

Interaction between Legislative Bodies at the Federal Level and Subjects of the Federation in Russia

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Abstract

Background/Objectives: The interaction of legislative bodies ensures democratic processes in Russia. Since 2015 a new electoral cycle has started, and therefore it is important to investigate the principles on which this interaction is based.

Methods: The study uses statistical data to illustrate the interaction of legislative bodies in Russia. For the first time quantitative indicators of activity of the legislative bodies of different levels are given, which makes the study verifiable. The method of modeling the activities of legislative bodies has been applied. This enables predictive analysis of political situation development in Russia in the nearest election cycle. **Findings:** The study for the first time raised the question of the interaction of Russian legislative bodies of different levels as a factor characterizing the efficiency and quality of political processes in the Russian society. The research literature analyzes, as a rule, separately the activities of regional and federal legislative entities. The interaction of legislative bodies of different levels as such was not a subject of any study, since this research requires certain specificity: It is necessary to assess the activities of legislative bodies at various levels by statistical methods and to determine the specificity of their interaction. We have conducted this analysis, making it possible to distinguish areas in which the said interaction develops, to identify the pressure points, to formulate the recommendations for all levels of legislative power in Russia. The achieved results enable to assess the activities of each level of legislative power in Russia and see the features of their interaction, take a look at this interaction as at the measured factor of political activity in Russia. **Applications/Improvements:** The results are applicable to political theory and practice: They open up the prospect of studying political activity through the prism of legislative bodies' interaction and enable to assess their activities through statistical indicators.

Keywords: Electorate, Legislative Bodies, Political Process, Subjects of the Federation, The State Duma

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Problem

Interaction between different level legislative bodies in Russia is an issue that has not been studied in sufficient detail so far. Meanwhile, political reality has been demonstrating with ever increasing vividness that those interactions use to predetermine the directions for developing Russian political environment. Interaction between legislative bodies of the Subjects of the Federation and those of the federal center is the subject matter of this study due to several reasons. First, notwithstanding the fact that the outlines of the new political environment of

our society are distinctly sketched, the political process has not acquired sufficient predictability. In this respect, the current practices exercised in reality by legislative bodies at different levels are of special interest. This interaction creates some particular political culture largely discussed by experts: "Following the results of the survey, the leadership and elite configuration in the Russia of our modern age are represented by a triad "President – Heads of territorial entities of the Russian Federation – municipal authorities"¹.

Second, over the years of interaction between legislative bodies, a vast experience has been accumulated that has not been specifically and profoundly studied yet. Third,

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the very regulatory and legal framework, on which the interaction between legislative bodies at different levels of this country is based, has been improving continuously, so long as the legislative bodies themselves, in the course of performing their functions, do regulate their standing in the regulatory system and within the political process. Fourth, special attention should be paid to the practices of observing the interaction between legislative bodies in relation to the electoral cycles in the center and in the regions.

1.2 Relevance of the Problem

Political reality becomes complicated; Russia is actively positioning itself on the international arena, accepting general “rules of the game”, namely, the regulatory and legal framework of all participants of political relations. A number of scientists note that it is exactly now that the new trends in Russian politics have become evident, the national interest has become keen as never before: “In recent years, the national policies and processes for developing more civilized cultural principles are more often viewed through the prism of historical and cultural characteristics of individual regions which are not absolute but have a significant impact on the overall situation in them”².

Political scientists highlight the fact that today we observe more evident inconsistency between the old trends of political development of the “global world” of the last century and the new trends of creating the polycentric world: “Today, the global community discusses a great number of scenarios and alternatives for future development. Russian scholars and experts are also actively involved in global political forecasting which is reflected in the proceedings of International Congresses on Globalistics held by the Faculty of Global Studies at Lomonosov Moscow State University. The developmental trends of global political processes result from the nonlinear character of the global political system, its transformation and partial dysfunctions and bifurcations. Today we observe a discrepancy between the old twentieth-century trends of political development of the ‘global world’ and the new trends of formation of a polycentric world. The collision between old and new trends and a qualitative transformation of the world political system into a new global system generates a new content of political processes of globalization. Presently, the analysis and forecasting of trends of the development of political globalization become more and more relevant and

important. In what follows we describe the most evident and significant trends of political globalization”³.

