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Community-Building in the North-Western  
Regions of Russia: Influence of the  
Federative Reforms and EU-Russian Cross-  
Border Cooperation

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## Preface

This Working Paper is dedicated to the analysis of interregional integration in the Russian North-West. It presents the results of the project “The Reconstitution of the North-West of Russia as a Political, Economic and Social Space: The Role of Cross-Border Interactions” implemented by the Center for European Studies of the European University at St. Petersburg in cooperation with the Karelian Institute of the University of Joensuu and the University of Tampere (Finland) in the framework of the “Russia in Flux” Program of the Academy of Finland (2004-2006).

In addition to this, data and working materials were used, which were collected by scholars from the Center for European Studies within other research projects. One of them was a pilot project, “Building of the North-Western Identity and Political and Economic Integration of the Subjects of the Russian Federation”, which became a part of the working group “Center and Regional Identities” of the international project “Official and Everyday Identifications”, implemented in 2003 with the support of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Ford Foundation. The second project, “Regional Identity under Conditions of Proximity to the EU (based on the example of the Republic of Karelia and Kaliningrad oblast)” was implemented on the basis of the Baltic CASE in 2003-2004 and funded by the Carnegie Corporation, McArthur’s Foundation with the participation of the Russian Ministry of Education. All the projects were implemented by the authors together with Dr. Natalia Yargomskaya. We are very grateful to her for her participation and cooperation in the empirical and theoretical parts of research.

Therefore, the factual materials and empirical data contained in the paper were collected during 2003 and 2005, and the major conclusions are relevant for this period. Although since this time many changes in the political development of the Russian regions have taken place, the research contains important results from the political processes which took place in Russia before 2004. We are sure that this paper can not be considered as a purely historical piece, but rather as an important study of contemporary and future significance.

The major parts of the Working Paper are presented in the book to be published in the Russian language by the publishing house Norma in 2010, under the title “North-West of Russia: A Region or Regions?” with the support of the Center for German and European Studies.

On different stages of the work, the translation into English was done with assistance of Natalia Yargomskaya, Ekaterina Kosheleva, Anna Zhelnina, Ekaterina Kolesova, who we would like to thank. During the pre-publication stage when the final text was being prepared, much important and constructive work was done by Steven Kelly, who carefully proof-read the text and helped us to be linguistically correct in our non-native language.

The research planned for 2010 will be aimed at up-dating the present study and will lead to the publication of a new book in both the English and Russian languages in 2010-2011.

## Introduction

The problems of the political, legal, economic and even social and cultural integration of Russia were actively discussed during the whole post-Soviet period in the country's history. In the early 1990s the "parade of the sovereignties" and the weakness of the central authorities that was based on the conflict between executive and legislative authorities caused concerns about the repetition of the USSR's breakup scenario. The formation of the bilateral ties "center - regions" and the permanent emphasising by the Russian republics of their special status which existed in our country during the last decade of the past century also indicated the fragmentation of the political space.

Nowadays, the current authority in the federal center holds up as one of its main achievements the consolidation of Russian society and the prevention of the country's breakup. In his Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation on April 3, 2001 Vladimir Putin declared: "Today we can already say: the period of statehood 'crawling away' is over. The disintegration of the state ... is stopped". However the existing system holds onto only the vertical of executive authority, the demolition of which would lead to a bigger fragmentation than the one that existed before 2000.

According to both the political theory and practice sustainable integration is formed and strengthened mainly in the natural way, without any hard external interference. It is based on close communication in the shape of multiple interregional and interpersonal ties, common projects and "bottom-up" associations of cooperation. However, the activities of common political institutes as well as the politics of identity of the central actors allow for the strengthening of the integration process "from the top". Thus the efforts made by the central federal authorities to decrease the level of disintegration are also very important. The principle here is that the "top-down" activities should be complementary to the integration tendencies that were born "on the bottom" and should not contradict them.

In spite of the notion of "feudal atomism" now dominant in society, it was precisely in that period when the networks of cooperation connecting the Russian regions started to come into existence. The most striking examples of such networks are the associations of economic cooperation of the subjects of the Russian Federation that were established in the early 1990s. Of course their appearance was a product of the

necessity to survive in the conditions of the collapse of the Soviet system of redistribution. The leaders of the Russian regions realized that the politics of autarchy was destructive for them, because none of the subjects of the RF represented a self-sufficient natural economy before becoming a part of the united economic system. However the associations which arose through force of circumstance not only continued their existence after the most pressing economic problems were solved but also kept developing, demonstrating their viability and efficiency in the new market conditions.

Another example of “bottom-up” cooperation is provided by the inter-parliamentary associations. One of the most critical problems of the 1990s was the absence of a unified legal space. This problem had two components: the discrepancy between regional and federal legislation and, as a consequence, the presence of multiple and diverse standard acts regulating the particular sphere of politics at the regional level. Thus, the absence of a framework of federal laws or the ignorance of existing legal acts by subjects of the federation led to the diversity of regional legislation.

Each of the regional parliaments had to develop laws independently, being guided only by the needs of their subject of the federation and their own experiences of lawmaking. However, this experience was insufficient in the conditions of transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Therefore the parliaments of the subjects of the RF entered into cooperation, with the aim to unite their efforts and exchange experiences. The most successful legal act of one region would become an example for the other members of the inter-parliamentary association. There is no doubt that such initiatives did not completely solve the existing problems of the absence of a common legal space, but they favored the evening-out of the excessive fragmentation.

Apart from solving the urgent problems which existed in the Russian regions during the first post-Soviet decade the arising networks of cooperation played an important role in the formation of integration potential. They could however neither eradicate the political fragmentation completely nor unify the legal space. The federal center realized that and tried to solve the existing problems with its own methods. First, the central governing authorities tried to establish a system of control over the situation in the regions. With this aim a moratorium on the direct election of the heads of the regions was declared which remained in force until 1996. After the Putsch in August 1991 a position entitled “The Plenipotentiary Representative of the President in the Subjects of the Federation” was established to strengthen the presence of the federal

center in the regions. However the leaders of some republics simply did not allow the president's appointees into their "patrimonies". In most regions between 1991 and 1997 where the heads of executives were appointed by the president the heads of administrations already played this role. After the moratorium on the direct election of governors was cancelled in 1996 the importance of the plenipotentiary representatives grew significantly. The problem however was that they were at that time strongly integrated into the regional political space and did not shape an alternative center of power. Secondly, the central governing authorities made attempts to integrate the Russian Federation political space not only "vertically", but also "horizontally". For example, in 1995 the analytical department under the President developed a project of creating federal districts in Russia with the goal of equalizing the territorial structure (Zamjatina 2002). This project was not implemented for many reasons, including the comparative weakness of the federal center itself as well as resistance from the regions.

The radical reforms in the sphere of the federal system began in 1999 and were practically over by the beginning of 2005. One of the main components of the implemented changes was the creation of the system of federal districts and the reform of the institution of the plenipotentiary representative of the president. However the "top-down" reform did not take into account that integration potential which had appeared due to the "bottom-up" initiatives. The borders of practically all the federal districts turned out to be in discord with the areas of activities of the economic cooperation associations of the subjects of the federation. This fact would not have been as harmful to the established networks of interregional cooperation if there had not been a rule according to which all the associations had to reshape their borders in accordance with the federal districts' borders that were shaped by the federal center.

The only exception in this case was the Russian North-West. Here the borders of the district almost completely matched the area of the economic cooperation association's activities and reproduced entirely the contours of the inter-parliamentary association. Thereby the North-West represents a unique example of the most "harmonious" federal district, where the federal center, aspiring to legal unification and political consolidation, could rely on already existing integration potential. However the federal authorities not only did not use the given resource but even partly destroyed the natural communication which had appeared during the first post-Soviet decade. Nor did the attempts to strengthen the existing ties by shaping a common informational space

that were made by the first plenipotentiary representative of the President in the North-West, Viktor Cherkesov, bring any significant results. His successors in this position, Valentina Matvienko and later Ilya Klebanov, did not continue their forerunners course.

Nevertheless for the absence of true integration in the Russian North-West not only the federal center can be blamed. The subjects included in the district were not equally prepared for intensification of the interregional ties. The political elites of some of the regions viewed the strengthening of integration as a threat to their own positions which they tried to consolidate by actively constructing the regional political communities. Therefore the potential opportunity to transform the North-West into a macroregion with its own community at the district level contradicted the aspirations of some elites to form regional identities inside the subjects of the RF borders.

The next wave of reforms put into practice by the end of 2004 should, at first glance, have assisted the deepening of integration tendencies. The revision of the governor's election order have had negatively influenced the process of forming political communities inside the borders of the subjects of the RF. The heads of the regional authorities which do not need any support from the electors anymore stopped viewing identity politics as an effective instrument for ensuring their own positions. Now they are above all interested in demonstrating their loyalty to the party in power and to the federal bodies. However the now existing vertical construction seems to be very vulnerable. The term "executive vertical" itself means that the current elites are only interested in "top-down" integration and ignore the "horizontal" type. Therefore any serious loosening of the modern construction will inevitably place on the agenda the question of a need for interregional consolidation. In connection with this the conclusions of this paper regarding the integration processes in the Russian North-West before 2004 can become a starting point for future research as well as for shaping the political agenda in the new conditions.

All the statements contained above are represented in a complete form in the next chapters. The beginning focuses on the history of shaping federative relations in post-Soviet Russia. Addressing this data is important for the exposure of the main premises as well as obstacles on the way to creating a sustainable system of interregional ties in Russia in general and in the Russian North-West in particular. Further on in the text, attention is paid to the integration processes inside the borders of the North-Western Federal District. On the basis of interviews with representatives of



political, economic and cultural elites of the two subjects of the federation inside the North-West federal district, an evaluation of the factors that assist or impede the cooperation of the regions with each other is carried out. Finally, the third part is dedicated to the question of why some subjects of the Russian Federation were ready for integration in the frame of the North-Western Federal District and why some resisted the development of closer links. In the end, on the basis of the research and analysis carried out the main conclusions regarding the premises and factors of community formation inside the regions are made. Special attention is paid to the perspectives for future research on interregional integration and political community formation in the subjects of the Russian Federation as well as to the possible integration scenarios in the Russian North-West.

## Chapter 1. Development of Federative Relations in Contemporary Russia: Structural Possibilities for Inter-Regional Integration

The formation of federal relations in Russia was caused by two main factors: the legacy of the Soviet federal model and political developments during the time of transformation. When Perestroika began, only one Soviet republic — the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) — was formally considered a federation. Its territory was divided into autonomous republics, autonomous oblasts and districts (okrugs), krais, oblasts, and republican cities (Moscow and Leningrad). All autonomies (republics, oblasts and okrugs) were formed according to the ethnic principle, while krais and oblasts were administrative territories where Russian population dominated. The main feature of such a system was ethnic federalism,<sup>1</sup> in which only some ethnic groups had the right to limited self-government within the framework of an authoritarian system. Administrative territories, on the other hand, were governed from the centre.

Almost all autonomies had references to the “main” ethnic group in their titles. Such groups were called “titulnaja nacionalnost” (titular ethnicity). Members of a titular ethnicity did not necessary form a majority of the population in autonomies, but they “predominate[d] within the local [Communist] party and governmental organizations” (Hajda, Beissinger 1990: 307). This privilege was a consequence of the Soviet ethnic policy that required the ranking of all Soviet citizens according to their ethnicity. This “ethnic stratification” was institutionalised since “the Soviet Union was a multi-ethnic state not only in ethnodemographic terms ... but, more fundamentally, in institutional terms” (Brubaker 1996: 23).

However, autonomous territories of the RSFSR were not included in the structure of this “federated republic”, but were parts of the All-Union ethno-federative system. Four facts prove this statement. Firstly, other Union republics included autonomies and yet were never considered federations.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, the jurisdictions of all autonomous republics, independent of their geographical location, were identical. For example,

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<sup>1</sup> The Soviet system of federalism “divided the territory of the state into a complex four-tiered set of national territories, endowed with varying degrees of autonomy and correspondingly more or less elaborate political and administrative institutions. At the top level of the ethno-territorial hierarchy... were the fifteen Union Republics” (Brubaker 1996: 30). Below the Union Republics were Autonomous Republics, Autonomous Oblasts followed by them, and at the undermost level were Autonomous Okrugs (Districts).

<sup>2</sup> For example, “unitary” Georgia included three autonomies.

autonomous republics in Georgia and autonomous republics in the RSFSR had an equal status. Thirdly, autonomous oblasts and autonomous okrugs had no jurisdiction at all. Therefore, at the beginning of the social-economic transformation in the USSR (Perestroika) the RSFSR was not a federative republic. It lacked any separation of powers between the federal and regional authorities.

The process of federalisation in Russia started in 1987 when the Soviet government faced the inefficiency of an economy within the administrative-command system. The Union centre undertook some measures to liberalise the system by introducing “hozraschetnyi socialism”. For all (union and autonomous) republics, hozraschet meant self-financing, self-payment and self-government of republican enterprises and, therefore, it inevitably required the redistribution of jurisdiction between the central and republican governments. Thus, not only the union, but also the autonomous republics (including those in the RSFSR) gained some kind of economic autonomy. As a result, these measures started a gradual process of federalisation in the budget sphere.

The second reason for decentralisation was the interethnic conflicts. The most intense among them was the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>3</sup> The situation in Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous oblast as well as in Azerbaijan and Armenia, — both republics contested this territory — challenged the Union centre’s vision of relationships between the union republics and autonomies. In the late 1980s, the CPSU adopted a number of documents that paid significant attention to the idea of increasing the political status of autonomous territories. For example, the CPSU’s platform, “Ethnic Policy of the Party in Contemporary Conditions” called for increasing the “power of union republics and autonomies through the separation of jurisdictions of the USSR and Soviet republics; decentralisation; delegation of certain governance functions to local authorities” (Natsional’naia 1989: 1). Another factor that stimulated decentralisation was the situation in Georgia and the Baltic republics. The threat of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Georgia seceding caused attempts to reform the whole of the Soviet federative system.

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<sup>3</sup> Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous oblast (NKAO) is an autonomy within Azerbaijan. However, the vast majority of the population in this oblast was ethnic Armenians (76% of population in 1979). The conflict was caused by the attempt by NKAO to secede from Azerbaijan and to join Armenia.

At the First Congress of People's Deputies (May-June 1989) Mikhail Gorbachev proposed a clearly delineated separation of jurisdiction between the Union, republics, and autonomies along with an increase of power for the Union and autonomous republics. General Secretary, M. Gorbachev, developed this idea in his speech on the central committee plenum in September where he suggested giving a new status to autonomous republics by transforming some of them into Union republics (Arinin 1997: 9). Self-government and self-financing not only for republics but also for "krais and oblasts" was recognised as necessary. In essence, this decision meant moving away from Soviet ethnic federalism since certain economic powers were also delegated to administrative territories within the RSFSR.

Thus, the Union centre provided the initial impulse for the federalisation of Russia through its attempts to solve the economic and interethnic problems that followed after the start of Perestroika. At the same time, the RSFSR initially lacked the political force required to transform the territorial system of the republic.

### **1.1. First Attempts at Deviation from the Soviet Federalism Model**

The transformation of the USSR territorial system, initiated by the Union authorities, influenced the situation inside Russia. The additional power gained by autonomous republics thanks to the Union centre, together with the idea of advancing their status to the level of union republics, created a threat to the territorial unity of the RSFSR. In fact, it would have meant seceding from Russia and directly joining the USSR. The situation got worse as democratic movements that appeared on the wave of Perestroika in a number of Russian autonomies acquired clearly identifiable nationalistic characters. Territories received different statuses: a wide range of political and economic rights for autonomous republics were provided; considerably less rights were enjoyed by autonomous oblasts and okrugs; and insignificant elements of self-government were given to krais, oblasts and republican cities. This set up grounds for asymmetry in the future Russian Federation. Thus, the politics of the Union centre went against the interests of the Russian political establishment and caused destabilisation within the RSFSR. The conflict between the USSR and the RSFSR became inevitable and it started after the election to the RSFSR Supreme Council (spring 1990) and the appointment of Boris Yeltsin as Chairman of the Russian parliament. Thus, the conflict "became obvious in the hard battle between Yeltsin and Gorbachev" (Arinin 1997: 8).

This confrontation was provoked not only by the political interests of Yeltsin and by his thirst for power, but also by political-economic competition between the Russian and the Union centres. At first glance, the interests of both centres were analogous - both Gorbachev and Yeltsin wanted to protect the territorial integrity of the state. However, “keeping” the USSR within the old borders would inevitably result in a changing of the RSFSR borders. Thus, the political conflict between the Union and Russian centres concentrated on the “battle for regions”. To win this battle each party tried to give the Russian autonomies more powers than the other.

In April 1990, two Union laws were adopted that significantly broadened the economic and political powers of autonomous republics. The law On Separation of Jurisdictions Between the Union of SSR and Subjects of Federation (O razgranichenii polnomochij mezhdru Sojuzom SSR i subjektami Federatsii) called autonomous republics “Soviet socialist states, subjects of federation — the Union of SSR” (Art.1). According to the law, they acquired the same power as Soviet republics in “economic and social-cultural development”. Exceptions were made only for those rights that “according to the agreement between them” were left to the Soviet republic (Art. 4). It supposed, thus, that union republics would, on the basis of the treaties, create their own framework of relations with the autonomous republics on their territories.

The law On the Fundamentals of Economic Relations of the Union of SSR, Union and Autonomous Republics (Ob osnovakh ekonomicheskikh otnosheniy Sojuza SSR, sojuznykh i avtonomnykh respublik) equalised autonomous and Union republics in their economic rights and duties. Thus, both types of republics were given the same jurisdiction. At the same time, autonomous okrugs and oblasts essentially gained fewer rights and opportunities. Krajs and oblasts — the administrative territories — according to these legislative acts did not get any additional power and continued to be subordinated to the union and republican centres. The Soviet federative system, which had been stable for several decades, began to change. On the one hand, the changes concerned the status of the subjects of federation. On the other hand, the system continued to be an ethnically oriented one.

The Declaration on the State Sovereignty of the RSFSR, adopted on June 12, 1990 proclaimed the right to self-determination of every people of the republic “in the ethnic-territorial and ethnic-cultural forms it selects”. It also stated the supremacy of the republican legislature upon the Union one. Following the RSFSR, autonomous republics

within the RSFSR started to adopt their own Declarations on Sovereignty. However, these documents did not automatically occasion a break-up of the territorial unity of Russia and secession of the autonomies from the republic. The adoption of these declarations, called the “sovereignty parade”, was partly a result of processes initiated on the Union level and partly a peculiar reaction to the attempts of autonomous republics to advance the status of krajs and oblasts. However it was, on the other hand, a consequence of the politics of the Russian centre. In August 1990, during his visit to the Volga region, Yeltsin more than once offered the Russian region to take as much sovereignty as they “would be able to swallow” from the centre. After that, the independence which was understood by republics as very limited and was connected mostly with external attributes of statehood – state emblem and flag, own authorities (Kosikov 1993: 176), begun perceiving as self-determination in form of independent states.

In general, the new federative system that started to take form in spring 1990 provoked intense debates in Russian society and undermined the basis of ethnic federalism. The extreme differences in views on the future territorial system revealed themselves during work on the first draft of the new Russian Constitution.<sup>4</sup>

After adoption of the Declaration on State Sovereignty, Russia started casting itself as a state maximally independent from the Soviet Union. One of the first steps taken by the Russian government towards the new state system was the creation of the Constitutional Commission. Yeltsin, in that period the Chairman of the RSFSR Supreme Council, was the head of this Commission at the outset.<sup>5</sup> He announced at the one of the first meetings the main goal of the new draft of the Constitution: “Development and adopting the new Constitution is, without a doubt, a strategic task for the real building of the new sovereign Russian state” (Shablinskiy 1997: 25). Therefore, the Constitutional Commission had to determine constitutionally not only the sovereignty of the RSFSR and its relations with the Union centre, but also the status of the former autonomous republics (now – the self-declared “sovereign states”) as well as the rules of subject foundation and the form which the new Russian Federation would take. At the same time, the Commission was far from reaching a consensus about these basic principles. It

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<sup>4</sup> The RSFSR Constitution from 1978 continued to be in force between 1990 and 1993 in Russia.

<sup>5</sup> At that time, Russia did not have institution of presidency. Essentially, Russia was a parliamentary republic (taking into account the very beginning of one party system erosion), with a central figure of the Supreme Council Chairman.

assembled people with opposing political and ideological attitudes. In the early 1990s, there were several political groups competing for power, most of which differed dramatically in their views on the USSR and Russia's future. Russian society also experienced political and ideological polarisation at that time.

The first draft of the Constitution had already been worked out in autumn 1990. This document mirrored the main tendencies emerging in Russian society. One of the central questions for the Commission was the issue of the federative system. In October 1990, a round table took place in order to discuss this problem thoroughly. Two opposite perspectives on the formation of a federation were revealed. One position stated that "only the state as a whole can possess sovereignty ... one should 'let those autonomies go' that express such wishes but those who would enter a federation must subordinate themselves to Russian sovereignty". Another position, quite the contrary, was based on the primacy of subjects of federation. Delegation of jurisdiction should be carried out according to free-will, following the "bottom-up" principle" (Yurev, Kovalskaya 1990: 25). Authors of the draft saw the resolution in the creation of "Russian republics", which should be formed "through the merging of krajs and autonomies based on economic advantages, historical and geographical mutual ties" (ibid.: 26).

The ideas embodied in the first draft (Proekt 1990: 55-120) implied that the whole territory of Russia would be divided into republics and federal territories (Art. 4.1.3). The difference between republics and federal territories did not concern the principles of their formation (ethnic or non-ethnic) but the ability of subjects to solve political and economic problems themselves. The draft intended that republics would have their own legislatures and executives (Art. 1.9.(2)) and their own citizenship (Art. 4.3.2), while federal territories would be governed by federal government. A federal territory could gain the status of republic if it were able "to implement functions defined in the Constitution of the RF and take part in the financial maintenance of federal authorities and institutions" (Art. 4.1.6). During one of the plenum meetings of the Constitutional Commission, Yeltsin commented on his preference for such a form of territorial system: "for us the principle of balancing subjects of federation in their rights is evident". Those parts of the federation that would not acquire the legal status of republics would have the opportunity to get the status of a federal territory, directly subordinated to the high authority of the RF ... State sovereignty of the RF is unanimous and indivisible. This is a

federation, not a confederation, not a community and not a union” (Stenogramma 1990: 6).

Aiming to win in the “battle for regions”, the Russian government announced the idea to sign a republican Federative Treaty aimed separating jurisdiction between Russia and its constituent parts. On the one hand, such a treaty did not contradict but rather followed the aspirations of the Union government for a treaty-based system of relations between the union and autonomous republics. The debates on the Federative Treaty demonstrated tendencies to granting some additional powers to the administrative territories. Thus, the Third Special Congress of People’s Deputies in May 1990 adopted the Decree on the Basis for an Ethnic-State System of the RSFSR (on Federative Treaty). This document was based on “the necessity to improve the status” of both autonomies of the RSFSR, krajs and oblasts. It demonstrated the start of the federalisation process over the whole territory of Russia and retreat from principles of Soviet ethno-federalism. Thus, this document normatively stated that “krajs and oblasts of the Russian Federation become full subjects of the RSFSR” (Art. 7). It also included “the right of autonomous oblasts and autonomous okrugs to secede from krajs and oblasts” (Art. 6). This point was later used by some Russian autonomies as a reference point in their bargaining with the federal centre for redistribution of additional powers to the regions.

In the second part of 1990, the RSFSR experienced two opposite processes. On the one hand, the Constitutional Commission worked out such a model of the territorial system that implied moving away from ethnic federalism and an equalisation in the rights of ethnic and administrative territories. On the other hand, the struggle against the Union centre forced Yeltsin to make concessions to the authorities of ethnic territories. These reverse tendencies caused endless changes in the constitutional drafts, delayed the adoption of the Constitution for three years and threatened Russia with disintegration.