Inevitably, a question arises about legislative regulations inside the country, about synchronizing those processes. Here, the process of interaction between legislative bodies of the Subjects of the Federation and the State Duma, the legislative body of the whole Federation, established over long years of practice, comes to the fore. The legislative process in the country and, consequently, the everyday political reality depend upon consistency and alignment of the activities of those authorities. Under conditions of economic crisis, political activities of the authorities operating effectively at all levels can ensure people’s life stability. All above mentioned proves that the subject matter of our study is urgent and relevant.

1.3 Studying the Problem

The declared problem is complex in its nature. Therefore, the process of studying could be split in blocks. The first block is represented by the researchers specializing in investigating the foundations of parliamentarianism in our society from historical prospective, such⁴⁻⁶. The second block includes theoretical scientists who appeal to the theory of parliamentarianism and its relations with other political phenomena. Here, the first to be noted is⁷. Particular problems related to the functions of legislative bodies in this country have been studied by^{8,9}. Some scientists investigate the connection between electoral culture of the election process and democratic political marketing: “The essence of the electoral process, from the point of view of political marketing, is to the greatest extent determined by the following factors: The nature of political regimes and systems, political system and form of government, especially ideological orientations and values; hierarchical level elections (national and local), particularly, the electoral law, the specificity of the mass-media support of the electoral process, leading political actors and resources, etc”¹⁰.

A group of researches highlight the fact that post-socialist reality in Russia does not conform to classical model of transformational political transitions, that the position of Russia in this context is very specific: “Post-socialist transformation does not fit the classic model of transformational transition, as other stages do: Different specific hierarchies of procedural and structural factors are mixed, transformations are implemented simultaneously in various fields, there at preserving the importance of power and thus resulting in complex conflicts”¹¹.

There is one more group of researchers who concentrate their attention on the culture in separate particular regions and who maintain that there are several neighboring types of political culture: "Political and cultural transformations associated with multi-system changes in Russia during 1991-2008 dramatically revealed themselves in the public mind in Southern Russia. Modern political culture in the south of the country is fragmentary, reflecting the transition period in Russia. However, it is unacceptable to believe that the South of Russia is the enclave of traditional and patriarchal ideas, inasmuch as it is dualistic in nature and includes two basic types of political culture, namely, traditional national-patriotic and urbanized modernist type widespread along the coast of the Black Sea and in the main cities of the region. In political culture of Krasnodar territory, a special sub-region, Sochi enclave is distinguished. Special conditions and vital entrepreneurship formed in Sochi a specific subculture, characterized by many features intrinsic to the developed civil culture"¹².

1.4 Hypotheses

Applying the method of generalization, it is possible, in the authors' opinion, to set forth two main hypotheses on the interaction between legislative bodies at different level in Russia.

According to the first hypothesis, the federal legislative body, the State Duma, is a "benchmark" of some kind, and all legislative bodies of the Subjects of the Federation are trying to follow in its wake. This hypothesis emphasizes the strengthening vertical of power in Russia as a whole. This point of view is evidenced by the fact that the functional methods of developing laws applied by the State Duma are indeed often duplicated in the Subjects of the Federation.

The second hypothesis is opposite to the first one. According to this hypothesis, legislative bodies of the Subjects of the Federation possess actual autonomy, inasmuch as they are placed closer to the population. Therefore, legislative bodies of the Subjects of the Federation develop the policy of their own for issuing legislative regulations, and do not always follow the example of the center. It can be illustrated by the fact, that at the federal level a proportional election system has been adopted for the State Duma elections, whereas only some of the regions have shifted to this system and many have preserved either a majority election system or a mixed election system for Legislative Assemblies of the Subjects of the Federation.