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Thus, up to the moment of full Russian political independence, the state area was utterly fragmented. Former autonomies, which had their own declarations on sovereignty and which were able to dictate terms to the federal centre, demanded a special position in the state and blocked all attempts to equalize their status with the status of administrative-territorial units. The central political actors tried to decrease the level of disintegration through work on the draft of a new Constitution, which intended a

fundamental change of the Soviet ethno-federal system. However, all such attempts were unproductive due to the situation, whereby the right of an ethnic group to self-determination was the most forcible argument for the fulfilment of political desires.

## 1.2. Asymmetry as an Echo of Ethno-Federalism

One of the effects of the Soviet federal system was the fact, that people's right to self-determination was understood as a right only enjoyed by ethnic minorities to their own statehood. It strengthened the position of Russian republics created on the ethnic-territorial principle. Exceptional positions of republics were strengthened after the August Putsch when the central authorities of the RSFSR had to create additional mechanisms of control in administrative territories and autonomies. Thus, according to the presidential decree On Some Issues Concerning the Functioning of Executive Branches of Power in the RSFSR (O nekotorykh voprosakh deyatelnosti organov ispolnitelnoy vlasti v RSFSR) on August 22, 1991, heads of executive branches of power in krais, oblasts, and autonomous okrugs were not elected directly by the population, but appointed by the President after approval of the candidates by the regional parliaments. The President also got the right to fire the heads of regional administrations.<sup>6</sup> The Resolution of the Fifth Congress of People's Deputies of the RSFSR established the moratorium on elections of executive heads in krais and oblasts until December 1, 1992.<sup>7</sup> On August 31, the Provisional Regulation on the Representative of the President of the RSFSR in Krai, Oblasts, Autonomous Oblasts and Autonomous Okrug, Cities of Moscow and Leningrad (Vremennoe polpzhenie o predstavitele prezidenta RSFSR v kraiax, oblastiakh, avtonomnoy oblasti i avtonomnykh okrugakh, gorodakh Moskve i Leningrade) was adopted. According to this document, the functions of the presidential representatives included control over the implementation of the federal centre's decisions in the aforementioned regions, proposals for the suspension of acts introduced by regional executives in the case of their incongruence with RSFSR legislature, and control over the resignation of executive civil servants. Thus, the President of Russia

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<sup>6</sup> Only republican cities – Moscow and Leningrad – were exceptions of this rule. To that moment, these regions had already directly elected heads of executives — mayors.

<sup>7</sup> This decision became a result of the “dramatic struggle” between the President and the Supreme Council of Russia. The Supreme Council defended an “idea of direct electiveness of regional executives”). At the same time, the presidential administration insisted on the procedure of appointment of executives by the President. It took into account analytical prognoses stated that in case of direct elections “President’ supporters would gain a success in no more then 10-12 regions and fail in 36 regions” (Gel'man 1998: 50 -51).

created an instrument to interfere directly in the affairs of administrative territories and autonomies of the RSFSR. At the same time, the process of the institutionalisation of republican executives was left to run without special concerns or particular control from the federal centre.

In autumn 1991 the Russian authorities won a victory over the Union centre and started to slow down the process of preparations for the Federative Treaty. The reason for this success was the attitudes of republican elites from the RSFSR who considered this document not as a law that regulates relations between levels of powers but rather as the foundation treaty of the new federation. In other words, the leaders of ethnic territories were aiming at the formation of a new treaty-based, but not a constitution-based federation.

A new draft (Proekt 1991: 85-151) of the Constitution of the Russian Federation was prepared in November 1991. The new project implied that subjects of federation would be republics and lands (krajs, oblasts, or their associations), equal in their constitutional status (Art. 7. (1).), with the right to introduce their own citizenship (Art. 19. (1).). As in the previous version, there were also federal territories governed directly by the authorities of the Russian Federation (Art. 76.(2)). During debates about the draft of the Constitution on the Fifth Congress of People's Deputies of the RF, Yeltsin<sup>8</sup> produced arguments for the territorial system of Russia presented in the draft. His main message was that "our state is a constitutional, but not a treaty-based federation" (Obsuzhdenie 1991: 58). The relevance of this statement was conditioned by "the simple, well-known fact that the Russian Federation really exists and peoples are really united within it". He also explained the meaning that authors implied under the idea of equal status. It was not a "request for unification and diversity", but reflected the necessity of "equal constitutional grounds in favour of the optimal development of the subjects of federation with attention being paid to traditions, local conditions, ethnic structure etc" (ibid.). This speech provoked intensive debates among Russian deputies that revealed an interesting tendency: delegates from ethnic territories complained about the suggested mechanism of subject formation, suggesting that it "ignores the rights to sovereignty of peoples from republics and autonomies". At the same time, deputies from

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<sup>8</sup> In June 1991, B. Yeltsin won the first presidential election. He continued to be head of the Constitutional Commission and his deputy was the Chairman of the Supreme Council, Ruslan Khasbulatov.

krais and oblasts considered that “the new Constitution contains a relevant territorial system for the RF” (ibid.: 67-68).

At the end of 1991, 15 sovereign states replaced the defunct Soviet Union. Now they independently dealt with questions of the separation of powers, the territorial system, and the relationship between the state and the individual. In late December, the working group created in the RF for the regulation of relationships between the federal centre and subjects of the RF suggested replacing the treaty with an agreement on the separation of jurisdiction between the levels of power. However, most republican political actors voiced their disagreement with this substitution. The leaders of two of 21 republics — Tatarstan and Bashkortostan — “definitely called for the signing of the direct, in essence, inter-state treaty with the RF... Only the leaders of four republics agreed to sign the agreement instead of the Federative Treaty” (Arinin 1997: 20).

Nevertheless, the Federative Treaty was signed at the very end of March 1992 by 87 of 89 Russian regions, and its text was fully incorporated in the Constitution of 1978, which was in force at that time. The treaty was missing signatures from the heads of two republics — Tatarstan and Chechnya. Its content reflected a compromise reached by the heads of republics and federal political actors. The first group aimed at securing their status through the Constitution and the second insisted on the creation of a constitutional federation. The essence of the treaty was not the foundation of the federative state but the separation of jurisdictions between central and regional authorities. However, this treaty consisted, in fact, of three different documents. The first one was signed by representatives of “sovereign republics”; the second one — by representatives of krais, oblasts and the cities of Moscow and Saint Petersburg, and the third one — by representatives of autonomous oblasts and autonomous okrugs. Each document differed in the list of jurisdictions granted to this or that group of regions. Republics gained the largest amount of power; krais, oblasts, and republican cities acquired less power,<sup>9</sup> and autonomous units got even less. Such a design of the treaty laid the foundations for future asymmetry in the Russian Federation. Two protocols also accompanied the Federative Treaty. One of them was a result of joint consultations by republics’ representatives. It was aimed at providing the ethnic territories with 50% of seats in one of two national parliament chambers. Representatives of the administrative territories signed the second protocol expressing their aspirations to equalise the

<sup>9</sup> Moscow and Saint Petersburg gained a status of federal cities after adoption of Constitution amendments on December 9, 1992.

constitutional status of all RF regions. Thus, two opposite directions emerged in the field of the Russian administrative-territorial system – the attempt to preserve the special status of republics, on the one hand, and the drive towards an equalisation of all subjects of federation, on the other hand, - intensified at the end of 1992.

The adoption of the Federative Treaty did not entirely guarantee the integrity of the Russian Federation. Firstly, two republics refused to sign this document. Secondly, a number of republics (Sakha (Yakutia), Buryatia, Tyva, Bashkortostan, Komi, Karelia and Kalmykia) proclaimed the supremacy of their laws over the RF Constitution which was in force at that time. Thirdly, special articles in the Constitutions of Bashkortostan and the Republic of Tyva provided the opportunity to secede from the RF.<sup>10</sup> The incorporation of the full text of the Federative Treaty into the Constitution of 1978 and the absence of the new Constitution did not solve the issue of the federation's status. Since the signing of the Treaty preceded the adoption of the new Constitution, it still left the opportunity to consider the federation as a treaty-based edifice and not as a constitutionally based unit.

The third draft (Proekt 1992: 156-239) of the RF Constitution was prepared in early April 1992. In many respects, it took into consideration the new political context and differed dramatically from the previous versions in the question of state territorial organisation. Now subjects of federation were called republics, krajs, oblasts, federal cities, autonomous oblast and autonomous okrugs. The draft fixed the asymmetry embodied in the treaty by giving republics rights to have their own citizenships (Art. 17 (1)). The Supreme Council also amended one of the articles that implied the formal opportunity of the subject to secede from the RF.

Nevertheless, those who prepared the draft tried to smooth over the apparent asymmetry. The new draft did not entail a full incorporation of the Federative Treaty into the Constitution. It also stated the supremacy of federal law over the whole Russian territory (Art. 1. (3)). The possibility to adopt charters, granted to krajs and oblasts, indicated attempts at a partial legal equalisation of subjects. As Oleg Rumiantsev pointed out, four principles of territorial organization were still “steadfast”. The first principle concerned “the equality of the constitutional status of parts of the federation”. The second principle “rejected the ethno-centric approach to the statehood”. The third principle stated “the unity of the economic and geopolitical dimensions as well as of the constitutional space”. The fourth acknowledged the “correspondence of the unity and

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<sup>10</sup> Data to the end of 1992 – early 1993. (See Kosikov 1993: 173).

unanimity of the federative state with maximal self-dependence of its parts” (Rumiantsev 1992: 7-9).

Notwithstanding the fact, that now not only the ethnic but also the administrative territories were admitted as subjects of federation, ethnic policy was still closely connected to federative policy. The creation of the State Committee for Ethnic Affairs (Goscomnats) is a good illustration of this assumption. One of the first achievements of the new structure was the draft of Conception on Ethnic Policy of the RF (Kontseptsiia national’noj politiki RF). “The core chapter of the draft was dedicated to the further development of federalism”. This chapter implied a further “decentralisation of the power of subjects of federation” and an “extension of the jurisdiction of administrative territories to the level of republics”. The attention paid to the issues of federal organisation was explained by the statement that the “decentralisation of power and its delegation to local communities allows for a rapid and contextualized reaction to the needs of citizens also in the ethno-cultural sphere” (Tishkov 1997: 611-612).

However, neither a new version of the Constitution of the RF nor the draft Conception on Ethnic Policy was adopted mainly because of the rigorous protests from republics. At that time, “the most favourable period of autumn-winter 1991-1992 to speed up the constitutional reforms was lost. In time, the source of opposition to the draft of the Constitution changed. The resistance from the conservative part of society that could be overcome relatively easily was replaced by resistance from subjects of federation, and first of all, of republics. Their influence has been continually increasing” (Byzov 1993: 173). An additional factor that hampered the process of adopting the new federal Constitution was indifference to this issue from federal political actors.

Yeltsin nearly lost interest in the work of the Constitutional Commission and became its formal rather than its real head at the end of 1992. As the secretary of the Commission, I. Fedoseev, pointed out, “at the very beginning Boris Nikolaevich claimed that the commission will be not a ritual but a working institution. And he truly took an active part in its work. But it lasted for only several initial sessions” (Fedoseev 1992: 8). Ruslan Hasbulatov, the vice-head of the Commission also, in fact, did not pay attention to its activity. As a result, central political actors of the state — the President and the Chairman of the Supreme Council paid almost no attention to the development of the basic principles of state building that directly affected future of Russia. At that moment, the deputies of the Parliament were busy with endless amendments to the previous,

Soviet Constitution, trying to capture its wide power as precisely as possible and “most deputies did not need the new Constitution any more” (Shablinskiy 1997: 51).

Contradictions between the federal executive and the legislative branches became increasingly obvious and made the situation worse. Amendments to the 1978 Constitution adopted by the Parliament “increased disorder in the Russian power structure, furthered duplications of functions between branch institutions and thus made the possibility of conflict between them real (Shevtsova 1999: 42). Since “both branches of power in their structures were oriented to gain a [power] monopoly” (ibid: 74), the President and the Parliament began to compete to maximise their power. The weakness of federal institutions was exploited by the Russian regions and mainly by republics that aimed, in turn, to maximise their powers. As a result, in the second half of 1992 mass media and the expert community widely discussed the theme of the threat of Russian Federation disunity. However, 20 of 2111 republics were not interested in actual gains to sovereignty. They rather were oriented towards gaining maximal profit from the “federative ‘deal’ on questions of resource redistribution and the separation of jurisdictions” (Solnik 1995: 96).

This situation corresponds in many respects to the idea of Adam Przeworski that “regional nationalism is not a source of institutional failure of the centre. Quite opposite, institutional failure of the centre creates conditions that allow regional nationalists to mobilise their resources” (cit.: Ross 1999: 18). Republics started peculiar “bargaining” with the centre. They referred to adopted declarations on sovereignty, threatened to secede from the Russian Federation, or required additional power for themselves. Such a practice of employing the ethnic factor as a resource for elites to gain can be found in East European countries: the “threat to stop cooperation and eventual possible seceding or/and territorial amalgamation with the neighbour state-patron is an especially effective instrument for bargaining... This is a form of black-mail” (Offe 1992: 37).

The conflict between the branches of power was beneficial for republican leaders, who found themselves in a situation of *tertius caudens*,<sup>12</sup> when both the President and the Supreme Council tried to gain their support and to strengthen their own positions. In addition to attempts to curry favour with republics, executive and legislative powers competed for the support of krajs and oblasts. The Supreme Council

<sup>11</sup> Here, we speak about all republics except Chechnya.

<sup>12</sup> *Tertius caudens lat.* — lit. “Third satisfied”, i.e. the third side that profits from a struggle between two rivals.

was able to reinforce its positions in administrative territories through the adoption of the law 'On Krai' and Oblast' Councils and Krai' and Oblast' Administrations (O kraevom, oblastnom Sovete i kraevoj, oblastnoj administratsii) which "fixed the dual accountability of administrative heads" to the President as well as to regional parliaments (Gel'man 1998: 52).

The federal legislature acquired the support of the majority of regional parliaments and became no less interested than the President in the stability of the political situation. The legislature decided on prolongation of the moratorium on the election of executive heads. Thus, even though the law 'On Krai' and Oblast' Councils... formally instituted direct, popular elections of heads of regional administrations, regions where the President appointed governors following the approval of the regional parliaments did not plan to hold elections in the near future. In the regions where such approval did not occur, "Councils were within their rights either to confirm" the authority of the regional administration's heads "or call for new elections" (ibid: 53). As a result, elections were held in eight subjects of the Russian Federation and only in one region – Krasnodar krai – did a candidate appointed by the president get electoral support. Notwithstanding, that regional political actors "had sympathy for the Supreme Council's side" they could not ultimately express their preferences to the Parliament, while "namely the executive power provided them with subsidies" (Shevtsova 1999: 94).

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To sum up, towards the end of 1992 Russia gained the features of an asymmetrical federation. The asymmetry in favour of republics was a particular echo of Soviet ethno-federalism. However, this echo was reinforced by the conflict between the branches of power on the federal level. The Federative Treaty comprised three different documents and its incorporation into the old Constitution strengthened disintegration. At that time neither the President nor the Supreme Council aimed at levelling the existing fragmentation of political space. On the contrary, they promoted deeper dissociation on the regional level, since both parties were interested in victory in the "battle for regions".

### **1.3. From the Battle for Regions to the "Winner's Constitution"**

Towards the beginning 1993 the confrontation between the two federal branches of power broke out into an open conflict. This development was connected with the fact, that in December 1992 during the Fourth Congress of People's Deputies amendments to

the Constitution were adopted, which “gave unlimited power to the legislature, even in fields, which in every political system should be the priority of the judicial and executive branches” (Sogrin 2001: 146). This conflict was aggravated by the situation, whereby both the President and the Supreme Council were elected directly by the population and therefore equally claimed superiority.

Under conditions of the weakness of central authorities, ethnic republics tried to fortify the treaty-based principle of federation building in any way possible. This allowed them to secure for themselves the status of fully sovereign states not only by entering the Russian Federation, but also by securing the right to separation. At that time the political actors in republics constantly appealed to the right of peoples to self-determination, by intensifying interethnic relations and forcing the federal centre to compromise more and more. The renaming of the State Committee for Ethnic Affairs (Goscomnats) into the State Committee for Federation and Ethnic Affairs (Goscomfederatsiia) in March 1993 can be seen as one of the indicators of this process.<sup>13</sup> Even the name of the new Committee underlines the priority given to federative system building in the field of regulating ethnic relations at this time. It was also important that Sergei Shakhray was appointed to be committee head - he was one of the most consistent advocates of negotiations between the centre and republics and of signing bilateral treaties. Shakhray believed that the “ethnic model of the state, even being artificially created, became a fact” (Shakhray 1994: 9). Therefore the committee’s tasks were oriented not towards reform of the system but more towards its conflict-free functioning.

As one of the attempts to solve the conflict between the two federal branches of power, a national referendum was held on April 25, 1993. The questions of trust in the President and parliament were both answered positively. The referendum reinforced the legitimacy of executive power but didn’t solve the conflict. On the contrary, this contradiction converted the predicament into the “war of constitutions” (Byzov 1993). In spring 1993 the Constitutional Commission, now controlled by the parliament, published a new draft Constitution. At the same time, just after the referendum, Yeltsin proposed his draft version of the Constitution. Now “the President needed a new Constitution, because only through its adoption it was possible finally to secure the separation of power between the branches. Draft versions of the Constitution produced by the

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix 1.

president and parliament respectively, differed fundamentally. This was caused firstly by the desire of each side to secure the maximum amount of power for itself and to neutralise the other side. Secondly, the process was characterised by attempts to win over political actors from ethnic territories to their respective side.

The presidential draft was more radical in this regard. It fostered a treaty-based principle of federation building through the incorporation of the full text of the Federative Treaty into the Constitution. It foresaw also an influential and numerous upper house of the federal parliament with representatives from ethnic territories dominating. According to the presidential draft, the upper house of the Russian parliament was supposed to consist of two representatives from each subject of federation and additional representatives from ethnic territories in such a way that the total number of “ethnic” deputies would be not less than 50% of the whole house. Also, the equality of the subjects of federation was not mentioned in the text at all. The draft of the Constitutional Commission was more “soft” because it proclaimed both the constitution- and treaty-based principle of federation building and declared the equality of subjects of federation and the supremacy of federal laws. Also, this draft gave more power to the lower house of parliament than to the upper one.

Nevertheless, both drafts were characterised by essential concessions to the ethnic territories because their authors were interested in their political support. Nevertheless, neither side was successful in their attempts. Even the presidential draft most appropriate for ethnic republics did not give Yeltsin their support but, on the contrary, was objected to by the republics. For example, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Bashkortostan expressed its evaluation of the presidential draft of the Constitution in the following words: this document “departs from the problem of peoples’ rights”, and its first chapter “not only takes a step back regarding the legal status of republics, but also cancels the treaty and constitutional character of the Russian Federation’s development” (Experty 1993: 120). Also, experts in Bashkortostan underlined that the draft’s authors “openly ignore republics’ Declarations on State Sovereignty” and claimed that the draft “cannot be evaluated otherwise than as an attempt to make republics to go back and bring their constitutions into accordance with the future Constitution”. In May 1993 the heads of 12 republics signed a statement where it was pointed out that in both drafts of the Constitution “human rights oust the peoples’ rights” (ibid: 121-122). At the end of June 1993 the presidents of the Republics

of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan rejected any further participation at the constitutional meeting. They justified this step by referring to the unacceptable situation whereby the federal authorities aspire “to depreciate and to discredit the very idea of a new approach to the building of federative relations” (Mukhariamov 2000: 57).

In this way, the battle for the regions led to the situation, where bargaining between the federal centre and republics begun to threaten the weak federative system established after the signing of the Federative Treaty. According to the deputy secretary of the Constitutional Commission, Vladimir Sheinis, confrontation between the two constitutional drafts brings with it a threat to Russia’s unity. More precisely, “the most sensitive thing” is the issue “about the far-reaching concessions, which are made both by the presidential and parliamentary sides, looking for support of the former autonomies, now republics within the Russian Federation” (Interview 1993: 140).

Moreover, not only republics tried to bargain with the federal centre, but also administrative territories. The most striking example of this is the attempt at the reorganisation of Sverdlovsk oblast into the Ural Republic. In April 1993 the question about the enlargement of oblast’s rights for the republican level was put to a referendum. In June Sverdlovsk regional council proclaimed the establishment of the Ural Republic and begun working out a republican Constitution. Yet essentially the regions built on the administrative territorial principle could not pressure the federal centre and get additional power. In many respects, this was explained by their “inability ... to unite themselves for effective bargaining about the same privileges for krajs and oblasts, which republics had” (Solnik 1995: 105). The inability to build a large coalition was caused by the large number of krajs and oblasts and the different levels of their economic development, as well as by the lack of a general goal, which would allow for some solidarity. One more important factor was the economic instruments for exerting pressure on the regions which were in the hands of the federal centre. This is why most krajs and oblasts preferred not to participate in the coalitions, but to build their own channels of relations with the central authorities in order to obtain, as rule, not political, but financial benefits. On the other side, the political actors in republics - relatively autonomous from the central authorities - could unite their efforts because the most important priority for them was to save and secure their privileged statuses. Therefore, “every proposal directed to the elimination of differences between the regions and republics was immediately evaluated by every republic as a direct threat to its own interests” (ibid).

In August 1993 Yeltsin suggested establishing a new structure – the Council of the Federation to facilitate the representation of all regions. His project was not supported by ethnic regions, because all subjects of the Russian Federation had to have an equal number of representatives – two members from each region. This would have led to domination by representatives from administrative-territorial units in the Council (Mommen 2000: 71). The constant disagreements of republics with the proposals of both branches of federal power led to the situation where neither President nor Parliament was able to win in the “battle for regions”. The appetites of republics grew proportionally to the concessions of the federal centre. This destabilised the situation in the country more and more and made the power conflict practically unsolvable through constitutional means. The violent solution of the confrontation carried out by Yeltsin in October 1993 made the battle for the regions senseless. The republics which bargained enthusiastically like venturesome players missed the moment when their potential benefit was maximal and instead of claiming what they had already won, decided to continue to play. And like anybody who could not stop at the right moment they got nothing in the end.

After the Presidential Decree on Phased Constitutional Reform in the Russian Federation (O poetapnoy konstitutsionnoy reforme v RF), which “in fact, introduced temporary presidential rule and meant a radical break of the whole political and constitutional system” (Sogrin 2001: 154) and the White House storm the essential reform of the federative system was initiated. The major changes concerned administrative territories and autonomies. In these subjects of federation regional parliaments were dissolved, the accountability of the heads of administrations to regional legislatures was abolished and the moratorium on the elections of heads of regions was introduced. The dates of the founding elections of the new regional parliaments (December 1993 – March 1994) as well as regulation on the general framework for the formation of regional legislatures were also fixed by means of the Presidential Decree (Gel'man 1998: 54-55).

The norms of decree and regulation were obligatory to follow only for autonomies and subjects formed on the base of the administrative territorial principle. It was recommended that republics “carry out reform of their state authorities in accordance with this Decree”. But in the new RF Constitution, adopted after the referendum on December 12, 1993 the privileges of republics were almost entirely missing. This was

explained by the fact that the new Constitution was not only “the winner’s Constitution” (Shevtsova 1999: 151), but also an attempt by the President to eliminate the consequences of his own actions which were undertaken in order to gain the loyalty of republican political elites.

In general, the Constitution could fully abolish neither the principles of Soviet ethno-federalism nor the decisions taken in the first years of post-Soviet state building. On the other hand, it could reform the former asymmetrical system of the federation. What were saved were the principles of forming subjects of federation (ethnic territorial and administrative territorial) as well as multi-level units.<sup>14</sup> The composition of the subjects also stayed unchanged: 21 republics (including Chechnya), six krais, 49 oblasts, two federal cities, one autonomous oblast and ten autonomous okrugs. Also, as an echo of the “sovereignties parade”, republics were recognised as “states within the Russian Federation” (Art. 5. p. 2.). In spite of numerous debates surrounding the treaty or constitutional base of the federation, the Constitution recognised not only the Constitution itself, but also the Federative Treaty and other treaties as a base for the separation of jurisdictions between the centre and subjects of federation (Art. 11. p. 3). Nevertheless, the Constitution secured the equality of all subjects, also “in relations with the federal authorities” (Art. 5. p. 1, 4, Art. 72. p. 2.). One of the indicators for this was the equal representation of regions in the upper house of the Russian parliament – the Council of the Federation (Art. 95. p. 2.).

The administrative-territorial units and autonomies received the same rights as republics. In spite of the recognition of republics as states, in the Constitution it was stated that the “federative arrangement of the Russian Federation is based on state integrity and the unity of the state power system” (Art. 5. p. 3.). The Constitution and federal laws have “supremacy over the whole territory of the Russian Federation” (Art. 4.

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<sup>14</sup> As was already mentioned, in the Soviet federative system only ethnic territories were recognized as subjects of federation: union and autonomous republics, autonomous oblasts and autonomous okrugs. At the same time, oblasts and republican cities were not seen as subjects. However autonomous okrugs, which belonged to the lowest level of the Soviet federative hierarchy, were formally parts of some krais and oblasts. This situation was kept even after the Russian krais and oblasts received the status of subjects of federation. Until 1993 only Chukot autonomous okrug had left Magadan oblast and was directly included in the Russian Federation. The remaining nine autonomous okrugs, by being full subjects of federation, continued to be parts of their krais and oblasts. Therefore, krais and oblasts, which include autonomous okrugs, are multi-level territories. And in spite of the fact that the okrugs have their own regional authorities, on the basis of a resolution by the RF Constitutional Court from 14.07.1997, their population “has a right ... to participate in the elections to legislative and executive authorities of krais and oblasts”.

p. 2, Art. 76. p. 5). The text of the Federative Treaty was not fully incorporated into the new Constitution. On the contrary, only statements from three documents of the Federative Treaty which were general for all subjects were included. This led also to the practical rejection of the first Treaty Protocol signed by republics.

Nevertheless, the adoption of the new Constitution which legally fixed the principles of further state building didn't solve many problems including those in the field of federative policy. For example, the Constitution could not stop the claims of republics to enlarge their economic and political rights. At the same time, those claims in many cases were legitimised to some extent, because during the constitutional referendum the majority of the population in eight Russian republics voted against the new Constitution (Shevtsova 1999: 153). The enumeration of all 89 subjects of federation in article 65, p. 1 of the Constitution didn't solve the problem of the inclusion of Chechnya and Tatarstan in the Russian Federation. As was already mentioned these two republics didn't sign the Federative Treaty in March 1992. The constitutional referendum and founding elections to the upper and lower houses of the federal parliament were not at all held in Chechnya and practically didn't take place in Tatarstan. In spite of the legal fixation of equality of all subjects, the moratorium for elections of heads of regional administrations in the majority of krajs and oblasts (prolonged by Yeltsin in October 1993) saved the previous asymmetry.

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To summarise, the adoption of the new Constitution prevented the full disintegration of the country, but did not solve the problem of the fragmentation of political space. The "Winners' Constitution" only allowed for the rectification of the errors which were made by federal authorities in 1992-1993, when both the President and the Supreme Council battled for regions. Moreover, the new Constitution did not move Russia forward in the building of favourable conditions for inter-regional cooperation.

## 1.4. Two-Way Street

Between 1994 and 1999 Russian federative policy looked like a "two-way street". This metaphor was uttered by Vladimir Zorin, who in this way expressed his opinion on the most optimal way of bringing regional legislation into accordance with federal legislation, (Zorin, Amanzholova, Kuleshov 1999: 336), is relevant for a description of the general tendency of that time. The federal centre tried to realise constitutionally fixed

norms on the one hand, and yielded to the regions, first of all to the republics, on the other hand.

This tendency is observed in the first Annual Address of the President to the Federal Assembly in February 1994. Speaking at the parliament, Yeltsin said that “the Constitution gave all Russian regions broad rights” and “those regional politicians who still struggle for more power force a wall next to the open door” (Poslanie 1994). But in spite of the fact, that “the time when regions battled with the ‘centre’ for their rights is over”, the most important role in the development of federative relations should be played by bilateral “treaties between the federal authorities and subjects of federation about the separation of jurisdictions” (ibid). Yeltsin also admitted that many problems were caused by the “contradiction between two principles, which were laid at the foundation of the state arrangement of the Russian Federation: ethnic territorial and administrative territorial principles”. However in spite of the recognition of the diametrical opposition of these two ways of federation building, which “complicates the separation of functions and jurisdictions between the federal authorities and subjects of federation”, “in the current conditions their co-existence remains historically necessary” (ibid).

One piece of evidences for the claim about the “two-way” character of federative policy is the widespread practice of signing bilateral treaties between the centre and regions. The major goal of these documents was the same as in the case of the Federative Treaty: the separation of jurisdictions between them. Therefore, in the beginning bilateral treaties had to be signed exclusively by three subjects of the Russian Federation: Tatarstan, Chechnya and Kaliningrad oblast. It was supposed that the treaties with Tatarstan and Chechnya would substitute the Federative Treaty not signed by those republics and so would solve the problem of territorial integrity. The necessity of the redistribution of jurisdiction in favour of Kaliningrad oblast was proved by the specific geographical situation of this region.

The first bilateral treaty with Tatarstan was signed in February 1994. S. Shakhray commented on this step by Moscow with the following words: “the goal of the Treaty is not to increase or to decrease the status of Republic of Tatarstan ...We all know that behind this treaty stands the consent of the Republic of Tatarstan to participate in the elections to the federal parliament” (O dogovore 1994: 1). After signing this document Tatarstan got its representatives in the Council of Federation and State Duma. The treaty with Chechnya was not signed. Indeed, the federal centre at the end of 1994

began the first war on the territory of this republic. The treaty with Kaliningrad oblast was signed only in January 1996 and became some kind of addition to the federal law on the Special Economic Zone in Kaliningrad oblast.

In spite of the primary idea to conclude bilateral treaties only with three subjects of the Russian Federation, other subjects (in the first instance – republics) started to insist on the reviewing of their relationships with the federal centre. The republics disagreed with the fact that the Constitution fixed the same competencies for all subjects of federation and therefore abolished the privileges of republics, which they got in accordance with the Federative Treaty. Therefore, republican leaders saw in the new treaties an opportunity to get back lost privileges. In the first treaties of 1994-1995 the redistribution of constitutionally fixed federal jurisdiction and joint jurisdiction took place. Those treaties, in fact, were inconsistent with the federal Constitution. Therefore, in the beginning, some analysts reacted very negatively to the broadening of the process of concluding bilateral treaties: “Instead of clearly marking the Treaty with Kazan’ as an exception to the rule, as a very unique case, the federal centre suddenly and unexpectedly began to propose that all others join ‘the new initiative’” (Lysenko 1995: 120). As a result, “the long queue of those who wish to join the treaty process was formed. The competition takes place: who will be able to get new concessions and privileges next” (ibid: 119). Many experts recommended “to stop the process of ‘writing treaties’ and instead to develop and improve the Russian constitutional federation before it is too late » (ibid: 121).

However, since 1996 bilateral treaties have begun to be signed with the administrative territories also. This made possible the reduction of asymmetry possible to some extent: “the distribution of treaty practice on oblasts and krais contributes to the overcoming of regional cleavages, ‘ethnic - Russian’, or ‘republics - oblasts’” (Chinarikhina 1996: 24). Nevertheless, an important feature of most treaties with the administrative territories was the lack of evident inconsistency with the federal Constitution. They didn’t revise, but specified and added article 72 of the Constitution.<sup>15</sup> In general, 42 contracts were signed with 46 subjects of federation,<sup>16</sup> including the

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<sup>15</sup> Art. 72 of the RF Constitution maintains the joint competencies of the federation and its subjects.

<sup>16</sup> As a rule, only one treaty was composed for multi-level units, which was signed by all included subjects of federation.

federal cities St. Petersburg and Moscow (for 10 years only with the latter). Only 10 of them were signed by ethnic republics.

The constitutionally fixed equality of all subjects of federation presupposed a lack of differences between ethnic and administrative territories in their rights and duties. It meant the full rejection of the model of ethnic federalism. Just after the adoption of the new Constitution a gradual separation of ethnic and regional policies began.

At the beginning 1994 the Minister for Ethnic Affairs and Regional Policy, S. Shakhray, declared: “the aim of the current ethnic policy is to separate the ethnic component from the territorial one” (Filippov 2000: 59). This position of the ministry was also expressed in February 1995 during parliamentary hearings on the Conception on New Regional Policy. Being at this time deputy minister for ethnic affairs and regional policy, A. Kotenkov, said: “Can we unite regional policy and ethnic policy? I believe, that in no case ... is regional policy called regional, because it should be independent from the ethnic coloration” (Kontseptsiiia novoj regional’noj 1995: 50). But not all political actors supported this understanding of regional policy. For example, the former Head of the Council of Nationalities, Ruslan Abdulatipov, in 1995 sent Yeltsin an Appeal on Federative and Ethnic Policy of the Russian State, in which he expressed his dissatisfaction with “the clear tendency of the last two years to substitute ethnic policy with regional policy” (Abdulatipov 1995: 20).

Thus, in the middle of the 1990s Russian politics was characterised, on the one hand, by a clear tendency towards the equalisation of all subjects of federation, independent of the principles behind the formation of their regions. The echo of ethno-federalism was still audible. This was expressed not only in statements from some political actors but also in some legal documents. For instance, the Conception on State Ethnic Policy of the Russian Federation (Kontseptsiiia gosudarstvennoj natsionalnoj politiki Rossijskoj Federatsii), adopted in 1996, paid considerable attention to issues of federalism. During a discussion on this conception at parliamentary hearings on March 19, 1996, the Minister for Ethnic Affairs and Federative Relations, <sup>17</sup> V. Mikhailov, said: “one of the serious issues of contemporary ethnic policy is the issue of the equality of subjects of federation. But equal rights don’t mean equality” (Kontseptsiiia gosudarstvennoj natsionalnoj 1996: 11). From his point of view, subjects are not equal, because there are two different bases for their formation: ethnic territorial and

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<sup>17</sup> See Appendix 1.

administrative territorial. In his opinion, the reformation of the system inherited from the Soviet era was “fraught with serious consequences and can in no case contribute to national consensus. It can be ruinous for our Russia” (ibid).

Nevertheless, in 1996 the Main Principles of Regional Policy in the Russian Federation (*Osnovnye polozheniia regionalnoj politiki v Rossijskoj Federatsii*) were approved by presidential decree. The document contained a new understanding of the term “region” and the goals of regional policy. The region was described as a part of the Russian Federation’s territory with common natural, socio-economic, ethno-cultural and other features. It could agree with the border of a subject of the Russian Federation, or unite the territories of several subjects. Such a vision of the term “region” could have been a basis for the integration of the subjects of federation within the framework of different economic, social and political units. It also correlated with the unsuccessful first attempt to establish federal districts.

The first project aimed at the establishment of federal districts in Russia was worked out in 1995 by the Analytical Department of the President of Russian Federation. The authors of the project aimed to make the Russian federative system closer to an “ideal model” worked out in accordance with the USA’s experiences (Zamiatina 2001: 76). The project proposed, that the centres of federal districts would not be agreed with the capitals of subjects of federation in order to limit the influence of governors in the decision-making process at the district level (ibid: 77, 78). That idea is very similar to the American system where the capital of the country does not belong to any of the states.

According to the project, the centres of the federal districts should have been located not far from the borders of a few subjects of federation in order to provide ease of access for inhabitants of the districts (ibid: 81). Nevertheless the “positive image of the city” as well as the capital past of the city were considered as positive factors for the selection of districts’ capitals (ibid: 76). However it is important to underline, that the main principles for delimitation of the districts were not the existing networks of Russian regional integration, such as associations of economic cooperation or inter-parliamentary associations, but administrative logic. The delimitation should have been carried out “taking into account an equal number of federal employees ... and cost of federal property” (ibid: 83). This project was not realised in the middle of the 1990s, and the integration “from below” was not replaced by integration “from above” in that time.

In 1996, after the Yeltsin's victory at the presidential elections, the moratorium on elections to heads of regional administrations was called off. Towards the autumn of 1997 "no head of a region appointed from the federal centre stayed in Russia". This allowed for the reduction of asymmetry and contributed to the further development of equality between subjects of federation. Direct popular elections provided not only democratic legitimacy to the heads of regions, but also increased their political influence (Gel'man 1998: 65-66). Now, the upper house of the federal parliament (Council of Federation) could oppose the President and government when decisions were not to regions' satisfaction.<sup>18</sup> Direct elections of governors also led to a high level of support for the regional authorities from the population. The mass surveys conducted by the FOM (Fund of Public Opinion) in 1997 very clearly show this tendency. For example, the question of "Whether regional leaders (governors) elected by the population have a right to oppose the central authorities and to conflict with them, if they disagree with their policies" was positively answered by 69% of respondents (Petrova, Klimova 1997). All attempts by the federal centre to weaken the influence of governors did not have any significant effect. At that moment it seemed that the "age of the 'executive vertical' was already in the past" (Gel'man 1998: 66).

The presence of directly elected governors in all krajs and oblasts opened the way for the building of regional political communities in Russian administrative-territorial units. The governors interested in strengthening their positions inside and outside of the regions and in re-election began to carry out identity politics, aimed at building a positive image of their team and policies. Some of them were very successful in building political communities, other were not able to formulate an attractive regional idea. The extremely uneven process of community-building in Russia was interpreted by some analysts as a threat which could lead to the deeper disintegration of the country (this point is considered in detail in chapter 3). In addition, the direct elections of governors were the reason for the formation of different political regimes in the Russian regions. Nevertheless, the true reason for the political fragmentation in that moment was not

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<sup>18</sup> According to the Constitution, the Council of the Federation "is composed of two representatives from every subject of the Russian Federation: one from every legislative and one from every executive regional authority" (Art. 95, p. 2). This formulation was not used during the first founding elections to the upper house of the Russian parliament, because these elections took place together with a referendum on the Constitution. In 1995, through the adoption of the Law on the Order of Formation of the Council of the Federation" a new order to elections was established. Since this time, the heads of legislative and executive regional authorities themselves have been members of the Council of the Federation.

identity politics and the difference of political regimes but the asymmetry which still existed.

The strengthening of administrative territories again provoked dissatisfaction from republics. In February 1998, during parliamentary hearings “Republics within the Russian Federation: Legal Status and Perspectives of Development” one of the central topics for discussion was the issue of the equality of subjects of federation. In general, the opinions of participants in these hearings reflected the picture of confrontation between republics and administrative territories at that time. For example, the vice-chair of the State Duma Committee for Ethnic Affairs, R. Sultanov, “opposed the ‘artificial equalisation’ of the legal status of all parts of federation by defending the special rights of republics as ethnic territories” (Zorin, Amanzholova, Kuleshov 1999: 333). The head of the Constitutional Court of Bashkortostan claimed that the “theory of status equality of subjects of federation is directed against republics” (ibid: 335). The representatives of krajs and oblasts meanwhile, supported the idea of “strengthening the federation through the equalisation of subjects’ rights» and “protested against asymmetry, which meant inequality in economic and financial relations” (ibid).

The sharp discussion during these hearings was occasioned also by the issue of bringing regional legislation into accordance with federal legislation. The republics’ representatives insisted on the argument that the inconsistency of republican constitutions with the federal Constitution is absolutely justified. From their point of view, the legislation of republics helps to correct the “imperfection of the Russian Constitution”, and therefore “constitutional diversity” enriches the Russian state system (ibid: 333-334). Some kind of legitimacy for this position was provided by the fact that in some cases republican Constitutions were adopted before the federal Constitution. That is why even those participants in the hearings who thought that inconsistency between the laws disturbs the functioning of the whole state didn’t believe in the ability of the federal centre to encourage republics to change their constitutions. They saw the escape from this situation in the achievement of agreements to change both the federal Constitution and republican Constitutions. This idea of compromise was expressed by the Chair of the State Duma Committee for Ethnic Affairs, V. Zorin, who was already mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph : “bringing the regional legislation into accordance with the Constitution of the Russian Federation is a two-way street” (ibid: 336).

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To sum up, at the beginning of 1999 the Russian territorial-political space was still very fragmented. The main reason for this was not the building of political communities in the framework of subjects of the federation, but republics' unwillingness to have equal political rights with krajs and oblasts. The federal center used mainly the practice of concluding bilateral ties with regions, and the regions were not opposed to such a practice. On the contrary, they supported it through the signature of the bilateral treaties. The attempt to set a new logic of inter-regional integration "from above" by building federal districts was unsuccessful.

## **1.5. From Unification to Restoration of the Executive Vertical**

Since 1999, a tendency towards the establishment of unified rules for relationships between the federation and its subjects has been outlined in regional policy. This unification consisted of a rejection of both the recognition of republics' special privileges as well as the "personification" of "centre – region" relations. While in the past, some regions could manage to establish special relations with the federal authorities, due to formal treaties revising articles of the Constitution as well as to informal bargaining now the centre selected a strategy of maintaining equidistance from all regions.

In June 1999 the law On the Principles and Order of the Separation of Jurisdiction between the State Authorities of the Russian Federation and the State Authorities of Subjects of the RF (O printsipakh i poriadke razgranicheniia predmetov vedenia i polnomochiy mezhdru organami gosudarstvennoy vlasti Rossiyskoj Federatsii i organami gosudarstvennoy vlasti sub'ektov RF) was adopted. This law fixed the equality of all subjects in their relations with the federal centre by separating jurisdictions, including those affecting the preparation of treaties and their signing (Art. 5). Also, the law prohibited one "to transmit, exclude or redistribute in some other way" the jurisdiction of the federal centre as well as the joint jurisdiction fixed in the Constitution (Art. 3, p. 1). Therefore, treaties between the federation and its subjects signed between 1994 and 1998 had to be brought into accordance with constitutional norms during the three years following the adoption of the law (Art. 32, p. 2.). In fact, this meant that in June 2002 all privileges resulting from treaties which were enjoyed by some subjects, ceased to be valid.

In 1999 the law On the General Principles of the Organisation of Legislative (Representative) and Executive State Authorities of Subjects of the Russian Federation (Ob obschikh printsipakh organizatsii zakonodatelnykh (predstavitelnykh) i ispolnitelnykh organov gosudarstvennoy vlasti sub'ektov RF) was adopted. This law legally fixed the direct elections of heads of regions,<sup>19</sup> unified a system of regional authorities as well as foresaw the responsibility of both regional branches of power for any ignorance in courts' decisions about the possible inconsistency of regional with federal legislation. In this first version of the law,<sup>20</sup> the head of region could dissolve a regional parliament if the court discovered that if, it hadn't eliminate the inconsistency of their laws within six months. At the same time, the regional parliament could dismiss the head of a region if he hadn't eliminated any possible contradictions discovered in his legal acts within one month.

These measures, on the one side showed the aspiration of the federal centre to unify the legal space over the whole territory of Russia. From the other side, the rights of subjects of federation to control the execution of courts' decisions on their own was not effective, because regional authorities were interested in both saving and getting additional jurisdiction even by contravening federal legislation.

Radical changes to federative policy took place in 2000, after Vladimir Putin became president. The main goal of the reforms was the creation of a common legal space, which was possible only if regional legislation were to be brought into accordance with federal legislation. Whilst two years ago the two-way alteration of legal acts was seen as the most appropriate way, now the federal centre began to insist on their exclusive right to change regional legislation. To achieve this, in May 2000 the institution of the Plenipotentiary Representative of the President of the RF (Polpred) was reformed. Now, the number of polpreds was reduced to seven positions. These represented the interests of the President not in every region, but in specially built federative districts. All subjects of federation were included in seven federal districts. This made it possible to

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<sup>19</sup> Before the adoption of this law, in some republics heads of executives were elected not directly by the population, but by specially called voters meetings. After this law was adopted the indirect elections of heads of republics were kept only in Dagestan, because of its ethnic diversity. The head of republic was chairman of the State Council, a collective body consisting of representatives from 14 indigenous ethnicities, elected by the Constitutional Assembly. However in 2003, a new Constitution of the Republic was adopted, which introduced the position of the President of Dagestan. According to the new Constitution, the first presidential elections of Dagestan were to be held in 2006, after the end of the legislative period of the State Council, which was elected before the new Constitution appeared.

<sup>20</sup> Between 2001 and 2004 this law was changed significantly. The most important amendments will be discussed in further texts in this chapter.

strengthen the federal influence in republics. According to the legal fundamentals, polpreds' activity can be divided into three components: firstly, the bringing of regional legislation into accordance with federal legislation; secondly, the coordination of federal services in regions; and thirdly, the control over the execution of the federal centre's decisions by regional authorities.

According to the President, the first task was successfully completed by the first period of reorganisation of the institution. In his Annual Address to the Federal Assembly in April 2001, V. Putin said that "more than 3 500 normative acts of subjects of federation didn't conform to the Russian Constitution and federal laws, and four fifths of them were subsequently brought into accordance". The polpreds also had fewer problems with the coordination of federal services in the regions. The most problematic issue was control over the execution of federal centre decisions by regional authorities, because this met with the displeasure of regional elites who saw this field of polpreds' activities as an infringement of subjects' rights and interests.

Nevertheless, federal authorities tried to encourage the regions to execute federal decisions in any way possible. For this purpose, in June 2000, a law was adopted, which after one year once more corrected the order of organisation of the regional legislative and executive branches of power.<sup>21</sup> Those amendments strengthened the responsibility of regional parliaments and heads of administrations for the adoption of legislation inconsistent with federal legislation. In particular, the procedures surrounding the dissolution of regional parliaments and the dismissal of heads of regions were foreseen in case warnings from the President about the contradiction of legislation were ignored. Now, in the case of non-execution of court decisions by regional legislative or executive authorities, the President had to give an official warning. In the case of subsequent inaction following this warning, the State Duma could dissolve the regional parliament, and the President could dismiss the head of a region. Thus, the mechanism of federal interference was created, which could provide control over the execution of federal decisions in the regions.<sup>22</sup> At the same

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<sup>21</sup> The Law On the Submission of Changes and Additions to Federal Law on the General Principles of the Organisation of Legislative (Representative) and Executive State Authorities of Subjects of the Russian Federation (O vnesenii izmenenij i dopolnenij v Federalny zakon Ob obschikh printsipakh organizatsii zakonodatelnykh (predstavitelnykh) i ispolnitelnykh organov gosudarstvennoy vlasti subektov RF).

<sup>22</sup> In spite of fact that between 2000 and 2004 no regional parliament was dissolved and no head of region was dismissed, the legal fixation of such tough sanctions contributed to the unification of the legal space.

time, new amendments created preconditions for the formation in Russia of executive (President – heads of regions) and legislative (State Duma – regional parliaments) verticals of power. Under the conditions of a lack of a consolidated democracy it created a threat to the building of democratic federalism.

The federal centre also secured itself against any possible attempts by subjects of federation to hamper the adoption of decisions unprofitable for them. For this purpose, the new law On the Order of the Formation of the Council of Federation (O poriadke formirovaniia Soveta Federatsii) was adopted. Now, members of the upper house were either elected by regional parliaments (half by the Council of the Federation) or appointed by the heads of regional administrations (the other half).<sup>23</sup> The heads of regional executive and legislative authorities, who are the key political actors in every region, stayed out of federal policy-making. They were replaced by not only the weaker political figures, but by people, “who were not always connected with the region which they represented in the centre” (Usiagin 2005: 96). One of examples of this was the story of the adoption of the law On the Order of Admission into the Russian Federation and Establishment within it of New Subject of the RF (O poriadke priniatii v Rossijskuju Federatsiju i obrazovanii v ee sostave novogo subjekta RF) , which paved the way for the enlargement of Russian regions.

The procedure of the amalgamation of two or more bordering subjects of federation into one was fixed in the law. The formation of a new subject “can effect the elimination of subjects of the Russian Federation, whose territories are to be integrated” (Art. 5. p. 2). Because this law together with the reduction of regions foresees the reduction of regional authorities, it was firstly rejected by the Council of the Federation in June 2001. However, after governors yielded their seats to representatives of territories who are more ready to compromises with the centre, the law was then approved by senators. The second Chechen war was formally finished and the presidential election in Chechnya took place in 2001.