2. Method

To study the interaction between the federal level legislative bodies and the authorities in the Subjects of the Federation in Russia, the method of traditional analysis of documents is applied. With the help of this method, it is possible to evaluate the contents of the legislative regulations passed at the level of the Subjects of the Federation and at the State Duma level.

It is hardly possible to evaluate the activity of governmental authorities without referring to verbal messages of the mass media. In this analysis, the authors also refer to their colleagues who maintain that "The language is not only a means of the cognition and interpretation of the surrounding reality but also the regulator of social and political processes"¹³.

The authors apply the tools of sociological science; otherwise, it would be impossible to present public opinion on most important issues. The authors were interested in sociological surveys and in statistical methods applied to the selected subject.

The method of comparative analysis has been used to identify the commonality and the differences between the evaluative judgments on the activities of Legislative Assemblies of the Subjects of the Federation and of the State Duma.

Besides, the authors also made use of the advantages of historical method. Peculiar features of development of the interaction between the abovementioned subjects could be comprehensively evaluated and predicted only based on the relevant understanding of historical reality.

3. Discussion

3.1 Specific Features of Law and Regulations Development and Operation of Representative Power in the Russian Federation

Improvements to federal and regional systems of legal establishment of democratic processes in Russia are generally implemented in parallel; however, there are still some differences between the federal level and the level of the Subjects of the Federation. As the Federal center passes a law, it leaves opportunities for internal activities of the Subjects of the Federation. It can be exemplified by the freedom to select its own election system. This is the basis for the interaction between the State Duma and

the subjects. In authors' opinion, this kind of freedom is a pledge of effective government. The party distribution in the State Duma of the Russian Federation after the elections affects the implemented policy in this way or another. However, this is not strictly regulated. It is possible to maintain that an objective is usually set to implement some certain policy but the selection of the methods to realize it in practice is delegated to the subjects. If a subject believes that selecting the proportional election system in this particular region would be more efficient than applying the mixed system to promote the "dictated" interest of the party majority represented in the State Duma, then the subject adopts this system. Nevertheless, as experience shows, most of the subjects predominantly preserve the mixed system, which does not make any obstacles in implementing a single state policy, but, on the contrary, sometimes proves very helpful (majority constituencies give practical possibility to collect the lacking number of votes for the party majority in a legislative body of any level). Strict regulations on the party-list elections at the federal level together with a relative freedom at the regional level make one of the prerequisites for effective cooperation, if proper interaction between the legislative bodies formed on different principles is ensured.

To ensure effective interaction between legislative bodies at federal and regional levels, it is important that the time and the duration of the election campaigns at federal, regional and municipal levels should be aligned. Elections for representative power authorities at federal level take place less often than the elections for regional legislative bodies and for the local power structures. There is an evident trend for making the period of the election campaign shorter; that takes now less than three months.

The trend for shortening the period of the election campaign, for its concentration, started at the federal level. Very soon, this trend was followed by the regions introducing amendments to their election regulations and laws: Regional laws attempt at limiting the time for nominating and registering the candidates for legislative bodies by dates (which makes it impossible for the self-nominated candidates, who have not been admitted for registration because of the lack of effective signatures in their signature sheets, to collect signatures several times). As a result, not only regional elections but also the elections for the local power structures (in cases where the city-managers have not been established yet) are held in line with the regulations that were dictated by the federal center. This can be considered as developing one of the

elements of political culture at regional level within the period between federal elections. This is a tacit mechanism of interaction between the federal legislative body and a legislative authority of the Federal subject.

From the prospective of law and regulations, the elements of interaction between federal and regional legislative bodies can include the increased amount of legislative rules for regulating organizational processes of the elections for representative power authorities at all levels. This can be also considered as a manifestation of political culture, of its legal aspect. When the federal legislative body, upon analyzing the results of the last elections, makes systematic alterations and amendments to the laws, and then the Subjects of the Federation do the same things, then it is possible to talk about a single general trend for the interaction between these authorities.

A general result of political transformations in the end of the 20th century was the transition to the new system of political order in the country and to the new procedure for elections for regional and federal parliament; the era of interaction between them has started. This entailed huge legislative activity performed at all levels of representative power.