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<sup>23</sup> In spite of fact that the adoption of this law lasted a little more than two months (it was adopted in its first reading by the State Duma on May 31 and signed by the President on August 5), it provoked very active opposition from members of the Council of the Federation. However, after conciliations it was finally approved by the upper house of the federal parliament. The governor of Novgorod oblast, M. Prusak, commented: “We lost, and now we should leave beautifully and with dignity” (Sovet Federatsii teriaet vse 2000: 12).

Together with reforms in the field of federation building, serious changes in ethnic policy began.<sup>24</sup> As in the previous ten years, one ministry (Minfederatsia) was responsible for federative as well as ethnic policies.<sup>25</sup> Whilst before it had been accepted that the territorial arrangement should meet the interests of ethnic groups, at that time, on the contrary, ethnic policy was considered to derive from regional development. In the opinion of the head of the ministry at that time, “ethnic problems are to be solved solely by economic means”, because it is “only through poverty that the language, ethnic and other barriers are being built” (Blokhin 2000: 3). He thought, that “ethnic policy is first of all about the proportional development of regions in the country, about bringing all territories up to the standard of living of the populations in Moscow and St. Petersburg» (ibid).

The economic logic was a determinant in the field of inter-regional integration. The head of Minfederatsia, A. Blokhin, published an article at the beginning of 2001. In that article he pointed out that the economic situation would remain difficult without a consolidation of the Russian economic space (Blokhin 2001). The best option in that situation was, in his opinion, to conduct “a search for new sources of support for federal and interregional programs and projects” (ibid). He underlined, that associations of economic cooperation had played a special role in the development of integration processes. Though he admitted the merits of the associations and of their “built from below” character, he elucidated the federal vision of such organisations. Blokhin pointed out that the associations of economic cooperation had to become mediators of federal policy. The issue of the international cooperation of regions was also described in the article. Blokhin wrote that the time when “the regions established ties with foreign partners directly, without the intermediation of the federal centre”, had finished. His main argument for this was the point, that “inter-regional cooperation should have had a systematic character” (ibid).

As a result, not only ethnic, but also regional policy was limited to goals of regional economic development. This was reflected in the structural change of the RF government: in October 2001 the Ministry for Federation Affairs and Ethnic and Migration Policy was dissolved, and its functions were transferred to other ministries - to

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<sup>24</sup> In many respects these changes were caused by the replacement of political actors, who coordinated ethnic relations in federal government and parliament. The replacement of these actors took place as a result of the elections to the State Duma in 1999 and replacements in the federal government after V. Putin became deputy President.

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix 1.

the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry for Economic Development and Ministry for Internal Affairs. Officially, this step was explained by referring to the low effectiveness of Minfederatsiya. This decision prompted a large discussion at the Civic Forum which took place in November 2001. However, the most debated issue was not one of federative relations, but ethnic policy. In the final statement from the ethnic policy panel discussion it was stated that “many representatives of the peoples of Russia as well as some officials, saw the liquidation of Minfederatsiya as a liquidation of ethnic policy and a step towards the further assimilation of peoples” (Smirnova 2001). Therefore, in December 2001 not a ministry, but the post of Minister for Ethnic Policy for the Regulation of Interethnic Relations was established. At this moment, regional and ethnic policies became fully separated from each other. The liquidation of Minfederatsiya and establishment within the government of the weak position of Minister for Ethnic Policy without a ministry is evidence of the rejection of maintaining any further elements of ethno-federalism.

In 2003 the reduction of multi-level territories was begun. The aim of this process was declared to be the economic equalisation of regions. Perm oblast and Komi-Permyak autonomous okrug within it were the first who used the law On Order of Admission into the Russian Federation and Establishment within it of New Subject of the RF. Due to the regional referendum in December 2003 and the adoption in March 2004 of the Constitutional Law on the Establishment within the Russian Federation of New Subject of the RF as a Result of the Amalgamation of Perm Oblast and Komi-Permyak Autonomous Okrug (*Ob obrazovanii v sostave RF novogo sub'ekta RF v rezul'tate ob'edineniia Permskoj oblasti i Komi-Permiatskogo avtonomnogo okruga*), Perm krai appeared on the Russian political map at the end of 2005. The basis for the amalgamation was the “speeding-up of social and economic development” of those regions as well as the “growth of the standard of living of the population” (Art. 1, p. 2.). In spite of the fact that oblast and okrug “end their existence as subjects” (Art. 4, p. 1), in reality an abolishment of autonomy took place. Instead of subject of federation the term “administrative territorial entity of krai with unified territory and special status” emerged (Art. 4. p. 2).

In April 2005 a referendum on the amalgamation of Krasnoyarsk krai and Taymyr and Evenk Autonomous okrugs was held. As in the case of Perm krai, the basis for their amalgamation was said to be economic expediency: Krasnoyarsk krai is an

unsubsidised region, while Evenkiya and Taymyr are 90% financed by the federal centre. The referendum on the amalgamation of Kamchatskaya oblast and Karyak autonomous okrug took place in the autumn of 2005. Ust' Ordynskiy Buryat autonomous okrug vanished from the Russian map in 2008. In general, the number of subjects of the Russian Federation had decreased from 89 to 83 by the end of 2009.

The enlargement of subjects of federation has led to a decrease not only in the number of multi-level territories, but at the same time of some ethnic autonomies within the Russian Federation. Such an enlargement of regions would hardly contribute to the creation of economically strong subjects of federation. As Evgenia Bukhwald writes, "the tasks of economic ... self-sufficiency of subjects of federation are to be solved not through the mechanic amalgamation of regions, but ... by successes in the economic field, which covers all regional links of the Russian economy" (Bukhvald 2004: 147).

The last radical changes in the sphere of the federative system occurred in autumn 2004. V. Putin formulated the idea of another reform at the enlarged government meeting with the government and heads of regions on September, 13. The formal cause for the changes was to combat the terrorism that became of high importance after the tragic events in Beslan. However, according to his speech, in order to fight terrorism it is not enough to strengthen security measures but it is also necessary to significantly rebuild state power. In Putin's opinion, "the main precondition for conquering terrorism" is "unity of the country", reduced to "unity of the system of executive power". Thus, "the bodies of executive power in the centre and in subjects of federation" must become a single system of power and "work as an integral co-subordinate single organism". To achieve this goal the President considered as necessary that "the federation and its subjects must jointly take part in forming executive bodies of power in the territories of Russia", that meant the election of heads of regions by legislative assemblies of the territories at the representation from the head of the state.

These ideas, articulated by Vladimir Putin were legislated in the latest amendments to the law On the General Principles of the Organisation of Legislative (Representative) and Executive State Authorities of Subjects of the Russian Federation, adopted in December 2004. These amendments, firstly, abolished direct elections of heads of regions and, second, in fact stated the monopoly of central executive power. Thus, the President acquired the power to dissolve regional parliaments in case of double (at the President's discretion) or triple (obligatory) rejection of the candidate for

the position of regional head by the regional parliaments. Now it is the President not the State Duma who can dissolve this or that regional parliament in the case of warnings about the inconsistency of legislative acts being ignored. The new procedure for elections to the post of governor further weakened the upper chamber of the federal Parliament — the Council of the Federation — while the centre acquired additional control of both branches of power in the regions.

Instead of two “power verticals”, Russia got one executive vertical that infringed not only on the principles of federalism but also on the democratic separation of power. In order to look less authoritative, the federal centre at the end of 2004 adopted the law On Amendments to Legislative Acts of the RF in accordance with the Widening of Powers of Subjects of the RF on the Joint Jurisdiction of the RF and Subjects of the RF (O vnesenii izmeneniy v zakonodatel’nye akty FR v svyazi s rasshireniem polnomotchij organov gosudarstvennoj vlasti subjektov RF po predmetam sovmestnogo vedeniia RF i subjektov RF....). However, the content of this normative act had little in common with its title: the widening of power of the Russian regions to focus on the implementation of tasks that were defined and controlled by the federal centre. These tasks were not beneficial but rather onerous for regions while they were simultaneously concerned with the providing of social support to veterans and people with disabilities, fighting forest fires, protecting from plant pests and so on. Regions have to implement all these “duties” on the expenses of the subsidies provided by the federal centre, i.e. with their financing fully under control. Thus, the regions did not receive additional independence. In fact, the opposite occurred - they became even more dependent on the federal will.

The structure responsible for territorial issues was restored in the system of Russian state authorities in autumn 2004. It had a symbolic name – the Ministry of regional development (Minregionrazvitia).<sup>26</sup> The main task of the ministry was not the development of federative relations, but effective territorial planning by means of working out strategies of socio-economic development.

After that there were no significant changes in the field of regional policy in Russia. Only one update in the interactions between the federal centre and region could be considered as important. The new order of elections to the post of governor was fixed by presidential decree. According to the new order, the political party which has a majority in the regional parliament, suggests the nominee candidate for the governor’s

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<sup>26</sup> See Appendix 1.

position. This statement almost precluded any possibility of building different power centres in the Russian regions because of the dominant position of the “United Russia” party in regional parliaments. It also increased the importance of identity politics - the governors’ position is now dependent on his/her loyalty to the “United Russia” party and not on the population’s support.

## Concluding Remarks

The federal centre was oriented towards getting control over the regions during the 1990s. The task of federative state building prevailed under inter-regional cooperation. The federal centre was focused on the creation of vertical integration, not on horizontal integration. It only supported the initiative “from below” during 1990s, as will be shown in the next chapter, and developed the legal framework for the activities of associations of inter-regional cooperation. The few attempts by central authorities to dictate the rules of horizontal integration to regions were unsuccessful in that time. The federal centre usually used the system of bilateral ties with the regions.

The situation changed radically in 1999-2004. The reforms, which were initiated by the federal centre, have had negative as well positive consequences. The unification of the legal sphere took place, on the one hand. The establishment of federal districts made the bilateral ties “centre-region” weaker and laid the foundation for the development of horizontal political integration in the future.

On the other hand, the building “from above” of the framework for inter-regional cooperation, firstly, blocked any possibilities for new initiatives “from below”. Secondly, the disconnection between the borders of federal districts and the areas of activity of associations of economic cooperation did not assist, but on the contrary, disrupted inter-regional integration. Thirdly, the federal centre’s ambitions to make the integration systematic changed the logic of cooperation. The structures of cooperation, which were built “from below” in the 1990s, were transformed into the mediators of federal policy. The issue of how the changes in federative policy influenced inter-regional integration in the Russian North-West will be discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter 2. Interregional Relations and Political Integration in North-West Russia

The system of asymmetric federalism which developed in the 1990s had very serious consequences for attempts at instituting horizontal cooperation between the regions. In the situation of asymmetric 'bargaining' federalism, the regions were interested in getting more power, privileges and funding through development of bilateral relations with the federal centre. In the beginning – that is to say, the middle of the 1990s - both republics and oblasts tried to bargain with the federal centre in order to get more privileges and autonomy fixed in the bilateral treaties. This led to competition and limits to the horizontal cooperation between them.

In the economic sphere, for the regions it was important to have special relations with the federal centre, in order to develop better financial conditions and to receive additional federal transfers as well as to be able to 'bargain' on an individual basis. For example, a governor of Leningrad oblast Vladimir Serdyukov once said: "I wont mention governors who are hanging around in Moscow 20 days a month occupied with solving only one problem: how to get more budgetary transfers and to get as much money as possible. I should just say that such governors constitute the largest part of all of us (governors)" (Vershki 2002: 94). Of course, some cooperation between the regions was observed in the solution of some economic and even political problems. However this was mainly due to attempts by the regions to "pressure the center and make it share its power or to make concessions" (Chernyshev 1999: 143).

The destruction of the planned economy has seriously influenced the economic situation in the Russian regions. To preserve existing communications and maintain contacts, regions have, since 1990, started to sign bilateral and multilateral agreements on economic cooperation between themselves, which became a basis for building associations of economic cooperation. At the end of 1991 this initiative by the regions had found support in the federal centre. The president, Boris Yeltsin, with his decree,<sup>27</sup> decided "to support the initiative of territories and to create the necessary conditions for the organisation and development of regional associations of economic cooperation". This was done with the purpose of "exercising new methods of national economy

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<sup>27</sup> Degree of the President of the Russian Federation № 194, 11.11.1991 "On Providing Conditions for the Increase of the Role and Interrelations of Republics within the RSFSR, Autonomous Units, Krajs and Oblasts, in the Implementation of the Radical Economic Reform".

management, under the conditions of a decentralised economy and market relations” and of “developing a procedure of common decision-making on issues of common development”. The structures created pushed forward interregional economic integration not only during the period of profound market reforms, but also after this time. At the beginning of 1999 all subjects of the Russian Federation (except for the Chechen Republic) were parts of eight associations of economic cooperation. The territories on which associations had authority in many respects coincided with the economic division into districts from the Soviet period, however, a number of regions were simultaneously members of several associations.

In spite of the fact that interaction in the framework of these associations allowed regions to solve their economic problems, they did not become separate actors, pooling the accumulated efforts of subjects in interactions with the federal centre. As A. Mommen mentions, the “ability of these associations to carry on negotiations collectively, to act in relations with Moscow from the unified positions in the most cases was undermined ... by divergences of their economic interests and rivalry. Benefits distributed among separate regions under the control of Moscow, exceed potential benefits from collective actions” (Mommen 2000: 72). According to other experts, the reason for forming associations of economic cooperation was an effort by the regions to protect their social and economic interests against unreasonable actions by the federal centre (Lesnikov 1997).

In November 1999 a special law was adopted, which defined the common principles of the formation and operation of associations on economic cooperation and thereby unified the rules of their functioning. A year ago, the federal centre corrected associations’ borders in accordance with the newly created federal districts. The next step of the federal modification of the regional initiative appeared at first “from below” and proved its vitality; this was the correction of associations’ borders in accordance with the newly created federal districts. The borders of districts were in a certain discord with the geographic range of eight interregional associations on economic cooperation. Therefore, as many analysts mentioned, the associations “turned out to be ‘persona non grata’” (Lysenko 2002: 168). The total number of associations decreased to seven and their members could be only regions belonging to a certain federal district. The simultaneous membership of a region in multiple associations was deemed impossible.

The reform implemented provided a new framework for economic integration and laid a new foundation for political integration at the same time.

Until 2000, political interregional integration in Russia was generally weak. As already mentioned, there were attempts at the integration of several subjects of the Russian Federation during periods of "bargaining" between regions and the federal centre for new competencies and division of power. In terms of this cooperation republics were the most successful. The majority of oblasts, on the contrary, preferred bilateral communications, "centre – region", not just in economic issues, but also in political dialogue. It is necessary to note that many regions have created interparliamentary associations with the main objective of facilitating an exchange of experiences on the legal regulation of different policies. However, these structures were less influential than their economic namesakes.

The federative reforms of 2000, followed by the "development of system of federal districts, made possible again the beginning of the process of interregional integration, but under federal control and within a certain geographic framework defined on the federal level" (Turovsky 2003: 237). In this way, the horizontal connections built previously by the decisions of the regions started to play a less important role (although some of them continued to function fruitfully).

However, the question about whether the federal centre policy really contributed to the deepening of interregional integration is not as simple as it might seem. To answer, it is necessary to examine in more detail those processes that took place inside the districts and to analyze the activity of plenipotentiary representatives of the President, since the representatives have been very important agents of integration. For this purpose we took the example of the Russian North-West as the most harmonized district in the sense of matching its borders with the geographic range of the association on economic cooperation functioning on this territory before the federative reform started.

## **2.1. Federal Districts: Possible Perspectives for Analysis**

The building of federal districts not according to economic or historical principles has triggered an ambiguous reaction in Russian society. A mass survey conducted by FOM (Fond "Obschestvennoe Mnenie" – Public Opinion Foundation) in 2000 indicated that only 43% of Russians evaluated the changes as positive, and 11% of respondents

were against the federal districts (Sozdanie federalnykh okrugov 2000). Some regional and local mass media have also ambiguously judged the presidential project. For example, the newspaper “Chelyabinsk Worker” announced the beginning of a “military-federal government system”, and noted that the new federal districts coincided with the borders of the military districts (Voenno-federalnye okruga)<sup>28</sup>.

The reform has found its opponents among political actors also and first of all among regional and local actors. Firstly, the majority of governors saw in the renewed institution of the plenipotentiary representative of the President, a threat to their positions (Fedosov et al. 2002). For example, the governor of Novgorod oblast at that time, Michail Prusak, became one of critics of the presidential project in the Russian North-West. At the conference dedicated his decade of service as governor, he said that the division of Russia into federal districts is a mistake, “because between the President and governors have been put intermediaries – the plenipotentiary representative and federal inspectors” (Nozhenko, Yargomskaya 2005: 133). Some analysts have also seen in the creation of districts a threat to the autonomy of subjects, and consequently, to federal relations in Russia. For example, Muhametshin claimed that the “idea of “gubernisaiton” means the creation of a unitary state and the unification of the polyethnic variety of Russia” (Muhametshin 2000: 47). Two years after the creation of a new system Lysenko summarized: “for the last two years, the country has taken a step towards a centralized government system”.

On the other hand, some opponents of the reform specified that the creation of seven federal districts could still cause a further disintegration of the country. Finding the situation regarding the separate interaction of the federal centre with each of subjects unacceptable, especially taking into account the basic principles of federalism, they indicated the danger of the further development of “neo-feudalism” (Valentey 2000: 23).

However, some analysts commented that the innovation also has its beneficial effects. For example, Alaev positively evaluated the creation of preconditions for a “vertical of power” (Alaev 2000: 181). Some researchers paid special attention to the strengthening of the role of plenipotentiary representatives of the President and their new possibilities in exercising control over the activities of the regional elite. “The creation of seven federal districts, the reassignment of all federal departments on the

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<sup>28</sup> As Usjagin shows, in reality the borders of the federal districts don’t coincide with the military districts, “although many authors erroneously, but very confidently say that they were designed after the military districts” (Usjagin 2005: 93).

respective territory of these districts to ‘governor generals’ is a staggering blow to the absolute power of ethnocratic elites” (Philippov 2000b: 45). Some scholars noted that the plenipotentiary representatives have got “real opportunities to correct the decisions of the regional authorities” (Trifonov, Mezhuev 2000: 26). Others supposed that the federal districts could be the first step in the process of regional enlargement. And the representatives of the president in the federal districts would play the role of “arbitrators”, who could “smooth and order competitive centres of regional and federal influence” (Dakhin 2003: 121-122).

However, after federal districts had become no longer innovative, but rather part of everyday political reality, the inaccuracy of many early forecasts became obvious. The districts have grown neither into provinces, nor into integrated subjects of federation. Nevertheless, scholars began to indicate some important changes within the federal districts like the building of a common informational space and the development of new contacts of an “interregional character between different categories of people such as civil servants, trade unions and social workers, artists, teachers, public health servants etc” (Busygin 2003: 83). The density and intensity of these networks together with the building of a common informational space made possible the hypothesis that in federal districts interregional integration is developing and the preconditions for building of new political communities are appearing. In other words, it became possible to consider federal districts from a new theoretical perspective and therefore not just as a corpus of individual subjects of federation united by the activity of the plenipotentiary representative, but as new potential macroregions.

It is necessary to say that we understand the regions “not so much as territories or administrative units, but as ‘live’, socially and intellectually designed spaces”, whose borders “are defined not by geographical categories, but by common identity (by ‘belongingness’, a set of voluntary accepted norms and values, adherence to certain procedures)” (Makarychev 2003: 14). In its turn, identity is understood here in a broad sense as a feeling of belonging to a regional community. This is why the region’s borders coincide with the community’s boundaries. In this regard, one of the central categories of our approach is “the regional community”, which could become the basis for self-identification by inhabitants of district.

To understand to what extent federal districts became and could become a basis for the building of a new regional community, it is necessary to find a convenient

theoretical framework. This will make an empirical analysis of the concrete selected case of the Russian North-West possible.

## **2.2. Theoretical Background of Regional Communities Studies**

The point of departure in our search for theoretical foundations for understanding the regional political communities was the concept of security communities elaborated by the authors of the communicative approach in international relations and regional identity studies, first of all Karl Deutsch and his colleagues (Deutsch, Burrell, Kann 1969). In the first place, the most important for our research is the distinguishing between integrated (non-political) and amalgamated (political) communities. Communities of the first type emerge as a result of the spread of common norms, rules and values established during the process of communication. They can be built on the borderlands of a number of bordering states or subjects of federation and also include territories of some other states or their administrative units. The communication, which is a basis for the integrated communities, is composed of functional ties. The ties can include transport communications, trade, tourism and the whole spectrum of joint cooperation projects in the social, economic and political spheres. The ties emerging in the process of joint projects, with time lead to the mutual relevance of those included in the communication. Gradually, mutual relevance grows into a common identity with the main indicator being mutual responsiveness. So as a rule, integrated communities emerge “from below” and are the project of a wide range of interactions.

Amalgamated communities, on the other hand, are mainly built “from above” and are a result of the activities of political institutions and explicit identity politics. The process is understood as an action carried out by political, economic and cultural elites. The main goal of the action is the management of informational flows in order to build a positive image of elites’ activities and of elites themselves among the population. The elites aimed to build such a positive image not only inside, but also outside their region (Gel’man, Popova 2003: 192). Therefore, amalgamated communities can emerge only on the territory of some administrative unit like a subject of federation or the state, where there are political institutions and agents of identity politics.

From the point of view of the communicative approach, the amalgamated communities should be supplemented by integrated communities, which guarantee the secure existence of the first ones. Thus, well established communication with the

neighbouring countries and their parts will contribute not only to the dialogue between the amalgamated communities (nations or regional political communities), but also to the emergence of mutual relevance and responsiveness. In such a way, the integration of the amalgamated communities leading to the building of integrated communities is a very important element of non-conflictual and mutually profitable interaction between the administrative territorial units.

For the building of both integrated and amalgamated communities, two main characteristics are important: building of the boundaries between "us" and "them" and effective communication.

Through the boundaries between "us" and "them" we understand those who belong to the community and those who are excluded from it. These aspects are very well studied by sociologists, anthropologists and political philosophers. Two of the first works which described this concept in sociology were the publications by Georg Simmel and Alfred Schutz. The publications had the same name - "The Stranger" ("Der Fremde"). In the second part of the 20th century, Frederik Barth created a concept of ethnic boundaries, which has gained many followers. In general, the most important theoretical conclusions can be described as the following: firstly, the establishment of a dichotomy between "us" and "them" is possible only in the case of contacts existing between the representatives of different communities (Simmel, 1981). Secondly, the boundaries between "us" and "them" are established not only from inside, but also from outside (Barth, 1969). There can be different mechanisms of an attribution to the "us" category: from legally fixed rules (like citizenship and naturalisation) to very subjective and emotional evaluations (such as, "carrier of the great Russian culture"). The first one is relevant mostly for the amalgamated (political) communities, the second one for the integrated (non-political) ones. In accordance with Barth's concept, the boundaries from outside are established through the enclosure of members of the other communities and promotion of their own image of "us". For instance, in spite of the wish of some Russian nationalists to see Byelorussians and Ukrainians as part of "the Russian people", such projects come across with the image of "us" and "them" constructed by the Ukrainian and Byelorussian nationalism ideologists.

The issue of efficient communication was considered by K. Deutsch in his book "Nationalism and Social Communication" (Deutsch 1953). In his opinion, the ability to understand an interlocutor depends primarily not on the knowledge of language, but on

membership in a community. Membership “consists in the ability to communicate more effectively, and over a wide range of subjects, with members of one large group than with outsiders” (ibid: 71). Deutsch noted, that “the communicative facilities” include not only a standardized system of symbols (like language, system of writing, painting, calculating etc), but also “information stored in the living memories, associations, habits, and preferences ... and in its material facilities for the storage of information, such as libraries, statues, signposts, and the like” (ibid: 70-71). We applied Deutsch’s ideas for the analysis of modern regional communities. Through coverage of the most regionally important events, mass media build a common informational space by spreading knowledge about common problems and aspirations as well as the common mechanisms of their solving and implementation. In addition to mass media, which is one of the main sources for the construction and support of a common informational space, a very important role in this process is also played by interpersonal links such as, for example, the implementation of joint cooperation projects and the exchange of experience. The completion of community building can be determined only when a large and stable network of human communications is built.

In the building of integrated (non-political) communities the central role is played by the wide networks of communication, common mass media, joint projects and other ties. On the other hand, the process of building amalgamated (political) communities is more complicated and multidimensional. As was already mentioned above, for the building of such a community activities by political institutions and purposeful identity politics are the most important preconditions. To discover the main mechanisms of amalgamated community building, we turned to theories of nations and nationalisms, because those are the items, which are the most researched type of political communities. The point of departure for us here was the concept of Benedikt Anderson, who distinguished the two most important characteristics of political communities: (1) limitation and (2) solidarity (Anderson 1991: 6-7).

**Limitation** of amalgamated communities is connected with the fact that behind the boundaries of even “the biggest among them” there are some other communities. Therefore, every political community has “finite, if elastic, boundaries” (ibid: 7). The flexibility of the boundaries is explained by the assumption that the bigger the number of individuals which ascribes itself to the political community, the broader its boundaries become. But when one speaks about the concrete amalgamated community, some limits

for such an ascription always exist. Thus, no community of this type can range further than the territorial space where the common political institutions work or will work in the nearest future.

Here, it is meant that the boundaries between “us” and “them” are constructed both from outside and from inside. External methods of construction can be traced in the political decisions leading to the establishment of administrative borders with common political institutions within such a bordered space. Consequently, the boundaries of amalgamated communities are defined through *demarcation* and *titualisation* (official fixation of the name of a territorial space inside of the demarcated borders). Here, we move to some extent away from the dichotomy between the establishment of the boundaries from outside and inside described by Barth. For us the important point is not that the members of a community “meet” the external boundaries, which were built by the members of other neighbouring communities (as was described by F. Barth). The most significant element for us is that all the external boundaries are in their essence the result of the implementation of some political decisions taken by a limited number of people and not always in accordance with the image of the majority members of the future amalgamated community. Therefore, we underline this process as the construction of the boundaries between “us” and “them” from outside.<sup>29</sup>

On the other side, internal methods of construction are referred to as not only the result of the activities of elites, but also as “by-products” of numerous activities by different actors from social and economic spheres, which lead to the building and entrenchment of a community image, including spatial aspects. Some of these actions lead to the mythologisation and symbolisation of space. For the transition from a territory with political institutions to an amalgamated community some implicitly shared meanings, values and common myths (Smith 2000: 92) are necessary. Situations reminding people of their belonging to the political community are constantly associated with symbols and semi-ritual measures (Hobsbaum 1990). The most popular examples of such symbols are an emblem, a flag and a hymn. However, there are also other ways of building this mythologized and symbolized space, among them are (1) “map-as-logo”; (2) natural character of borders and (3) image of the centre (capital).

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<sup>29</sup> It is so even though in some cases political decisions are a result of forced adherence to boundaries, which were created by other communities. Such a situation has often been observed in the cases of the dissolution of poly-ethnic and multiconfessional empires, when the population of a metropolis was forced to recognise the new boundaries between “us” and “them” created by the ideologists from the nationalist movements in the former colonies.

The maps are visually fixing “the limits of sovereign authority” (Anderson 1991:172) of the amalgamated communities and where from the political point of view they end. But in the building of the communities’ boundaries not only the political map is important, a special role is played by the “map-as-logo” which is a schematic picture of an administrative territorial unit (for example, of a state or subject of federation). Such a map taken in the context of parallels and meridians, neighbouring administrative territorial units and other geographical and political parameters is “no longer a compass to the world”, but a “pure sign”, “available for transfer to posters, official seals, letterheads, magazine and textbook covers, tablecloths, and hotel walls” (ibid: 175). “Map-as-logo” is easily recognizable and fixes a spatial image in the consciousnesses of the members of the amalgamated community.

Some “legitimacy” of the demarcated borders derives from their natural character, i.e. the relation to existing geographical reality. “In everything ‘natural’ there is always something unchosen ... To put it another way, precisely because such ties are not chosen, they have about them a halo of disinterestedness” (ibid: 143). Therefore, geographical references like the “Nordic country” or “island state” become very important for the fixation of images about the boundaries of a political community. In this respect also the selection of the centre (capital) is significant, because the creation or exploitation of a readily available positive image of the capital city can serve as good stimulus for the development of a feeling of prestige<sup>30</sup> amongst the members of an amalgamated community. However there is always a danger that within the demarcated borders two or more cities have ambitions to become a capital. In this case the choice can not only facilitate, but on the contrary also hinder the fixation of the borders demarcated by political actors in the consciousness of the potential members of an amalgamated community. Therefore, it is necessary that the status of capital be given to the recognised leader of the territory.

One more important factor for the demarcation of boundaries between “us” and “them” is the duplicating of the name of the demarcated spaces. This is partially implemented by political actors through the naming of official structures. The fixation of a name in the mass consciousness is also a by-product of the activity of agents from the

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<sup>30</sup> A feeling of prestige is one of the preconditions for uniting people in political communities. For the first time in sociology the connection between the feeling of prestige and the political idea was described by Max Weber (Weber 1994). Later, many scholars paid some attention to this issue by considering patriotism as one of the main mechanisms for the support of the feeling of prestige.

economic sphere, for example, actors from regional firms and enterprises. The major symbols of the amalgamated community, including the title of the territory, as well as names of famous personalities, historical monuments or sights, are used in the naming of the private firms and/or their products,<sup>31</sup> newspapers and other mass media. Nevertheless, not all the methods of constructing boundaries between “us” and “them” from inside are aimed at mythologisation and symbolisation. Some of them can, in fact, contribute to the structural fixation of the “rules” for belonging to the community. In the case of nations this is done through the institution of citizenship and the naturalisation procedures. In other types of political communities the rules are expressed through mechanisms of horizontal interaction within the political or other associations augmented by clear rules of inclusion and exclusion.

A community is **solidarity**, because it has strong horizontal ties – social, cultural, economic and political ones – within its demarcated borders. This unity, in opposition to the boundaries between “us” and “them” is a set of perceptions about “we-communities”, where a dominant role is played not by “belonging” or “exclusion”, but by the image of who “we” are.

For strong horizontal connections, firstly *common institutions* and the *unification of rules and documents* are needed - measures which would connect people. The second condition is not just an informational exchange, but rather *the building of a common informational space*, which connects people together through access to the same information. Aside from this, mass media are able to transform regional symbols into an element of the everyday life of the ordinary people by destroying in such a way the boundaries between the private local and public regional spheres (Hobsbaum 1992: 142).

Besides the above mentioned factors, an important role in the process of unity building is played by common collective memory and historical roots. No political institution appears in an “empty” space. On the contrary, on any given territory there must already be other institutions as well as political, social and cultural relationships, which continue to exert influence even after new institutions and rules are established. In other words, it is possible to find a large amount of political and social fundamentals that are retained in the form of some ties and networks of interaction. In the analogy using

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<sup>31</sup> An interesting example of research on identity building through agents from the economic sphere is presented by the study of the titles of the vodka brands in some Russian regions conducted by Nikolay Petrov (Petrov 2003).

Eric Hobsbawm’s term, “proto-national ties” we called such ties “proto-community ones”. Under “proto-national” ties, Hobsbawm understood the previous ties, which had already connected people of some given territory together before the nationalism era. He defined them as “feelings of collective belonging which already existed and which operate ... potentially on the macro-political scale” (Hobsbaum 1992: 46). Proto-community ties can, of course, also hinder the building of a political identity: for example, in the case that these ties are “cut” during the demarcation of the new borders. However they can also become a source of new myths and rules for the new emerging community.

The mechanisms for the building of amalgamated political communities can be schematised in the following way (Table 1):

**Table 1. Mechanisms for the Building of Amalgamated (Political) Communities**

<b>Limitation</b>		<b>Unity</b>
boundaries between “us” and “them”		«we-community»
Construction from outside	Construction from inside	<i>Common institutions and unification</i>  <i>Common informational space</i>  <i>Proto-community ties</i>
<i>Demarcation</i>	<i>Mythologisation and symbolisation</i>	
<i>Titualisation</i>	(map-as-logo, natural character of the borders, image of the capital centre, duplicating of the name)  <i>Structural fixation of rules of belonging</i>	

So, the building of amalgamated (political) communities is a more complicated and multifaceted process than in the case of integrated communities. Nevertheless, a common precondition for both of them is the building of a common informational space and numerous networks of interaction.

As was already described above, the establishment of federal districts created new foundations in Russia for the development of new regional communities. In addition, the intensification of contacts observed by scholars as well as the integration of subjects of the Russian Federation into the social and economic spheres could contribute to the building of integrated district communities. However, the reform of plenipotentiary representatives of the president provided the opportunity for amalgamated communities

to appear within the federal districts. Representatives could become institutions, which could actively work on the building of a new identity, where the representatives themselves could play the role of active agents of identity politics in their districts.

For verification of this assumption we examined the case of North-Western Federal District (NWFD)<sup>32</sup>. Precisely this district was hailed by analysts as the “most balanced” and “natural”, because it “includes historically and economically connected regions”. The other districts have artificial borders, because they were created not on the basis of economic districts or already existing associations on economic cooperation, but in opposition to them. Thereby, in almost every place except for the North-West “territories were united in a district, which had no internal need for such unity” (Usiagin 2005: 91-92). At the same time the establishment of a system of federal districts hardly influenced the composition of the Association on Economic Cooperation “North-West”.

Unlike the other associations, “North-West” lost only one subject of federation, i.e. Kirov oblast, which was part of the region until 2000. However Kirov oblast was itself partly an “alien” element because it had previously belonged to Volgo-Vyatsky economic district. At the same time, other subjects of federation (with the exception of Kaliningrad oblast) belonged to the unitary North-Western economic district, which was divided into Northern and North-Western districts only in 1982 (Petina 2000: 180). It is also important, that the economic role of St. Petersburg in the district is “quite big, but not so overblown, like the role of Moscow in the Central Federal District” (Zubarevich, Petrov, Titkov 2001: 177). Therefore, the borders of the North-West turned out to be close to the borders of the region of economic cooperation created in the Soviet period. The experience of economic cooperation in the Soviet and post-Soviet time can be considered as proto-community ties. Experiences of long-term cooperation, at least in economic sphere, could, without a doubt, become the basis for the building of, if not of an amalgamated, then of an integrated regional community. It is worth mentioning that the North-West is quite homogeneous in the ethno-cultural sense: there are only three “ethno”-subjects of the Russian Federation - Nenets autonomous okrug, the Republic of Karelia, and the Republic of Komi.

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<sup>32</sup> See Appendix 2.

### 2.3. In Search for a New Regional Community

Since our research was carried out within the framework of a pilot project, we could involve neither the whole territory of the North-Western Federal District<sup>33</sup>, nor even the biggest part of it. For analysis we have chosen two subjects of federation included in the district: the Republic of Karelia and Novgorod oblast, which differ in many characteristics: geographic location, proximity / distance from external borders of the Russian Federation and the attitudes of regional elites towards the establishment of federal districts. Thus, the Republic of Karelia has, in the northwest, access to the White Sea and its western border coincides with the state border between Russia and Finland. Novgorod oblast is, on the other hand, an “internal region”, which has no external border of the Russian Federation and no access to the sea. As for an evaluation of the federative reform, the Republic of Karelia was one of the first subjects of the Russian Federation in which elites enthusiastically supported the idea of district community building. In contrast, as mentioned above, the governor of Novgorod oblast did not like the idea of reforming the institution of the plenipotentiary representative.

During the research, in 2003 12 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted in Novgorod oblast and 12 in the Republic of Karelia. Taking into account that the activity of the renewed institution began only in 2000, we didn't expect to discover a stable established political community in the North-Western Federal District. However we were interested in the orientations and beliefs of potential agents of identity politics within the district and those who are intensively involved in the construction of a common informational space. Therefore, our respondents were representatives of regional political elites, civil servants of middle rank, heads of printed and electronic regional mass media and representatives of federal agencies in the regions. Our interview guide included several blocks of questions oriented towards getting information about interregional ties, common projects and exchanges with other subjects of federation from the North-Western district. Also questions were asked, which are connected with the assessment of the activities of the plenipotentiary representative in the building of a common North-Western space.

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<sup>33</sup> See Appendix 2.

## Unsuccessful Search for an Amalgamated Community

All seven federal districts were created on the basis of a decree from the President of the Russian Federation and the Regulation on the Position of Plenipotentiary Representatives of the President of the Russian Federation in the Federal Districts. In these documents all federal districts were given names and their borders were fixed. Thus, the federal centre became the agent which defined the boundaries between “us” and “them” *from outside*, while effecting their demarcation and titularisation. It is also important that all the names of the federal districts are connected with their geographical location – a fact that underlines, to a certain extent, the “natural” character of their construction.

At the beginning of the 2000s, maps of federal districts with the “map-as-logo” concept began to replicated. There has been also duplicating of the name of districts not only through renaming of official institutions, but also through other agents from the social and economic sphere. Thus, the word “North-West” has taken root in the names of many regional firms, brands and trade marks. For example, in the “Yellow Pages St. Petersburg” in 2004 around 270 firms, enterprises and other organisations were listed with their names containing the words “North-West”. Among them, some “North-Western” enterprises and institutions still remained from the Soviet period and some are obviously new, such as, for instance, the real estate agency “North-Western Stability”, the paintball club “North-Western Legion”, the legal centre “North-Western Region” and many others.

As for the image of the capital city, there is no other city in the North-Western Federal District which has such strong capital ambitions and potential as St. Petersburg. Nevertheless, the existing picture and image of the “cultural capital” which is firmly fixed in the consciousness of many inhabitants not only of the districts, but also of the whole country, has most likely an all-Russian, rather than a district character. Thus, however, some respondents claimed a greater emotional attachment to the “Northern Capital”, than to Moscow: *“Moscow is another country altogether. Certainly, Piter<sup>34</sup> is closer and more understandable in its spirit and mentality”*. Other respondents mentioned a kind of “foreignness” of St. Petersburg caused by its special status: *“Piter it is haughty. There is no desire to make contact with people there. The people are absolutely different there. They don’t behave how we do”*. In spite of a difference in the emotional perception of the

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<sup>34</sup> „Piter“ is affectionate diminutive from „St. Petersburg“.

city and its inhabitants, almost all respondents were unanimous in their estimation of the integration potential of St. Petersburg. However at the same time they pointed out the ambition of a city to become the leader in the district arena: *“Perhaps it perceives itself as the Russian capital and wants to be North-Western capital”*. On the other hand, the respondents confirmed an absence of any real actions directed towards the realisation of the city’s capital ambitions. Former leading positions in educational, innovational and informational spheres were lost, and the city did not make any attempts at regaining them: *“The North-West does not need Piter. Those positions which Peter occupied such as being an educational and innovational centre, it has abandoned them, without trying to fight in the new conditions”*. Or: *“At some time, the promotion of Petersburg as a cultural centre of both the country and especially of the North-Western district was forgotten. Now, it is very difficult to restore it anew. Petersburg’s ‘Channel 5’ is now something like a local city studio”*.

Thus, the integration potential of the city was estimated by respondents as insignificant: *“Cooperation [with other regions] exists, but without Piter”*. It is only possible to change the situation by means of making certain concrete efforts as it is impossible to rely only on dividends from the past: *“In order that communications with the regions are developed enough, Piter should invest resources, specifically to restore links with them»*. Therefore Petersburg appears like a respectful, honorary general but without any army.

As was already mentioned, a very important role in the construction of boundaries between “us” and “them” from the inside is played by the creation of stable mechanisms of horizontal interaction. By such mechanisms we referred to associations of cooperation existing on the territory of the North-West. One of the pioneers in this respect among the political structures, which was also very successful, was on the territory of the district the North-Western Parliamentary Association (NWP). This association was created in 1994 and united representatives of the regional legislatures of the same 11 subjects of federation, which six years later were included in the North-Western Federal District. The main aim of the creation of this consultative body was to elaborate on “some consistent approaches to existing legislative activity”.<sup>35</sup> Our respondent mentioned one more task for the association: to raise the effectiveness of the legislative process: *“The idea was not to invent a bike anew. If a law was designed in*

<sup>35</sup> Parliamentary Association of the North-West of Russia. General information: [http://www.duma.murman.ru/parliament/paszr/history/astn\\_history.pdf](http://www.duma.murman.ru/parliament/paszr/history/astn_history.pdf)

*Vologda, why should we in Novgorod to design the same law from scratch? ... If we approach some law to solve economic problems, we take the whole experience of the North-West, and apply it, and the process of the legislation promotion hastens ten times".* At the end of November 2004, during the jubilee conference in Vologda dedicated to the 10 year anniversary of the NWPA, the organisation was renamed the Parliamentary Association of the North-West of Russia (PANWR).

As was already mentioned, the association on economic cooperation, which existed in the North-West before the building of federal districts, has in terms of its structure of participants, not changed much in comparison with some other districts. During the 1990s, Kirov oblast also belonged to the association as well as the 11 current members, and two oblasts – Novgorod and Kaliningrad - were simultaneously members of other interregional associations – “Chernozemje” and “Central Russia” respectively. The borders of interregional interactions marked by the federal centre from outside corrected the rules of inclusion in this structure. In addition to this, the associations of economic cooperation also lost their former full autonomy from the federal centre. Now they have to develop programs for social and economic development in the district together with the plenipotentiary representatives of the president in the federal districts. Nevertheless, both NWPA and Association “North-West” can be seen as stable proto-community ties, which could contribute to new political community building within the borders of the district.

On the one hand, the activity of the plenipotentiary representatives in the task of elaborating programmes of social and economic development together with the interregional associations should contribute to deeper integration. Yet some of our respondents noted that the inclusion of the plenipotentiary representatives in the work of associations on economic cooperation did not contribute to this cooperation, but rather confused the dialogue between its members: *“the association on economic cooperation ... it is a sufficiently powerful instrument, through which we could agree ourselves; calmly and equal in rights, without the need to highlight the special status of the representative. The appearance of the plenipotentiary representative didn’t change this for the better - the previous equality disappeared”*. In spite of the fact that the representatives had to help the regions to develop the economic sphere, their activity didn’t really bring anything new to the cooperation which already existed: *“As I understand, the districts were created not to govern the economy and investment*

*streams. If this was all supported by special resources – organisational, economic, and financial and others – maybe in that case it makes sense. But it is not supported by anything other than a PR-cloud. There are no real resources, no approaches”.*

As for the construction of a common informational space, this process was unsteady in the North-West and in many aspects depended on the personalities of the plenipotentiary representatives. Thus, during the first three years of the federal districts, three representatives replaced one another in the NWFD.<sup>36</sup> Attempts at building a single informational space within the district could be observed only in the activities of the first plenipotentiary representative, who frequently mentioned the necessity of adjusting the information exchange between the regions inside the district. For example, in his speech to mass media representatives in January 2001, Viktor Cherkesov said: “We count on the support of the press in uniting all the regions of the district into a single informational space” (*Obraschenie*). It is very important to note that the building of a common informational space was seen by the first representative and his team as an instrument for the building of a new community within the district. Thus, the deputy representative in the NWFD, Evgeny Makarov, said in an interview: “There is still much to do to fix the understanding of commonality in the North-Western geographical and political space. When the question is asked, whether some concrete clear image of the North-West was built among the inhabitants, I answer that it is not necessary that the citizens have especially warm perceptions of the established administrative structure. It is necessary to speak about the building of social-cultural communality among the inhabitants of our cities and counties ... The main problem is that the people know little about one other: how do the people live in Pskov or Murmansk oblasts, what is the situation in Nenets Autonomous District?” (*Severo-Zapadny okrug*).

For the building of a common informational space in the North-West of Russia, the office of the plenipotentiary representative actively encouraged both the establishment of new structures and the activities of institutions which already existed. Thus, Cherkesov, in autumn 2000, “welcomed the self-organization of the heads of the regional mass media, who decided to unite themselves into the association” (Viktor Cherkesov *prinial uchastie*). The Association of Mass Media of the North-West was created on the initiative of the mass media themselves “as an independent journalists’ organization with the purpose of advocating corporate interests and uniting efforts

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<sup>36</sup> See Appendix 2.

towards building an informational space in the region”.<sup>37</sup> In March 2001, Cherkesov also signed an agreement on cooperation with the informational agency “Severinform” created in 1999. “Severinform” became a federal informational agency broadcasting the news of the North-Western Federal District.<sup>38</sup>

The aforementioned structures tried to cover the events happening in some subject of federation in the mass media which are common to the North-West. However, despite the adjustment of cooperation between journalists from various subjects of federation within the district, the common informational space was not really built in the first half of 2000s. Thus, the networks of journalists’ interactions provided the impetus towards integration which had an effect mainly on the representatives of the mass media themselves rather than on the population: *“Yes, it’s great that there is an Association of the Mass Media of the North-West. But go onto the streets of Novgorod and ask: ‘What is the Association of the Mass Media of the North-West?’ I assure you, 99% of people will not be able to answer this question”*. Such a situation can be partly explained by a question from the editor-in-chief of the weekly journal “Expert. North-West”, Fedor Gavrilov: “Are the people in Vologda really interested in what is happening in Kaliningrad?” (Nozhenko, Yargomskaya 2005: 136).

Following the resignation of Cherkesov from his position as the plenipotentiary representative in the North-Western Federal District, purposeful activity towards the building of an amalgamated community was stopped. His successors Valentina Matvienko and Ilja Klebanov<sup>39</sup> did not share the goal of political integration within the borders of the district. Matvienko’s main aim was the strengthening of her own position in St. Petersburg to win the elections to the post of governor in 2003. Klebanov became a very “technical representative”, whose activity is unobtrusive to ordinary people.

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Therefore, in 2003-2004 we found within the North-West no consecutive process of building an amalgamated community. In the North-Western district the reformed institution of the plenipotentiary representative proved itself most actively during the first three years of its existence and generally within the administrative centre of the district of

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<sup>37</sup> Self-representation of the Association of the Mass Media of the North-West. See: <http://www.asmi-sz.ru/>

<sup>38</sup> Self-representation of the Informational Agency “SeverInform”. See: <http://www.severinform.ru/pages/about/>

<sup>39</sup> See Appendix 2.

St. Petersburg. Active phases changed into silent periods and the rhythm of the changing of phases was set by the elections of the capital city governor. Nevertheless, during the first two years some attempts at the creation of a common informational space were undertaken, for the purpose of constructing a new regional identity in the district.

However, our research showed that after Cherkesov's departure, amalgamated community building within the district's borders almost disappeared from representatives' talks. This situation can be partly explained by the weakness of this political institution. Being a part of the administration of the president, representatives act like politically dependent structures. As practice showed, the institution of the representative didn't need any additional political legitimacy "from below" in order to act in the North-West. This is connected with the following factors: firstly, this institution created "from above" depends only on the federal centre; secondly, regional elites in this part of Russia don't really oppose the interventions of representatives and federal inspectors in the legislative process in subjects of federation. The reform of the procedure surrounding governors' elections in 2004 made any possible opposition even more unlikely than previously.

On the one hand, plenipotentiary representatives had no real motivation to engage in active identity politics. On the other hand, the political institution which was created had an internal logic of integration, which it naturally followed without any additional effort. The creation of federal districts and the ensuing correction of the borders of interregional integration contributed to the intensification of contacts between subjects of federation included in the North-Western Federal District. This is why the building of an integrated community. Within the borders of the Russian North-West is possible

### **Unsuccessful Search for an Integrated Community**

In 2003-2004 we found a large amount of branching cooperation networks within the borders of the district. In the North-West many cooperation networks and joint projects were functioning and it was hard to determine the exact amount. All of them were initialised not only by representatives of the regional authorities, but also by other agents like, for example, state and business structures or international partners, who are interested in developing contacts with the borderland territories.