3.2 Formal Principles of Interaction between the State Duma of the Russian Federation and the Legislative bodies of the Subjects of the Russian Federation

Principal directions of interaction between the State Duma and the Legislative Assemblies are stipulated in a special document called Concept of improving the interaction between the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation with legislative (representative) bodies of governmental power of the subjects of the Russian Federation within federal legislative process, that have been approved by the Chamber of the Federation Council (protocol dated May, 26, 2009 No. 10) and was approved by the Presidium of the Council of Legislators (decision dated May, 27, 2009)¹⁴.

According to this document, the interaction results in an annual Program that envisages systematic informational support to legislative activities. Moreover, the methods are determined for automated collection of the information on legislative initiatives from legislative bodies of the Subjects of the Federation together with the forms for statistics reports on draft legislative rules that are ranked by regions, subject sections, number of draft laws.

The declared interaction system is implemented in practice. Thus, at the website of the Federation Council, the Days of the Subjects of the Federation in the Federation Council are indicated. For example, nine events of this kind have been held in 2015 and gained wide social significance.

No doubt, the main direction of interaction between the State Duma and the Legislative Assemblies is represented by collateral lawmaking. This makes the formal side of interaction between the State Duma and the legislative subjects of the Russian Federation. The authors decided to analyze the dynamics of the activity of the Subjects of the Federation in submitting their draft laws to the State Duma. Since 2012, the Legislative Assemblies of the Subjects of the Federation submitted 4,222 draft laws, while other subjects (Supreme Court, Government of the Russian Federation, President of the Russian Federation etc.) submitted only 1,123 draft laws¹⁵. Below there is a list of most active subjects who submitted the greatest number of lawmaking initiatives: The State Council – Kurultay of the Republic of Bashkortostan, the State Council Khase of the Republic of Adygea, Legislative Assembly of Jewish Autonomous Region, Legislative Assembly of Zabaykalsky Krai, Legislative Assembly of Chelyabinsk Region etc.

Thus, over 80% of legislative initiatives have been submitted to the State Duma by those Legislative Assemblies of the Subjects of the Federation. This fact testifies of several trends. First, it shows how active is the legislative authority of practically each Federal subject in terms of understanding political situation, in ranking the current events and in developing the systemic vision, as this source of legislative initiatives proves to be the most active indeed.

Second, this correlation shows the path for promoting legislative initiative from bottom to top. Based on the results of the undertaken analysis, it can be maintained that there are much more initiatives coming from below as compared to the initiatives coming from above (from the President, from the Federal Council etc.). This is to demonstrate the establishment of civil society, where the legislative initiatives should come from the bottom, from the regions that are much closer to the population.

3.3 Informal Principles of Interaction between the State Duma of the Russian Federation and the Legislative Bodies of the Subjects of the Russian Federation

There is one more direction that the authors have identified as informal principles of interaction between the

State Duma of the Russian Federation and the legislative bodies of the Russian Federation (or “public and informational interaction”). Thereat, the authors understand that all activities of the State Duma are open and therefore, public in their nature. However, the authors have identified separate direction specifically covering press conferences.

As observations show, the press conferences of the State Duma (or of its separate representatives) are held in cases when the most controversial and disputable laws are concerned. Such laws, for example, in 2015 included the draft law on changing the pensionable age, pension payments, etc: “On July, 7, 2015 in Moscow, a press conference with the Deputy Chairman of the State Duma of the Russian Federation A. Isayev was held. The Deputy Speaker talked to the mass media representatives about the most significant social laws adopted by the deputies over the last session and touched upon the Duma agenda for the autumn.

The problems with potential extension of non-pensionable age and the attempts of the financial bloc of the government to intercept the control over the budget funds, the adopted law, according to which employers should justify the refusal of employment in writing, as well as the draft law on calculating average wages for the periods of shutdowns caused by the failure to pay...”¹⁶. Press conferences are also held separately by party factions. Thus, large press conferences are held by factions of United Russia and Communist Party of the Russian Federation. Press conferences are also held by such subjects as the Committees of the State Duma.