One of the obvious examples of the initiative “from below” which came from the heads of the regional mass media has already been mentioned – the Association of Mass Media of the North-West. The other institution created by state and business structures which was important for the region, was the Centre for Strategic Development of the North-West. The main goal of this organization in 2004 was stated to be “the building of a space for interaction and free communications between organisations and private persons working towards the further development of the North-West of Russia”<sup>40</sup> (Nozhenko, Yargomskaya 2005: 137). Some such projects were developed and subsequently shut down; some of them turned out to be viable and even to have good perspectives for the future. For example, the project oriented towards the building of the common cultural space “Northern Ring” was unsuccessful though it had the purpose of securing “investment for building a common historical and cultural space achievable by developing amongst the population of region the perception of the historical and moral importance of their ‘small motherland’ for the whole of Russia”.<sup>41</sup> Such structures and projects had to contribute to the building of a common informational space within the borders of the Russian North-West. However the scarcity of truly district-wide projects did not prevent the unification of all 11 subjects of federation, which belong to the North-Western Federal District.

At the same time, in the district there were a large number of projects connecting certain regions of the North-West. For example, since the beginning of 1990s the representatives of the Republics of Karelia and Komi, as well as Murmansk and Arkhangelsk oblasts have actively worked together within the network project “Barents Press”, within the framework of the Barents Euro-Atlantic Region (BEAR). It is worthwhile mentioning that this sort of project sometimes creates and supports such networks of interaction which would not otherwise appear: *“We make contacts ... through... ‘Barents Press’. Not simply because Murmansk or Arkhangelsk are nicer or closer to us. They are nice, I assure you, but I would not have communicated with them for these ten years ... because they have their own work and I have mine”*.

Most projects implemented in the North-Western district didn’t cover the whole district and as a result the boundaries between “us” and “them” reached no further than

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<sup>40</sup> Such a goal was firstly declared by the Center for Strategic Development. But now on its official web page it is written that «The Center was created for the promotion of development of the North-Western subjects of the Russian Federation and providing of strategic advantages of this macroregion within the system of the Russian and global economy» ([www.csr-nw.ru](http://www.csr-nw.ru)).

<sup>41</sup> CM: - <http://www.journalists.spb.ru/about/asmi/projects/#sevkoltso>

the area of their cooperation networks. The partners who were in the direct contact were seen as “us”: *“We say ‘our correspondents’, because ... we have such a peculiar family, i.e. Cherepovets, Vologda, Arkhangelsk, Murmansk, Petrozavodsk, Kaliningrad, Pskov, Velikie Luki, Novgorod”.*

Moreover, among our respondents there were also many who were not included in the cooperation projects. For them, inclusion in the “us” group occurred on some other basis. In the research we could ascertain the most common foundations for the definition of the boundaries between “us” and “them”. Thus, some differences were discovered in two of our cases – the Republic of Karelia and Novgorod oblast. For the respondents from Novgorod some more pragmatic and less mythologized process of inclusion into “us” was typical. They almost literally repeated the arguments advocated by adherents of the communicative approach, mentioning as the most significant factors the duration of contacts and geographical proximity. Thus, the most important partner of Novgorod oblast was Pskov oblast. These regions are connected with each other through a very long history of neighbourly relations (though it was not without many problems) and the age of capitals of regions: *“We [Pskov and Novgorod] know each other well enough ... Pskov will celebrate 1100 years this year ... We celebrated 1140 some years ago”.* One more reason for the identification the regions as “us” were is the distance between Novgorod and its neighbours: *“Pskov is just 200 kilometres away; you can go there without a second thought. Piter also [is close], Leningrad region. By car it is just two and a half hours”.*

For the majority of respondents from Karelia the boundaries between “us” and “them” were based on strongly mythologized connections. Thus, in the “us” group they included first of all such regions as Murmansk and Arkhangelsk oblasts, where the Pomors lived at some point in the past: *“[we have the closest links] with Murmansk and Arkhangelsk, because they are Pomor regions. There was even some common language of the Pomors living on the coast of the White Sea. Some of them settled down in Murmansk region, some in Karelia, and some in Arkhangelsk”.* Thus, the important basis of community identity for them is the sea: *“well, all around the White Sea, the three regions Murmansk, Arkhangelsk and Karelia too, there is one sea, one means of production, one way of life for the coastal people – the Pomors, they are ethnic in this respect. They live in these three regions”.*

One more basis for identifying the “us” group in Karelia was the Russian North including Arkhangelsk, Murmansk and Vologda regions. The third basis for the construction of the boundaries is the Finno-Ugric world: *“With Komi we have a slightly different connection ... in Komi we have representatives of the Finno-Ugric people”*. So, for the respondents from Karelia the world of “us” included four subjects of federation of the North-Western Federal District: Arkhangelsk, Murmansk, Vologda oblasts and the Republic of Komi. The remaining seven subjects of federation were not really included in the “us” group, because there was no mythologized basis for the inclusion of them in the mythologized space.

Generally, in the interviews which were carried out multiple factors served as a basis for commonality: neighbourhood, common historic roots, common geographic specifics, common culture, common resources, and networks of transport communications connecting subjects of federation, common ethnos, economic ties and common economic and social problems. If we were to create a kind of map of images, we would see a large number of unsteady and unstable communities, whose boundaries sometimes coincide and sometimes again diverge. However, in the Russian North-Western space we didn’t find an integrated community which would cover the biggest part of the North-Western Federal District.

The aforementioned difference in the perception of boundaries between “us” and “them” indicated in interviews with respondents from Novgorod and the Republic of Karelia helped us to draw one more conclusion. Informants from Novgorod almost never talked about a sense of community that could connect them with other regions. Usually, they called other subjects of federation “partners” or “friends”, but avoided using the pronoun “we” as a collective term for themselves and those with stable contacts. Thus, they underlined a certain distance from those who could be referred to as “us”. For respondents from Petrozavodsk the situation is reversed: it is typical for them to understand their region as a part of a community built during a long process of communication.

This observation as well as the assessments of the activity of the plenipotentiary representatives in the North-Western district provided by the respondents made it possible to draw the conclusion that potential agents of district identity politics in Novgorod oblast were, in fact, not supporters of deep integration within the borders of the North-Western Federal District. In their interviews they were critical about the activity

of the plenipotentiary representatives, again and again repeating comments about the artificiality and low effectiveness of this institution. In this way, the negative attitude towards the establishment of federal districts which was expressed many times by governor, Mihail Prusak, can be seen differently. At the same time, potential agents of district identity politics in the Republic of Karelia showed openness towards the idea of interregional integration. Generally, they evaluated the activity of representatives more positively, than their colleagues from Novgorod, and they also underlined the importance of joint projects for the internal development of the Republic.

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In 2003 – 2004 in the Russian North-West an integrated (non-political) community, whose boundaries could move closer to the borders of North-Western Federal District, was absent. In spite of this we found a large number of non-political communities, which were formed and which function for different reasons. Networks of communication existed in the region before the creation of the federal district system. New projects initiated by different actors also contributed to their creation. The main reason for the absence of an integrated district, from our point of view, was the lack of organisations and projects, in which all 11 subjects of the Russian Federation included in the North-Western Federal District, could participate. Precisely such structures and projects could form a common informational space and then subsequently lead to the appearance of a non-political community.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The transformation of the institution of the plenipotentiary representative created the basis for the building of macro-regions within the federal districts, which means also for the building of amalgamated (political) and integrated (non-political) communities. In the North-West the building of the new communities could be based on the significant integration potential which appeared as result of the activities of the associations of economic interaction and interparliamentary associations. However the research we carried out didn't find any evidence of the building of either amalgamated or integrated communities within the North-Western Federal District. The reasons for this were, on the one hand, the absence of a clear identity politics, which could be implemented by the plenipotentiary representative office and the general weakness of the institution of the plenipotentiary representative. Being a part of the structure of the administration of the

Russian Federation, it acts as politically dependent and weak institution, which therefore does not require any political legitimacy “from below”. On the other hand, the scarcity of district-wide projects and organisations, which could contribute to the building of a common informational space in the Russian North-West, was also instrumental.

One of the important conclusions from our analysis is the fact that there exists varying degrees of readiness for interregional integration amongst subjects of federation within the North-West Federal District. The identification with an amalgamated or integrated community on the district level was not seen as a problem for agents of identity politics from some regions. However, for agents of identity politics in other regions this process turned out to be difficult and painful. Thus, the Republic of Karelia showed a high degree of readiness for integration and at the same time, Novgorod oblast was against it.

In our opinion, a region’s readiness for integration in many ways depended on the type of political community that had been built within the borders of a subject of federation from 1991 to 2004. In some subjects a new identity (we could say a district identity) is perceived as danger for the existing (or developing) regional identity. Therefore, if regional agents of identity politics thought that the creation of a new community would contravene their plans, they would either hinder the formation of new lines of communication or would take the process under their control.

The hindering of communication as well as political control of it led to a strengthening of the boundaries between “us” and “them” in regional amalgamated communities. However, if political actors didn’t look at new integration as a danger for regional identity, these boundaries became flexible. The strength or flexibility of boundaries depends on the readiness of the amalgamated community (or part of it) to fit into other communities. It is important to mention that in this case we are talking not about changes in boundaries of communities – the maximum width is determined by the coverage area of political institutions - but about their quality. We mean here the ability or inability to broaden the boundaries between “us” and “them”.

Therefore, the next chapter will be dedicated to an investigation of the types of regional political communities as well as to the main reasons for the construction of such communities in the subjects of federation included in the North-Western Federal District.

## Chapter 3. Regional Community Building and Cross-Border Interaction

While in the previous chapter the process of political integration within the federal districts in the framework of the federation reforms was made, in this chapter, the question is answered why some regions were ready for political integration within the North-Western federal district, and some not. Some of them without any problems began to identify themselves with the broader community, some of them rejected this political project. Therefore, the objective of the chapter is a search of the major factors influencing readiness to the integration. For this, the following tasks are consequently followed in the chapter. Firstly, theoretical definition of the main elements of regional community building is given and the hypotheses regarding the possible influencing factors are formulated. Then, they are consequently tested on example of every selected case study (Novgorod oblast, Republic of Karelia and Kaliningrad oblast). In the end of the chapter, the comparison of the cases is carried out and some general conclusions are made.

### 3.1. Classification of Regional Political Communities

Following the Ernest Gellner's logic<sup>42</sup>, we define political communities with the flexible boundaries between "us" and "them" as *modular*. We see modular political communities as communities with built in members, which can easily be integrated into any other political (merged) and non-political (integrated) communities. Thus, owing to its ability to "suit" any cooperation, the members of modular communities can easily enter new communities. The members of such communities are able to adapt promptly to the new norms and rules of communication. On the contrary, the rigid boundaries between "us" and "them" allow us to define another ideal type of political community, which we called region-centered. Modularity and region centeredness also assume a different sense of unity and understanding of "we-community". The main features here are not the rules of belonging or being excluded, but common to the society discussions

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<sup>42</sup> Ernest Gellner describes modular communities using an example of traditional and modular furniture. In traditional furniture, Gellner states, all of the pieces are sold together and compose a single set. Any new furniture pieces, or when one piece exchanged by the other break the single style. The other hand the distinguishing feature of modular furniture is that all of its pieces can either stand alone, or fit together with other pieces to compose some desired and desirable structure (Gellner 1994).

about what "we" are. The flexibility of boundaries and therefore modularity supposes that there are many different views on what "we-community" is. These views can compete with each other as well as exist on various levels. On the other hand, region centeredness often has one dominant discourse (the stable regional myth) translated by the political elites and shared by the majority of regional political community members. In this case the main agents of identity policy are often in control of the region's main external communication flows, they do it in order to prevent competition between identities. The Table 2 shows differences between the ideal types of regional political communities.

**Table 2. The Types of Political Communities**

<b>The criteria</b>	<b>Modular type (flexible boundaries)</b>	<b>Region centered type (rigid boundaries)</b>
Perception of "we-community"	Many discourses	One dominant discourse
Presence/absence of communication control	No control of external communication	Strict external communication control

The classification of ideal types of political communities allows us to formulate some hypotheses about the factors influencing political community- and identity-building.

First of all, identity politics can be monopolized by one actor in the region, subordinating every other potential power center. This leads to political stability and absence of any significant conflicts in the region. In relation to the identity politics and the type of the developing political community such monopolization leads to the appearance of one dominating public discourse about "we-community", i.e., the building of the region centered community type. In other cases identity politics is developed by various factors that translate their own view of a regional myth or a new regional idea. As a result, many to various extend competitive "we- community" discourses appear, thus creating a modular type community. Such situation can be possible in a region which has a polycentric political system. In this case the politics do not become monopolized. Usually this has to do with political instability and conflicts between the various power centers of the region; in this case none of the agents can form a monopoly. Apart from the governors: regional or domestic parliaments and heads of the local self-administrations, especially in capital cities can become the power centers in the region. Such conflicts and their connection with the formation of one political system or the other are typical for the regional political development of the 1990s – beginning of 2000s (See

more: Gelman, Ryzhenkov, Brie 2000). This gives us reasons to include this factor when analyzing the development of the regional political communities. Hence, our first hypothesis is that *the type of a political community depends on the political process in the region and regional political regime.*

At the same time, when we examine the regional political community and identity-building more closely it is necessary to consider whether they have or do not have a single powerful foundation for the construction of a regional myth. Thus, a historical foundation, a new idea, or a single predominant discourse on "we-community" that exists in some regions allows the development of an identity feeling shared by the most community members. As ideal types, the difference between a regional myth and a new idea is that the former is based on a historical past and the latter is just an intellectual product, which creates a new previously unknown image of a region. On the other hand, in some regions there is no steady historical foundation and less ground for the development of a new idea, or its use is complicated by some reasons. Such situation leads easily to the development of several discourses about "we-community" that are translated by various power centers. Some external issues can also play a certain role in creating the regional myth. Some discourses about "we-community" can be controversial to the interests of the agents of the overall state identity policy, which are striving towards the national consolidation. Or, vice versa, the actions of the outside agents can help internal agents in creating a regional identity idea (or myth). Hence, our second hypothesis states *that the presence or absence of a solid foundation for the creation of a regional myth influence the type a political community as well as the content of the regional myth.*

Finally, let us suppose that the history of intensive long-term regional contacts with other political (merged) and non-political (integrated) communities plays a significant role in the creation and implementation of identity politics and community building process. Therefore, it is not only the level of intensity of such contacts, but also the way how they are formed and how many actors were involved in communication, as well as either the presence or absence of mediators in establishing contacts with the external agents is also significantly important here. Thus, our third hypothesis states that *the type of political community depends on the history of formation of the region's external links, in the case of the Russian North-West – cross-border cooperation ties.*

In order to test our proposed hypotheses we have chosen three subjects of federation, namely Novgorod and Kaliningrad oblasts and the Republic of Karelia, which between 1991 and 2004 had different types of regional political communities. Novgorod oblast can be studied as an example of a region centered community. One dominant discourse, created by the intellectuals during the Perestroika years was fluently adapted here by the regional political elite. This regional myth was actively incorporated in people's minds by the means of symbolic management (Petro 2004). In the Novgorod region during the government of Mikhail Prusak, the external communication was also strictly controlled by the regional political elites.

The Republic of Karelia, on the contrary, matches to a much greater extent the ideal community type that we define as modular. One single dominant discourse about "we-community" can hardly be seen to have developed here (Tsumarova 2006). Various views on the region can become actualized in various contexts. It is important to outline the fact that in a number of cases the Republic itself is looked at as if it was a part of a bigger merged or integrated community, for example as a part of a Barents Euro-Arctic region, Northern Europe, Finno-Ugric world etc. In Karelia many agents from public officials to civil society representatives are involved in external cooperation. Moreover, the agents of identity politics do not use strict control over such communications.

In the framework of the proposed typology, the Kaliningrad oblast can be defined as a region that occupied an interim place between the two ideal types. There are several discourses here about "we-community" as well. Two of these are based on the historical past of the region. Thus, on one hand there is a stable view on Kaliningrad oblast as an inseparable part of Europe, based on its Prussian past. This idea competes with a view that the region is a Russian enclave in the "alien" European surroundings and that it is the nation's western outpost. Such a discourse is based on a fairly favorable historical ground, namely the victory in the Great Patriotic War and the dissolution of Prussia as the "seat ground of aggression". Both of these discourses exist in Kaliningrad oblast simultaneously; however neither of them has become dominant or laid foundation for new regional myth. A third notion of the "we-community" was created as part of the regional idea of a "cooperation region" between Russia and the European Union. The reason for the creation of this discourse was the change in the geopolitical place of the region which changed with the EU enlargement in 2004. This discourse outlines the uniqueness and singularity of the Kaliningrad oblast, making this

constituency stand aside from other Russian regions and creating some elements of region centeredness. Apart from this, despite the intensive international cooperation since the beginning of 2000s the federal centre has began to control communication with the outside world.

Thus, the initial setting of the empirical cases on the ideal types scale looks the following:

<b>Modular centered type</b>	<b>Region</b>
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-----<	
Republic of Novgorod	Kaliningrad
Karelia	Oblast
Oblast	

Consequently, main purpose of the empirical research was the testing of the three hypotheses proposed concerning the dependence of the political community type on: (1) a political regime and political process in the region; (2) presence/absence of a solid foundation for building the regional myth and its content and (3) the history of the development of the external ties of a region. Herewith we analyzed not the overall variety of the external communications of the region, but only its international relations. The choice to analyze international relations was conditioned by two factors: First of all, interregional communication within Russia was to a large extending situational, and directed on solving the current problems (in the economic, political and social spheres). Joints structures, apart from the economic cooperation associations and some bilateral connections, proved to be quite weak and ineffective. Secondly, international cooperation, and especially cross-border cooperation played a significant role for the Russian North-West bordering the European Union.

In the framework of this empirical research we made case-studies analysis. All the three regions selected for research are contrasting examples, each is different in its border location, character of international relations and type of relationship it had with the Federal centre, each one also has a different past.

Two regions (Republic of Karelia and Kaliningrad oblast) are border regions, which take actively part in international cooperation and European projects and programs implemented in the North-West of Russia. They differ however in their

structural conditions of their border location. Republic of Karelia borders with Finland, the "old" EU member state, whereas Kaliningrad oblast shares an external border with the "new" EU member states Lithuania and Poland. This influences the different intensity of cross-border cooperation. The other significant factor of the border location, which greatly influences the type of political community, is the presence of a joint border with other subjects of federation in the case of Republic of Karelia and the exclave position of Kaliningrad oblast. Customary for both regions is that both are located on previously foreign territories: partly Finnish in the case of Karelia, and Prussian in the case of Kaliningrad oblast

Another important factor for choosing the cases is the ability of their subjects to use proto-public connections when forming a view on the "we-community". With regards to this, the chosen regions also have some similarities and differences. The history of Novgorod oblast provides solid ground for the creation of a stable regional myth, and vice versa, in Republic of Karelia and Kalinigrad oblast the opportunity to build a dominating regional myth is more limited.

### **3.2. Region Centered Political Community: Example of Novgorod Oblast**

Novgorod oblast is one of the few subjects of federation, that has been actively building its regional political community for as long as almost two decades. The main agents of the regional identity politics were at first the intellectuals and after that the regional government headed by Michail Prusak, who was governing the region from 1991 until 2007. The local history of the medieval Novgorod Veche Republic and its tight connections with Hanseatic League facilitated the development of a dominant "we-community" discourse. Its international relations were relatively developed despite the absence of the external border. They were, however, strictly controlled by the regional government.

#### **Political Regime of Novgorod Oblast**

Political process in Novgorod oblast during 1991-2004 was closely related to the figure of Michael Prusak who was primarily appointed to occupy the governor's post by the Russian President, and thus needed to gain public support and strengthen his positions in the region. During the 1990s – beginning of 2000s owing to an active

identity politics he gradually managed to strengthen his position both at the internal and the external markets.

Despite the fact that his version of the regional myth was opposed to federal attempts to create a common Russian identity, he was also supported by the federal centre, which was possible because Prusak had relationship with the high Kremlin officials. During 1993-1999, Prusak was an active participant of the main Kremlin political parties, namely "The Party of Russian Unity and Agreement" and "Our Home is Russia". This allowed him to use the Kremlin's support on the one hand and peacefully develop the internal identity policy on the other. During the first elections in December 1995 he used the symbols and slogans of "Our Home is Russia" adding some regional touch to it. His basic slogan was very region centered "Our Home is Novgorod" (Senatova, Yakurin 2001: 48). Hence, he demonstrated the close links with the federal officials and at the same time maintained the autonomy from Moscow, which as many observers point out, was deeply rooted in the minds of people of Novgorod (Senatova, Yakurin 2001: 31-61; Petro 2004: 243).

As a loyal governor during the 1990s Prusak actively used the federal support. He gained the required autonomy in order to implement his identity politics and to attract external investment. Moreover, the investors benefited from tax reductions made possible by federal transfers. He was appointed to become the Head of the Committee for External Relations of the Council of Federation, which enabled him to attract a greater amount of foreign investment and to create a positive image of Novgorod oblast. Good relationships with officials at the federal level allowed Prusak also to control federal structures in the region, which helped strengthen his political weight in the region.

As a result, during the elections in 1995, 1999 and even in 2003 he consistently got high electoral support. During the 1995 elections he got 56,7% of votes, in 1999 – 91,56%, in 2003 – 78,73%. Prusak gained such success due to his active cooptation policy of the potential political and public leaders and their "support groups", which consisted of the representatives of the region's administration and the parliamentarians of the regional Duma, representatives of the city and domestic authorities. Virtually all the political power holders of the region supported the governor and confronted him only on a rare occasion. The opinions and positions of the community leaders and the people of the region were also taken into account by the regional administration, thanks to the

well developed communication system with the representatives of the regional community. It included the Public Chamber created in the region already in 1994 and other consultative organs, public hearings and discussions of the political decisions (Vladimirov et al. 2003). The policy of active cooperation with regional and domestic business and the creation of favorable conditions for economic development did not leave much possibility for financial support of Prusak's competitors, thus strengthening his regional monopoly. At the same time, the dominance of Prusak in the region was supported by his monopoly on using the Novgorod regional myth, which had a strong historical foundation.

### **Novgorod Veche Republic and the Connection with Hanseatic League as a Basis for Regional Myth**

The regional identity- and community-building in Novgorod oblast was based on an exceptionally solid ground, and a number of favorable historical, cultural and symbolic conditions, which were initially adopted by the emerging democratic movement and then began to be used widely by the political elite. In Perestroika years the basic slogan of the politically active citizens was the idea of renovation of the St. Sophia Cathedral and returning it its original function. This idea was actively broadcasted in the local mass media, "which highlighted the cathedrals role as a unifier and protector of the Novgorod land" (Petro 2004: 221). Thus, already in 1995 a "Novgorod project" was developed with the support of local university scholars. The project was "an attempt of the local intelligentsia ... to make a medieval Novgorod history a foundation for a new regional strategy" (Petro 2004: 228-229).

The Novgorod myth that became a subject of active public discussion at the time was based on historical past of the Novgorod Veche Republic and its tight connections with Hanseatic League. The local administration, which consisted of the representatives of the old nomenclature and the new members, was not interested in the myth at first. However, already in 1994 when the "regional authorities actively started to attract foreign investment" (Gelman, Popova 2003: 199), the history of Novgorod as a city open to trade became "the symbolic product", which was highly successful at the foreign markets (Ibid: 200). By 1999, the internal market benefited from it as well: the active promotion of the "Novgorod myth" helped the governor to gain support both of the citizens and the political elite: Prusak gained 91,56% of votes at the regional election.

The political elite of Novgorod oblast put a lot of effort into the promotion and recreation of the myth in the minds of the region's citizens by means of active symbolic management such as the introduction of extra curriculum on regional studies at schools and universities as well as the special education of the civil servants. Mass media was actively involved as well with publications related to this topic, the politicians made speeches and so on.

Thus, the active identity politics based on the idea of uniqueness of the Novgorod history, its symbols and traditions provided the electoral success to the governor at the internal market and attracted foreign investors and tourists on the external markets. Undoubtedly, the rich local history was a great help in the development of the regional myth. However, as the example of the neighboring Pskov region shows, as such historic past without the active identity politics becomes merely a museum item and does not turn into popular ideology, which creates feeling of unity.

However, such an active policy has an opposite site as well. A single discourse created a feeling of unity and togetherness also develops rigid "us and them" boundaries. The people of Novgorod got used stressing the uniqueness of their region and opposing their society to its neighbors. Thus far, the idea of a renaissance of a Veche Republic and a free trading town created a regional political community rather closed for any integration.

The close links with the representatives of federal structures and monopolization of the right to use the regional myth allowed Prusak to take almost total control not only of the political process in the region, but also of its external communication.

### **International Relations of Novgorod Oblast**

Since Novgorod oblast is not a bordering region, the international cooperation here was not as developed as it was in other subjects of federation consisting the North-Western Federal District like Pskov or Leningrad oblasts, or Republic of Karelia. Nevertheless, the international relations, especially foreign investment and international projects for the civil society development during the 1990s had a special role in the Novgorod oblast.

The major emphasis of governor Prusak's policy was on the attraction of the foreign investment to the regional economy he developed favorable tax laws and gave special personal attention to single investors. During the 1990s and up to the 2000s,

Novgorod region maintained leading positions on tax legislation of investments and the numbers of foreign investments involved in the region (Vardomsky, Skatershikova 2002: 185).

In addition to the successful investment attraction there were social projects financed by various international institutions. For example, The European Commission's TACIS projects were implemented on the regional level as well as on the city level, IBRD loans for the housing construction and development of the town's public transport (Vardomsky, Skatershikova 2002: 186), EBRD loans for the purchase of town buses, for implementing the experiments with the tax-paying foundation and for the creation of the first full land registry in Russia. EBRD even facilitated the opening of a Western-Russian venture foundation for the support of the small and medium enterprises (Ibid).

In 1997 Novgorod oblast became one of the four regions of Russia that was granted aid from the US Agency for International Development in the framework of a special program of the regional investment initiatives of the US State Department. This program was initiated by the Gore- Chernomirdin's commission and its projects were focused on attracting investments to the Russian regions with the support of civil society institutions. For these purposes, North-Western Centre for Civil Society Development was opened with the support of the Novgorod Administration, which became a resource centre for NGOs. The Centre's activities were aimed to distribute the money from the foreign investors to the other NGOs up until 2001.<sup>43</sup>

Up until now the specifics of non-economic international cooperation of the Novgorod oblast in the 1990s – early 2000s was totally dependent on the region's governor and his connections in the federal centre. While many Russian regions during the time of the weakness of the central authorities were “freely floating” and had to explore foreign cooperation and support without any guidance, the Novgorod region got used the federal authorities intermediated its international cooperation. Both the foreign investment and support for the social and civil society projects was possible due to the political and economic support of the centre, obtained by the governor Prusak, thanks to his loyalty to central authorities and his position in the Council of Federation. In this way the external relations of the region could be controlled by the governor.

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<sup>43</sup> For more information on the Center please go to: [http://www.ngosnews.ru/cntr\\_pgs/history.htm](http://www.ngosnews.ru/cntr_pgs/history.htm)

Thus far, the development of the region centered community in Novgorod oblast was to a large extent a consequence of the active identity politics of the regional authorities and the governor Prusak personally. On the internal market it was focused on strengthening the governor's positions in the region, and gaining the support of its electorate. The identity politics was implemented for the attraction of foreign investment as well as for increasing the region's status in the eyes of the federal center. Federal authorities were not creating obstacles for the development of the region centered political community in Novgorod oblast, because governor Prusak demonstrated his loyalty to it by being a consistent member of the power parties and by supporting Yeltsin's politics.

This result was achieved due to three reasons: first of all because of the specifics of the regional political process that helped creating the mono-centered political regime in the region. Secondly, the presence of the solid historical foundation for the development of the regional myth, based on the past of Novgorod Veche Republic and Hanseatic League. Thirdly, regional elite managed to take control over the international cooperation of almost all actors in the region. All this was possible because of Prusak's personal connections with the federal center representatives.

### **3.3. Modular Political Community: Example of Republic of Karelia**

During 1991-2004 in Republic of Karelia there was a tendency for the building of modular type regional community. In the history of Karelia and its capital city Petrozavodsk there was no single powerful foundation for the development of a regional myth, on which the political elite could form a dominant discourse on "we-community" attractive for the Russian majority. Largely because of the border location of Karelia, there was also a number of uncontrollable by a single agent external communication networks. 723 kilometer long western border of the republic coincides with the Russian-Finnish border. The development of the cross-border cooperation led to the appearance of many links between the Russian and Finnish partners. The municipal authorities as well as various institutions and NGOs had an important role in this cooperation. Another strong direction of the international cooperation development was the Republic's membership in the Barents Euro-Arctic Council. Apart from this, Karelia was actively involved in the activities of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Assembly of the European Regions, the Nordic Council etc.

## Political Regime in Republic of Karelia

The specific character of the political regime in Republic of Karelia and its relationship with the federal centre along with its border location is connected with two factors: first, the status of the republic, which gave it certain benefits during the 1990s and second, the economic profile of a timber industry region as well as the absence of any large business and the economic weakness as a whole.

During the 1990s - beginning of the 2000s, the political regime of Karelia was pluralistic, with the occasional conflicts between various power centers. The beginning of the 1990s was characterized by an easy transformation to a new political system and the consensus between all the political powers in the region. The post of the Chairman of the Supreme Council was occupied by Victor Stepanov in 1989, who was a young and progressive communist in the moderate opposition to Yeltsin (Tsygankov 2001). Owing to the special status of the republic, the building of the new political system and the regional and local elections in Karelia took place earlier than in the other regions, but not as early as 1991, as in a number of Volga republics. The new Constitution of Karelia was adapted in January 1994, and in April the elections to the renewed regional and local government bodies took place, Stepanov was directly elected to become the Head of Government. The elections to the Legislative Assembly as well as to the local administrative and legislative government bodies under the auspices of the new constitution took place at the same time.

Generally speaking, in the beginning of the 1990s the political regime of Karelia could be characterized with having consensus around the figure of Stepanov who achieved such a unity without introduction of an active identity policy within the region, but as a result of a moderate controversy with the federal center and with achieving legitimacy as a result of elections.

In the second half of the 1990s the political development of Karelia was directly connected with the attempts to overcome the economic crisis, which mostly influenced the timber industry. Despite all the efforts of the regional authorities however, the volume of investment, directed at the development of the timber industry decreased by 8,8 times by 1998 (Nemkovich, Tsipuk, Shishkin 2000: 42-43). The economic downturn and the lack of any clear perspectives for the regional industry development brought about the break of consensus, which was achieved in 1993-1994. The Petrozavodsk city mayor Sergey Katanandov, who presented himself as an energetic politician of the new

generation, based his election campaign on the critique of Stepanov's policy. The main emphasis of his policy was made on the necessity to mobilize the republic's internal resources in order to improve the economic situation, which was expressed in his concise slogan "Make a Step". With this slogan Katanandov won the elections for the Republic's Head of Government in April 1998. At the same time another young politician, Andrey Demin won the election to become the mayor of Petrozavodsk. By the early 2000s a conflict between the republican governor and the mayor developed. The conflict was typical for many Russian regions and had to do with the relocations of budgets. But as a result, it helped the development of several power centers in Karelia. Despite the fact that this conflict was resolved not in favor of Demin, the conflict between the regional and local government bodies remained, and developed into a conflict between Katanandov and Viktor Maslyakov, the later mayor of Petrozavodsk (Gel'man et al. 2002: 259-271; Gel'man et al. 2008: 227-270).

During the first period of his government Katanandov tried to implement the idea of the necessity to rely on the inner resources, by closing the region from the influence of the external economic actors. By 2002 however, such policy proved to be inefficient because it was necessary to modernize the industries (Krom 2004). All in all, during the first (1998-2002) and the second (2002-2006) electoral period, Katanandov gave a lot of attention to the development and implementation of Concept for Social and Economic Development of Republic of Karelia "Renaissance of Karelia". The concept was developed by a wide range of experts. The consolidation of society around the economic goals could be observed also in 2002, when Katanandov won the election for the second time with his program called "Together for the Success of Karelia!" The main aims of the program were called: "Dignity. Business. Prosperity." The refusal of autarkia policy as well as the attraction of a wide range of experts for the creation of the development programs and concepts for the republic helped the development of various communication networks, which were not taken under control by a single power centre.

Thus far, the political process in the region was not facilitating the development of a dominant discourse about "we-community", i.e. the building of a region centered type of the political community. The elite status of the national republic allowed the regional elites to strengthen the positions of both power branches by the means of direct elections already in the beginning of 1994. The presence of an "external threat" on the one hand made the political elite work jointly around Stepanov's figure and on the other

hand it was not helping the creation of a single powerful regional myth. Another important political development factor was connected with the strong economic problems, which occupied the first line in the political agenda for the major competitors. A politician who based his election campaign on the promises of social and economic nature won the second elections for the post of the governor. His experts and supporting group were not the representatives of ethnical and cultural elite, but economic scientists. In addition, the development of polycentric political regime was supported by conflicts between the capital's mayor and the Head of Republic, which contributed to the building of multiple "we-community" discourses. The conflict between the Petrozavodsk mayor and the Head of Republic increased the number of communication networks with the outside world, especially with the other cities, regions and countries.

### **Absence of the Regional Myth**

Creation of a dominant discourse about "we-community" is only possible with the presence of either a strong historical base, or a new idea for the regional myth. A good example was provided above with the case of Novgorod oblast with its history of a Novgorod Veche Republic and its tight links with Hanseatic League, which became a foundation for cultivation of the political community. On the contrary, the Republic of Karelia does not have its "Golden Age", which could become the base for a regional myth development. To some extent, pre-modern Karelian history of the area, the building of Finnish communism of the Gylling period in the 1930s, the status of (Finnish-Karelian) Soviet Republic in the 1940s - 1950s could form a strong base for the regional myth, But in fact, such scenario was not realized because the political process in the country as a whole limited such an opportunity. Mentioning and relying on the Finnish past could be considered by the federal centre as the demonstration of the separatist tendencies. Karelian economic weakness and its dependency on the federal transfers leave no possibility for an open conflict with the state government, as it happened in the economically developed Tatarstan, for example.

The second possible foundation for a new consolidated idea could be special status of an ethnic republic. The sovereignty parade of the early 1990s was largely a result of a skillful political play of the ethnic republican elites. Apart from other autonomy republics in the RSFSR, the social political movements of the end of the 1980s were not widely supported by the public. Surely, there was a burst of public activity during the Perestroika time, creating numerous associations and NGOs including the ethnically

based ones. None of which managed to monopolize the political space. The National Front of Karelia, which united the ethnical intelligentsia, as well as moderate Karelian People's Union (Karjalan rahvahan liitto) and radical Karelian Movement (Karjalan liike) got no significant support neither from the side of political elite, nor the citizens, primarily because of a small number of Karelians in the republic.

All of the above led to the absence of a dominant discourse or regional idea and the development of "we-community" ideas. The analysis of the regional image done by Elena Tsumarova in 2004-2005 (Tsumarova 2006) showed that the political agents in their speeches used fairly abstract ideas which could lead to the development of the feeling of unity. In their presentations Karelia appeared to be a border region of Russia and the European Union and as one of the centers of the Barents region. The boundaries of the regional political community were primarily introduced as flexible. The other subjects of Russian Federation and other states geographically closed to Karelia and having common interests with it were perceived as part of "us". Everyone who was considered insensitive to the regional interests including the federal center was perceived as "them" (Ibid: 164). Despite the fact that the ethnical component was not used as a basis for the development of a regional myth in Karelia, the special republican status was actively used by the political identity agents. The autonomy idea was one of the central in political declarations of the political elite (Ibid: 165).

The lack of a single direction in the implementation of the identity politics influenced the "we-community" perceptions of people of the republic. The respondents stressed the tight link of the region with the other regions of Russia or the neighboring states (Ibid). Thus far, the flexibility in defining political community with "us and them" boundaries, which was common for the political identity agents as well as for the ordinary members of political community was the consequence of the absence of a powerful base for the development of a regional myth. In addition to this, there was no possibility to use the existing foundations for the creation of a new unifying idea.

## **International Cooperation of Republic of Karelia**

Due to the historical and geographical closeness, the links of Republic of Karelia with Finland are the most important and developed. Primarily, those were the Finnish partners who initiated projects and defined the cooperation areas, but as the time passed Karelia started taking a more active part in the development of bilateral and multilateral international cooperation.

The first stage of the Karelia – Finland relationship development after the fall of the “Iron curtain” in the early 1990s, as in many cases, was the humanitarian aid supply. The main impulse for the cooperation development was the signing of the Russia-Finland Friendship and Cooperation Agreement in 1992. Based on this agreement the Finnish Ministry of International Affairs since 1993 started to allocate additional funds for the support and development of economic and social fields of the border areas of Russia such as Murmansk oblast, Karelia, Leningrad oblast and St. Petersburg. Karelia occupied the exceptional place among these regions. The basic directions for the cross-border cooperation were the development of the border infrastructure, environmental safety, social issues, cultural cooperation and life quality in the border regions.

The new stage of the Karelia – Finland cooperation began with Finland’s entry to the European Union in 1995. This was conditioned by the presence of the EU funds, one of the most important resources needed for financing the cross-border cooperation. TACIS program became one of the main sources of the further development of the external relations of Karelia as the North-West of Russia was included into the list of priority regions in 1995 and in 1997 the TACIS office was opened in Petrozavodsk. In total, about 40 Karelian projects and a project with Karelian presence were implemented in the framework of the TACIS program with the budgets from 100 thousand up to 3,5 million Euro (Cross-border cooperation). Already having cooperation experiences with Karelia Finnish organizations, companies and institutions remained as European partners in the most projects.

Apart from the TACIS programme funds, since 1995 the European Commission made available INTERREG programmes for the Finnish territories. In particular, INTERREG IIA Karelia programme was oriented towards the Eastern Finland and covered the cross-border cooperation with Karelia. These projects encouraged the identification and resolution of the issues common for both Eastern Finland and Republic of Karelia, exchange of experiences and the strengthening of connections between the partners of the various levels and character (Yarovoy 2003).

In 1998 the idea of the creation of “Karelia” Euroregion including three regional councils of Finland and Republic of Karelia was developed as a result of a long-term cooperation in the framework of the European programs. The idea was first mentioned by the Karelian government and supported by the Finnish partners; it was then implemented by signing the Agreement of the Euroregional Charter in 2000. The main

area of its activities was the economic cooperation, environmental protection, tourism and culture, and since 2003 also the development of information technologies and civil society. As a whole, it is acknowledged to be the most successful example of Euroregion with the involvement of Russia (Kuznetsov 2004: 10).

The “Northern Dimension” initiative, which was put forward by the Finnish politicians already in 1997 got support of the European Commission and European Council in 2000 became the official strategy of the EU in the developmental support of the Northern regions of Russia (Shlyamin 2002: 22-24), which only increased the role of Karelia in the relationship between the EU and Russia.

The specific feature of the international relations of the Republic of Karelia is that they mostly deal with not only the economic relations and investments, but with the cross-border cooperation in the social and cultural field. This is why a large number of regional agents take part in this cooperation. Among them, not only the regional and municipal authorities are, but also NGOs, educational and social institutions. Even though at first the Ministry of External Relations of the Republic of Karelia began the cooperation in the early 1990s, after that the cooperation between the Finnish partners and their Russian counterparts continued directly, without any assistance from the governments.

Thus far the international cooperation in the Republic of Karelia was of a diffused and direct character. This was due to the number of factor: first, because the main aim of the international cooperation in the region was solving the social problems the governmental bodies, social institutions and NGO representatives used the opportunity to obtain foreign funds for the implementation of its programs. This led to the increase of the cooperation agents, which collaborated directly with their partners and did not depend on the regional powers. Second, the federal center made no attempts to take control over the international collaboration in the republic, especially in the 1990s. The reason for this was the fact that Karelia, due to its insignificant economic potential did not attract much interest of the foreign business. At the same time, the status of an ethnic republic allowed the regional political leaders to acquire a greater autonomy compared to the other subjects of federation, in particular in the field of international cooperation. Apart from this, the relationship between Russia and Finland in general has always been characterized by the absence of conflicts and a positive attitude.

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The development of a modular type political community in Republic of Karelia was directly connected with the history of the regional political developments and with the lack of a solid usable base for the formation of a regional myth, as well as with the specific features of the international cross-border cooperation in the region. The competitiveness and policenteredness of the political system, which was created in the region between 1991 and 2004, as well as the specifics of the electoral process did not allow the development of a single power centre in the region. The lack of a solid historical foundation and the inability to form a new idea for the creation of a regional myth helped the formation of flexible “we-community” boundaries. The numerous communicative links with Finland and other countries and regions were not taken under the strict control neither by the regional, nor by the federal governmental bodies. The former considered it to be an additional source for solving the social problems, the latter saw no threat in such international development.

### **3.4. Ambiguous Political Community: Kaliningrad Oblast**

In the provided classification of political communities Kaliningrad oblast occupies a middle place between the two polarities: the modular and the region centered types of political community, and has some elements from both. This is connected with the fact that there are several discourses about “we-community”, the two of those are based on the historical past of the region and the third one is based on the presence of a regional idea. Nevertheless, the main element of the regional idea is the stress on the unique exclave/enclave location of Kaliningrad oblast. Secondly, the numerous communications of the community members with the external factors initially were not taken under control by the governors, since the 2000s however, they started to get close attention from the federal center.

The formation of political community in Kaliningrad oblast is undoubtedly a very interesting and ambiguous process, which involves several factors, both inside and outside the region. In this case, the parameters of the identity policy and political community formed from the outside and not from the inside. The Oblast became the subject of active policies of the federal center, European Union and its separate member states, as well as many factors inside these structures: the politicians, experts, government officials. Such a close attention to the region of the above mentions agents

has to do with its unique geopolitical location of a Russian exclave, separated from the "larger Russia" and of an EU enclave, surrounded by the EU member states.

### **Political Regime of Kaliningrad Oblast**

During the 1990s - beginning of the 2000s the polycentric, competitive political regime with a high level of conflicts and political instability was formed in the region. Between 1991 and 2004 four governors were elected and none of them was re-elected for a new period. Each of the governors became involved into conflicts with several power centers horizontally: governor vs. regional Duma, and vertically: regional vs. local authorities, i.e. capital's mayors in particular. Each of the four governors represented the different regional development periods, introducing and implementing various economic and ideological strategies.

The first head of the regional administration Yury Matochkin supported Yeltsin and liberalization of political and economic system. The main idea of his government was lobbying the development of a free economic zone in the region, which was implemented in 1993. The Federal Law on Special Economic Area in Kaliningrad Oblast was introduced in 1996<sup>44</sup>. Despite such success and the loyalty of this electorate, Matochkin was the head of administration during the period of severe economic crisis of the early 1990s, which was even worse in Kaliningrad because of its exclave location. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the region was isolated from the economic and transportation networks, which formed during the Soviet times. As a basic way to compensate for the industrial downturn Matochkin saw the assistance from the federal centre, he mostly relied on this help. At the same time, his activities connected with obtaining resources from the federal center were not as successful as one might have expected. As a result the opinion about the lack of the sufficient support from Moscow to Kaliningrad oblast formed in the region, which was unwillingly put in a difficult geopolitical situation. This led to the defeat of Matochkin to Leonid Gorbenko during the 1996 elections, who was the general director of the Kaliningrad state sea fish port. Apart from Matochkin, who kept insisting on having a special relationship with the federal centre, Gorbenko trusted the regional ability to be independent from the federal finances

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<sup>44</sup> To read more about the history of a special economic area see: The Special Economic Zone in the Kaliningrad Oblast (2005) in: Bulletin of Independent Information Agency # 1 of Kaliningrad - <http://www.knia.ru/bul/38.html>.

and wanted to develop local and regional industries, which shortly proved to be ineffective.

From the very beginning as in many other regions there was a conflict between the governor and the mayor of the regional capital. The conflict between Matochkin and the mayor Vitaly Shipov was replaced by a conflict between Gorbenko and the mayor of Kaliningrad Jury Savenko. Gorbenko was in a state of permanent conflict with all the political parties in the region and with the regional Duma. The election of a governor who had the support from the federal centre, as a whole matched the common for early 2000s the general tendency to the vertical power and strengthen the influence of power block representatives. Egorov, who occupied the governors post until 2005 conducted a moderate policy, which was developing the special economic zone as well as active connections with the federal centre. At the same time, in order to strengthen his positions he tried to use his own economic resources as well as the public resources. Despite his moderation he still got in conflict with the regional Duma, which had always played an important role in the region.

In the mid 2000s as a response to new political goals of the EU enlargement in 2004, Georgy Boos, an experienced politician and federal level manager was appointed for the post of Kaliningrad oblast governor.

Thus far, the political development of the Kaliningrad region of the 1990s – early 2000s did not allow the emergence of a single regional power centre. None of the governors could take the other political powers under their control, almost all of them with the various degree of intensity participated in the conflicts with regional Duma, Kaliningrad mayors, State Duma members, and with other heads and representatives of local authorities and with other heads. None of the elected governors could get a significant support from the federal centre. The support of the central authorities to one or the other governor was a significant factor for the citizens of the region, which was isolated from the "larger Russia". A good example of this is a primarily positive attitude of the local and regional elites to the "Moscow appointee" Boos (Georgy Boos, 2007). Therefore, the Kaliningrad region was generally very close to modular type of political community.

The geopolitical location of the region influences not only the development of inner political processes in the region, but also the development of the “we-community” picture. The two external issues were important here: the federal center and the European Union.

## **Two Competitive Discourses about "We-Community" and One Regional Idea**

The regional myth in Kaliningrad oblast could be primarily based on two different foundations. First, is its pre-Second World War past, connected with the history of belonging to Eastern Prussia. The rich historical and cultural past of Königsberg laid the foundation for the notions of the regions' generally tighter than in the rest of Russia connections with Europe. Second, the base for the regional myth could also be its Soviet past, the post-war population of Kaliningrad oblast and the building of a virtually new city in the Soviet and post Soviet times. Thus far, the post-war history created the foundation for the second potential regional myth, which was almost contrary to the first one. Here the main idea is the special mission of Kaliningrad as a part of Russia, the mission of the protector of its borders, its outpost and its fortress.

Almost every researcher of the regional identity of Kaliningrad oblast point out the presence of these two controversial ideas. Anna Karpenko points out a “traditional-state” line (Kaliningrad as an “integral part of Russia”) and a separatist line (Kaliningrad as a Baltic republic or the “special economic zone”) of the regional idea narrative development (Karpenko 2008). Alexander Gnatenko points out that there are notions of Kaliningrad as of a «spit, which is facing the West”, and the opposite, as a bridge for the Russian producers to the European markets and as a gateway for European producers to the Russian market (Gnatenko 2008: 104). As B. Abramov outlines two different views of the Kaliningrad oblast development are also common for various bodies within the federal centre. The power structures representatives, in charge of economic development are ready to consider the region as a Russia-EU cooperation ground, but the security officials prefer to see it as “a survivor aircraft carrier” and “a signal pistol at the temple of Europe” (Abramov 2004: 24).

During the 1990s both of these discourses were widely represented in Kaliningrad oblast and were supported by different communities. In the development of their identity politics none of the governors however could rely only on one of these discourses, making it a base for the development of a regional myth. The main reason

for this was the existence in Kaliningrad oblast of two completely opposite “external markets”: the border countries and the European Union on one hand and the “larger Russia” on the other.

Counting on the support of the idea that the region was historically a part of Europe was very attractive for the “European external market”. At the same time, the development of a regional myth of the basis of the Prussian past could be taken by the federal centre as a demonstration of separatism tendencies. On the other hand, the discourse about the “outpost” or the “spite, which faces the west” was attractive for the federal center, but was an obstacle for the development dialogic relationship with the West

Thus far, the geopolitical place of the region, and the presence of two various “external markets” laid the ground for ambiguity and at the same time, both controversial discourses about “we-community” were in use. The agents of the regional identity had to tack between the federal centre and the European Union, choosing the one “external market” or the other.