Press conferences are a form of activity that has been actively adopted by legislative bodies of the Subjects of the Federation. Based on the authors’ calculation, just in 2015 the Legislative Assembly of Chelyabinsk Region (the Chairman himself, the leaders of the committees, separate deputies) held more than 10 press conferences. All press conferences were held openly, publicly. The only common drawback to press conferences at all levels is that they are usually organized spontaneously; there is neither schedule nor agenda available beforehand for such events, which makes it difficult for the representatives of the community and mass media to participate.

This problem partially overlaps the problem of political PR exercised by some individuals and by whole factions: “The modern politics develops in the information space influenced by various factors, such as public requirements changing under the influence of global information

processes; compliance/noncompliance of various mass media with the requirements of information consumers; changes in the structure of political actors; difficult access to unbiased information, etc. All these make the media political process in Russia nonlinear and unpredictable at the current stage of information relations development. Research has only recently approached this issue. Its deeper exploration requires a complex approach in several human sciences both in Russia and in other countries. The reason for that is the involvement of Russia and other countries in the global information processes. This inevitably affects all aspects of the information exchange¹⁷.

4. Conclusions

4.1 Strengthening the Interaction between the State Duma and Legislative Assemblies of the Subjects of the Federation

Strengthening the vertical of power in the country results in ever more close interaction between the State Duma of the Russian Federation and the Legislative Assemblies of the Subjects of the Federation. Going back to the issue of the election system, the changes that took place since the beginning of 2016 show that not only the State Duma can affect the activity of the legislative bodies of the Subjects of the Federation but the contrary is true as well. Thus, the experience of the regions in implementing the mixed election system proved more successful as compared to the cases when the proportional system was applied at the federal level. The changes in the election system result in the fact that the election for the State Duma scheduled for September, 2016, will be held in line with the mixed system principles. This makes it possible to form the party majority in the State Duma.

4.2 Placing the Issues of Interaction beyond Public Discussions

A negative feature characteristic for informational coverage of the interaction between the State Duma of the Russian Federation and the Legislative Assemblies of the Subjects of the Federation is that there is hardly any possibility to trace the results of the State Duma discussing the legislative initiatives submitted by Legislative Assemblies of the Subjects of the Federation. Thus, for those citizens who reveal interest in some certain draft laws, there is no

mechanism in place to control the status of these draft laws at all stages. At the same time, submitting and discussing a legislative initiative should be a bilateral process; placing this interaction beyond public discussion makes it impossible to observe the mutually beneficial activities of those two legislative bodies. This brings people's discredit to the activities of legislative bodies in general.

4.3 Attempts at Preventing Transparency in the Activities of Legislative Assemblies of the Subjects of the Federation

The lack of the State Duma rating evaluations of the activities of legislative bodies of the Subjects of the Federation results in the fact that it is practically impossible to evaluate the work of legislative bodies neither by this legislative body of the Federal subject itself nor by the population in general. Up to now, such kind of evaluation could only be observed in the reports of the representatives of the State Duma during the Days of the Subjects of the Federation, when the mutual common efforts are praised. It is a matter of great concern that if the State Duma does not schedule this Day of some particular subject for quite a long time, then no evaluation can be carried out at all. At the same time, such evaluation is of paramount importance for the electorate, especially during the election campaign when the population of the region should have a basis for evaluating the work of the legislative body over previous period and thus could make well-founded conclusions. Whereupon, another negative factor of the existing evaluation practices is the fact that this evaluation (if any at all) is not carried out by the community that votes during the elections and affects the political process, but by a higher authority.

Without such ratings, it is impossible to carry out the qualified evaluation of the draft laws that have or have not been adopted by the legislative body of the Federal subject; it is impossible to understand how those adopted laws regulate the interactions within the subject. Personal activities of the deputies of the legislative bodies remain non-transparent at both federal and regional levels.

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