The instability of political regime and the presence of two opposite notions about “we-community” led to the appearance of a large number of speculations about the future of Kaliningrad oblast. In 1990s there were various speculations about the region in local mass media, such as turning the region into a Russian republic with the main population of ethnic Germans, obtaining an independent status of a Baltic state, returning the region to Germany, recreation of the contemporary Eastern Prussia within the territories of Russia, Poland, and Lithuania and ruling it together in different variations (for example, the EU, Russia, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Sweden), giving the region away to Poland and/or Lithuania (Fedorov, Zverev 1995). Such speculations blocked the development of a steady regional identity. The lack of a large number of the “indigenous” people of the Kaliningrad oblast was also an obstacle on the way of developing a wide “we-community” discourse (cf. Karelia where the existence and claims of indigenous people was even bigger obstacle for the use of historical tradition as bases for we-community). In the Soviet times the population of the region largely consisted of the migrants from the other parts of the country. So far, the most people of the region, even the once who were born there thought of themselves as originating elsewhere. In the post Soviet times, the situation didn’t change for the better, because there was a change in the consistency of population again. There was a high level of migration to

and from the Kaliningrad oblast. It was both, the region that received new migrants and that “gave” its people to other regions and countries (Abramov 1998: 27).

Nevertheless, in the beginning of the 2000s a tendency for the appearance of a new regional idea developed. The main reason for this was the anticipation of the most significant EU enlargement in 2004. As a result of this the Kaliningrad oblast became the EU enclave, which put an issue of the Kaliningrad transit area to the political agenda. There was an issue about how to move people and goods between the region and the rest of Russia.

The new regional idea has its foundation the special geopolitical place of the Kaliningrad region, which allowed it to become a model for practicing the gears of interactions between Russia and the EU. This idea was articulated in the concepts of a “pilot region” and a “region of cooperation”. The Agency of Regional Development and The Moscow-based East-West Institute developed the first mentioned concept (Usanov 2003, Smorodinskaya, Zhukov 2003). The concept of a “region of cooperation” was prepared by Kaliningrad State University (at present, Russian State University named after Immanuel Kant). Therefore, the special feature of the regional idea construction of the Kaliningrad oblast was the active participation in this process not only the governmental bodies, but also the community of experts. In contrast with Novgorod oblast, the creators of regional idea were not only the local intellectuals, but also the representatives of the scientific expert centers from Moscow and the EU member states.

The regional idea of Kaliningrad allowed the regional elites to present themselves successfully on both “external markets”: in the relationship with both Moscow and Brussels. It coincided with the interests of the federal centre in its determination to integrate Russia in the world economic area. It also matched the EU policy, which actively developed the cross-border cooperation and new integral communities based in Europe. This is why the presentation of the oblast as a “pilot” region in terms of the EU-Russia cooperation proved to be very successful for the key regional agents between 2002 and 2005 (Karpenko 2008), even though it did not lead to the loss of the existing discourses about “we-community”. They continued to reproduce on the “internal market” even without a serious support from the main agents of identity. At the same time the notions of the Prussian past was deeply rooted in the minds of the population. According to the survey conducted in 2003 the large number of respondents replied that they “were very interested in the history and culture of the Eastern Prussia”, and that they treat it

with respect (24,2% and 56,4%) respectively. 9,3% respondents said that they were careless about the pre-war regional history and 2,9 % of respondents said that it is alien to them (Klemeshev et al. 2003). Such situation developed largely because of the activities of the other agents of identity, for example various cultural communities, museums, exhibition organizers and so on. Apart from this the Prussian past is often a part of the brand names of many local producers.

Therefore, the specific feature of the development of a political community in Kaliningrad oblast is connected to the presence of two contradictory discourses about “we-community”, each of which could potentially be the foundation for the regional myth. However, none of the discourses could be used by the basic agents of the regional identity because of the presence of two different “external markets”. As a result, a completely new regional idea developed, which complimented the interests both the EU and the federal centre. However, the appearance of such idea did not make the previous “we-community” discourses to disappear, they continued to reproduce on the internal market. On the contrary, it brought one more view on the regional political community, creating a new discourse. The new regional idea did not help the development of a discourse about the regions exclusiveness, as it was based on the notion of Kaliningrad oblast as a special subject of the RF, which was separate from the other regions of Russia. This is why Kaliningrad took an interim place between the two types of regional political communities: modular and region centered. On one hand, there were several discourses on “we-community” in the region, none of which became the foundation for the main regional myth. On the other hand, the new regional idea, created in early 2000s, helped the creation of a notion of the unique Kaliningrad oblast, which complied with the region centered type.

The regional idea also helped to harmonize the external communications of the region, which because of its geopolitical location were numerous during the whole post Soviet period.

### **International Cooperation of Kaliningrad Oblast**

The particular characteristic of the Kaliningrad oblast international cooperation during the 1990s had to do with the exclave position of the region, and furthermore with its position of an enclave within the EU. It was expressed in the developed cross-border cooperation, in the increased interest to the region from the EU as a whole, and of its separate members.

The foundation for the cross-border cooperation of the Kaliningrad oblast with the neighboring countries was laid in the early – mid 1990s, when the bilateral agreements between Russia and Byelorussia, Russia and Poland, Russia and Lithuania were made. These agreements created the special collaborative instruments of the border territories. The constant management of the cross-border cooperation was implemented by the three relevant bilateral Councils, which held about 8 to 12 joint commissions.

The cross-border cooperation was also implemented in the framework of the Euroregions. Kaliningrad oblast was one the first in Russia to create such type of cooperative communities. The work in this direction began in 1996-1998 when the Neman Euroregion was created with the presence of Byelorussia, Lithuania, Poland and Kaliningrad oblast at a late stage (Kuznetsov 2004). Furthermore, the number of euro regions grew to five, namely: Neman, Baltica (regions of Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Denmark, and Sweden), Shishupol (the regions of Poland and Lithuania), Lava-Lina (Poland) and Saule (regions of Latvia, Lithuania, and Sweden) (Mezhevich 2009).

The other important factor of the international cooperation of the Kaliningrad oblast is its active dealing with social and economic issue via the EU TACIS programs. All in all the region got about 40 million Euro used for support of private sector, cross-border cooperation, environmental protection, health care etc. (Otnoshenija 2003: 3). The region was subsidized for resolving regional problems by other EU programs as well like INTERREG, the Northern Dimension etc.

Apart from the EU programs, there were a number of funds from separate EU member states, which implemented their own programs of international cooperation., namely the Danish Foreign Ministry, German political foundation, Swedish Agency for International Development (SIDA) and others (Kuzin 2003: 145). Many international organizations also had their offices in Kaliningrad, for example Nordic Council of Ministers and Council of the Baltic Sea States. The permanent European presence in the region could be felt also in the activities of Consulates of the separate EU member states such as Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Sweden, and the Netherlands.

Various agents, including the regional and municipal government bodies and NGOs took part in the international cooperation. As a result, the cooperation became diffused as it was not coordinated from a single centre because of the many funds and

support programs involved.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the instability and polycenteredness of the regional political regime made impossible the monopolization and control of communication with the "outside world". In general, it helped the developing of the modular political community and prepared the region for the inclusion into other macro-regions, especially the once of an international level.

The federal centre as well did not show much interest towards the international cooperation of Kaliningrad oblast during the 1990s. In comparison with the Soviet times, when substantive military forces were situated in the region, in the early 1990s the number of military forces and the Baltic navy was significantly reduced. The federal center lost its interest in the region because it was not anymore a strategically important place from the military point of view (Dinamica 2003). Even though the central authorities took part in the creation of a special economic zone in 1996, and in 1998 it supported the development and the introduction of a special federal task program, they did not significantly support the region financially.

The situation began changing in the beginning of the 2000s, when the federal centre turned its attention towards the Kaliningrad in relation to the EU enlargement and the necessity to regulate the issue of the "Kaliningrad transit". At the same time, the EU interest in supporting the stability of the future enclave increased. In May 2002 the Program "Cooperation between the EU and Russia in Kaliningrad, 2002 and on", (The Program 2004) of the EU activities in Kaliningrad oblast was adapted. Russia at the same time developed a Federal Program "Development of Kaliningrad Oblast Until 2010", which got fuller funding, in comparison to the previous programs. The region appeared to be among the five priority issues of the Presidents' Administration Committee, the new law to regulate the special economic zone was being developed, from July 2002 until January 2004 the a special post of the Russian President representative on the issues of Kaliningrad oblast was introduced.

A close attention of the federal center influenced the further development of the international collaboration in the region. The central authorities found the more strengthening orientation of Kaliningrad towards Europe (Makarychev 2002/2003) as a threat to lose the region. Generally, this coincided with the all Russia tendency to stress the importance of sovereignty and the liberation from the influence of the external, especially western agents. This is why the federal centre decided to take the

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<sup>45</sup> About the various cooperation agreements see. Klemeshev 2004.

international collaboration as well as all the political issues of the region under its control by appointing the politician from Moscow for the governors' post, it also kept sending the financial help to the region. Despite some financial loss from the political point of view such status strengthened the dependency of the region on the federal budgets.

The new strategy of the federal centre in the relationship with the region restricted the regions orientation towards the involvement in the other macro regions, and had a negative affect on the modular political community structure. Moreover, it facilitated the development of the notion of the region as a unique space, i.e. helped strengthening region centeredness.

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During the 1990s the Kaliningrad Region was developing a modular type political community. This was supported by the polycenteredness of the regional political system, the existence of several discourses about “we-community”, none of them could become the foundation of a regional myth, as well as the well developed international relations and the lack of the external communication control. The change in the geopolitical situation, namely the eastern EU enlargement in the early 2000s and the EU joining of Poland and Lithuania - brought some elements of region centeredness.

Kaliningrad oblast began to be closely observed by the two external agents: the federal center and the EU, which significantly influenced the interregional processes.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The analysis of the development of the political communities in the three selected regions proved the first hypothesis, which states that the type of political community depends on type of the developed in the region political regime. The competitiveness of the electoral struggle, conflicts and the poly centeredness of political system did not allow the appearance of a single power center, which would take under control the identity politics as well as the external relations of the regions. As a result, a large number of the communication networks with the “external world” came into existence, which led to the development of the flexible “us and them” boundaries. The representatives if various power centers also developed their “we-community” images. In the case Republic of Karelia, economics was the important factor of the political development, which became the main subject of the electoral struggle. The important

factors of the development of the polycentered political regime were conflicts between the capitals' mayor and the heads of regions, which helped the development of the many “we-community” discourses, they also increased the communication networks with other cities, regions and countries.

During the 1990s – beginning of the 2000s, in Kaliningrad oblast there was a polycentered system with many conflicts and a high degree of political instability. From 1991 till 2004 there were four governors, none of which was re-elected for a new period. Each governor became involved in conflicts with several power centers. As a result, several different “we-community” discourses developed and spread over the region, international relations with many various agents from regional and local government bodies and to different NGOs, which developed broad communication networks.

At the same time, the governor Novgorod oblast managed to create a single strong power center in the region. Thanks to the active cooptation policy of the potential political and public leaders included into his own “support team” he could create a monocentered political regime. Almost all the regional political forces supported the governor and rarely started confronting him. The policy of active collaboration of the governor with regional and local business and the creation of favorable conditions for its development helped the survival of Prusak without any financial support of his possible competitors, thus strengthening his political monopoly in the region. All of the above helped the governor to monopolize the right to use the regional myth, and become the main agent of the identity politics, and control the external communications of the region. Thus, monopolization of the political sphere by one actor facilitated the development of a region centered type of political community in the region.

Our second hypothesis about the dependency of a political community type on the presence/absence of a solid foundation for a regional myth and the content of such myth was proved as well. In the case of Novgorod region the foundation for the development of the regional myth was the history of a Novgorod Veche Republic and the former tight connections with Hanseatic League. The concept of a Novgorod myth was developed by intellectuals in the Perestroika times, and then it was adapted by the political elites. Despite the fact that the main point of the myth was about the autonomous to Moscow region and a free city, it was not taken by Moscow as a threat. This was possible because governor Prusak constantly demonstrated his loyalty to the

federal government. The active identity politics facilitated the spreading of a regional myth, which helped the development of rigid “us and them” boundaries.

In Karelia, on the contrary, there was neither a dominant regional myth, nor a new idea. The steady regional myth was not developed here primarily because the republic could not use two potential foundations for it, namely the tight cultural and historic connections with Finland and the status of ethnic republic. The fact that the republic relied on its “Finnish” identity could have been seen by the federal center as a separatist tendency, and as Karelia was dependent of the federal transfers, the open conflict with the federal state governmental bodies was not interesting for the regional political elites. The ethnic ideology with the Karelian People Front and especially ethnically radical Karelian movements ahead did not have support neither from the political elites, nor from the population primarily because of a small number of Karelians in the republic. Various “we-community” notions became important depending on the context. Mostly those were the communities which overstepped the boundaries of the republic. Those were for example the Barents Euro-Arctic region, the Northern Europe, the northern territories of Russia, Finno-Ugric region and so on. The lack of a powerful myth and a new regional idea led to the development of quite flexible “us and them” boundaries in Karalla.

In Kaliningrad oblast there were primarily two foundations for the regional myth development. First, it was the Prussian past of the region, second, the image of “new territories”, based on the victory in the Second World War. Relying on many centuries of history of Eastern Prussia could help strengthening the notion of a region as an integral part of Europe. On the contrary, addressing the post-war past could encourage the development of an image of the «Russian outpost”. None of the notions, mentioned above became the ground for a stable regional myth. The main reasons for this were the restrictions for the use of each of them on the “external markets”. Thus, the image of a region as an integral part of Europe satisfied the neighboring countries, but was opposite to the interest of the federal center. And vice versa, the myth about the “Western outpost” satisfied Moscow, but was badly perceived by Europeans. The absence of a single regional myth led to the creation of flexible “us and them” boundaries, which allowed the population of the region to identify both with the “bigger Russia” and with Europe. Change in the geopolitical situation, related to the eastern enlargement of EU led to the development of a new regional idea in Kaliningrad oblast.

The notions of the oblast as a “region of cooperation” between Russia and the EU on one hand did not stimulate the death of the old images of a «Russia’s western outpost” and the “integral part of Europe”. On the other hand, however it facilitated the emergence of the region centered type elements into previously modular political community.

The analysis made proved the hypothesis about the dependence of a political community type from the history of the development of the regional external relations. The international collaboration in the Republic of Karalla had a diffused and direct character because of several factors. Because the main aim of the international cooperation was dealing with social, a large number of cooperation agents, which interacted with all of the partners directly emerged independently to the regional powers. The federal center was not trying to take the international relations of the republic under its strict control, primarily because Karelia was not very interesting in terms of large business. Secondly, the status of a republic allowed the regional political leaders to ask for a greater independency in comparison to other subjects of federation, also in the external relations. Third, Russia - Finland relationship, which was the main partner of Karelia, was considered to be friendly. This led to the development of soft “us and them” boundaries, i.e. the formation of a modular type of regional community.

During the 1990s the international relations of the Kaliningrad oblast was of a diffuse character, and was not coordinated from one center, mainly due to policenteredness of a regional political regime. The international cooperation of the region were primarily European and varied and well developed. In general, it helped the development of a modular type of the political community, and the readiness of the region to be included into the other macro regions, primarily international. The situation started to change in the early 2000s when both the federal center and the EU gave Kaliningrad oblast a special attention due to the eastern enlargement of the EU and with Poland and Latvia becoming its members. The programs, which were realized by the EU and its separate member states, also helped the development of a modular type political community in the region. The increased attention from the federal center on the contrary limited the regional orientation towards entering the other macro regions and encouraged the development if an image of the uniqueness of the Russian enclave region.

In Novgorod region in 1990s the international cooperation depended on the governor and his personal interactions with the federal center. The governor managed to use the central government bodies as a mediator of the international relations of the region. The attraction of the foreign investment as well as the social and civil support programs became possible only because of the support from the federal center. This led to the governors' taking control over the main communications with the external world. Thus, the history of the development of international connections of the Novgorod region greatly influenced the development of a region centered political community.

Therefore, the development of a region centered community type in Russia largely depends on the type of political regime and the level of involvement in the international cooperation. The modular structure of regional community develops with the involvement and freedom of international collaboration. The modularity of regional communities is a good assistance for increasing the effectiveness of cross-border cooperation and for maximizing its benefits. Moreover, it would encourage the inclusion of Russia into the processes, of not only the European, but of a global character. This will become possible only if the federal center will not become an obstacle for the further development of international cooperation of the regions or will try to take control over the cross-border cooperation. In the process of the development of the further federal policy and especially the North-West Russia regional policy the central government must take into consideration the fact that the emerging modular political communities are not dangerous for the national consolidation. On the contrary, the modular structure can encourage further overcoming of the political, social and economic fragmentation of the country.

## Conclusion

By the end of the 2000s the Russian North-West had not become a region – a space integrated politically as well as socially and economically. Just as before, it remains a set of amalgamated and integrated communities. In the early 1990s amalgamated (political) communities started to form in a number of North-Western regions, first of all due to the identity politics carried out by the regional elites. In spite of the fact that after 2004 this process was practically suspended, in certain subjects of the federation rather sustainable boundaries between “us“ and “them” and representations of a “we-community” managed to appear. Integrated (non-political) communities appeared in the space of the North-West due to communication networks and common projects that bound together different subjects of the federation and/or their components. The Russian North, the region of the *pomors*, the Finno-Ugric world and the European borderland – the boundaries of these integrated communities intersect partly, making in total a fanciful map of regions and identities, that sometimes match and sometimes contradict each other, and which supplement and mutually exclude each other.

The construction of the North-West as a united region which had already begun to occur naturally in the 1990s and had good chances for further development due to the creation of the North-Western federal district was practically stopped in the middle of the 2000s. If during the first two years of the districts’ existence the plenipotentiary representative of the presidents in the federal district made certain efforts to form a common informational and political space, then from 2003 there was no significant integration process initiated on this territory. However, the absence of a united region within the North-Western Federal District, which is the most favorable for the development of integration potential among the federal districts, should not become a reason for a researcher’s pessimism. Despite the opinion that now there is practically no space for new research on interregional integration in Russia, above all in the political sphere, there is still a whole corpus of questions awaiting analysts.

Over the last 50 years the integration processes attracted a great deal of attention from researchers. During that time, in different parts of the world networks of communication appeared which included both the states and their parts. The leader in the building of new regions is undoubtedly Europe, where interstate integration led to the formation of a unique political space and supranational structure of a new type.

Starting in the 1950s with the consolidation of the efforts of several states of the “Old World” to solve the economic problems, as result the modern European Union was built. In connection with this the discipline of integration studies was developed in Europe. Moreover, the models and theories developed later by researchers were applied for analysis of not only European integration itself but also of other cooperation projects on the supranational, national and sub-national levels. In the 1990-2000s research developed that focused on the cooperation between countries and their components to solve the problems characteristic to the territories, the borders of which do not coincide with interstate delimitation lines. Cooperation of this type is directed at the integration of the efforts of different actors – representatives both of authorities of different levels and non-governmental structures - and its main task is the common regulation mostly of social, economic and ecological processes.

The Russian North-West is involved in a series of initiatives which have the goal of solving problems affecting the main territory: the “Northern Dimension Policy”, cross-border cooperation programmes, the Council of Baltic Sea States; the Barents Euro-Arctic Region and Euroregions. Research on the integration processes that run in the framework of these initiatives is very important in order to evaluate the recent trends in the development of non-political communities in the globalization era.

Secondly, for the Russian North-West the integration processes have a special significance and perception. During recent years the European Union has become an active actor in arranging the tight networks of cooperation not only between its member states but also with neighboring countries, including Russia. The subjects of the federation, being a part of the North-Western Federal District, are already actively involved with cross-border cooperation and with networks of communication and cooperation with the countries and the regions of the EU. Regardless of the internal Russian political situation they will further participate in common projects and initiatives, becoming a part of the integrated communities which appear as a result of cross-border cooperation.

The effectiveness of such cooperation will depend on the type of political communities now being built in the Russian regions. Thus the questions of their formation and identity that attracted the interest of Russian political scientists in the middle of the 1990s but was nearly forgotten over the last four years, still remain topical. The “modularity” of regional communities is of great help for increasing the effectiveness

of cross-border cooperation and in maximizing its benefits. Moreover, this will assist Russia's inclusion into the processes of not only a European but also of a global character. However it will only be possible if the federal center does not impede the further development of the international ties of the regions and if it does not try to take border cooperation under its control. The central authorities, in the development of further federative politics and especially of the politics regarding the Russian North-West, should take into account the fact that the modular political communities that still are appearing inside some subjects of the federation are not threatening national unity. On the contrary, precisely that modularity can assist the further overcoming of the political, social and economic fragmentation inside the country.

Contemporary Russia now seems to be less disintegrated comparing it to the political formation it represented during the first post-Soviet decade. However it is still a long distance away from real consolidation. The current state system rests above all upon the power vertical, which means rather tight control of the situation in the regions by the federal center. Its Achilles heel is the attempt to bond together the very different regions and their elites by creating multiple bilateral "center-region" vertical ties. These ties rest upon not just loyalty but devotion to the course of one political power which is embodied by the party in power, and personified by the president and the prime minister. The real political community represents a "horizontal friendship".<sup>46</sup> The unity of the members of such friendship can not be achieved by their *separate* demonstration of devotion to the central governing authorities. Important are the horizontal lines of communication, *common* efforts to problem solving, and sustainable networks of communication between completely different actors. Therefore the attempts at vertical integration do not assist the real sustainable consolidation of Russian society. Russia still has a rather long way to go before achieving real political, social and economic integration. Sooner or later, the questions of horizontal integration and the development of political societies in the regions will be on the agenda again.

Not to be discounted are the current political processes inside the Russian regions. Despite a certain unification of the regional political regimes and the practically vanished interest of the regional political elites in pursuing active identity politics that followed the cancellation of elections to the posts of governor, the subjects of the

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<sup>46</sup> B. Anderson pointed out that nations as political communities of the state level, 'regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each', represent "horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 1991: 7).

federation are still very different. Therefore there is still a broad field of activities for modern researchers, both in the sphere of case studies and in the comparative analyses of different cases of the building and transformation of political communities as well as of perspectives of intraregional and interregional integration. The international cooperation of the Russian regions has to be taken into account as well, since this will assist all-Russian horizontal integration, not disintegration, as the federal center fears. In the end, it is precisely horizontal, not vertical integration which will be a guarantee of the successful development of the whole of Russia as well as of its particular regions.

## Appendix 1. Transformation of Russian Federal Authorities Responsible for Federative Relations (1991-2005)

*1991 – March 1993: State Committee for Ethnic Affairs (Goscomnaz)*



*March 1993 – January 1994: State Committee for Federation and Ethnic Affairs (Goscomfederatsiya)*



*January 1994 – March 1996: Ministry for Ethnic Affairs and Regional Policy*



*March 1996 – May 2000: Ministry for Ethnic Affairs and Federative Relations*



*May 2000 – October 2001: Ministry for Federation Affairs, Ethnic and Migration Policy (Minfederatsiya)*



*October 2001: Liquidation of *Minfederatsiya* and transfer of its functions to other ministries*



*December 2001 – September 2004:  
Position of the Minister for Ethnic Policy (Minister without Ministry)*



*September 2004: Establishment of the Ministry for Regional Development*

## Appendix 2. General Information about the North-Western Federal District

The North-Western Federal District was founded according to the Decree of the President of the RF № 849 from 13.05.2000

The North-Western Federal District consists of 11 subjects of the Russian Federation:

The Republic of Karelia, The Republic of Komi, Archangelskaja, Vologodskaja, Kalinigradskaja, Leningradskaja, Murmanskaja, Novgorodskaja, Pskovskaja *oblasts*, St. Petersburg, the Nenets Autonomous District.

Administrative center of the District: the federal city of St. Petersburg

The area of the District as of 01.01.2008: 1 687 square meters. That makes up 9.9% of Russian territory.

Population: as of 01.01.2009 the region was inhabited by 13, 462 people (9.5% of Russia's population).

Plenipotentiary representatives of the President of the Russian Federations:

Viktor Cherkesov: 18.05.2000 to 11.03.2003.

Valentina Matvienko: 11.03.2003 to 15.10.2003.

Ilya Klebanov: since 01.11.2003.

Sources:

Official web-site of the North-Western Federal District:

[http://www.szfo.ru/section/30/federalynyy\\_okrug.html](http://www.szfo.ru/section/30/federalynyy_okrug.html)

The plenipotentiary representatives of the President of the RF in the federal districts:

<http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/ruwiki/7353>

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