

Analysis

The Appointment of a New President in Adygeya and Trends in Relations Between the President and the Regions

By Oleg Tsvetkov, Maykop

Summary

The Kremlin's appointment of Aslancherii Tkhakushinov as the new president of Adygeya is unprecedented since the new leader won only 2 percent of the vote in the region's last presidential elections in 2002. The appointment shows that Moscow is much more concerned with naming a dependent, manageable regional leader than one who represents the will of regional society. The result could be damaging for Russia since now the bureaucratic class is taking power far beyond the control of civil oversight.

Putin Appoints a New President

Despite its specific features, the case of Adygeya, a North Caucasus republic with a population of 450,000, demonstrates the logic of the Kremlin's federal policy: strengthen the dependence of the regions on Moscow and subordinate them to its current interests. This is why Putin cancelled the gubernatorial election in 2004 and replaced them with presidential appointments.

Putin appointed Tkhakushinov, the former rector of the Maykop State Technical University, despite his poor showing in 2002 and his shady reputation. During a meeting with Putin on December 7, 2006, former Adygeya President Khazret Sovmen named Tkhakushinov as one of the "thieves, bandits, and extortionists" running the republic according to the republican press, citing sources at Radio Liberty and the Internet (<http://www.rambler.ru/news/politics/0/9318393.html>). The university that Tkhakushinov led has a reputation for taking bribes. Many students there claim that they paid to enter the university and continue to pay to pass tests. Such practices are not uncommon in the Russian education system.

Useful Friends

Tkhakushinov benefited from connections to many highly-placed friends. Since Putin does not know all the regional elite and lacks the ability to pick among them, he must choose governors from the candidates suggested to him. Usually his advisors remain in the shadows and it is difficult to determine their exact role.

At his inauguration on January 13, Tkhakushinov named Deputy Head of the FSB Investigative Department Yury Ansimov as his personal friend. Currently Ansimov serves in Moscow, but formerly was head of the FSB in Adygeya.

In Adygeya, Ansimov was also connected to Vladimir Altunin, with whom he wrote a book on ter-

rorism. Since the summer of 2006, Altunin has served as the federal inspector for Adygeya on the staff of the Presidential Envoy to Southern Russia Dmitry Kozak. Now Altunin sits next to Tkhakushinov at official events, occupying a seat of honor and power. Former President Sovmen, in contrast, did not have any contact with him.

Tkhakushinov used a variety of means to make contact with highly placed federal officials. In the summer of 2006, his university set up a branch of the Academy of Security, Law, and Order, an organization that unites many former and current employees of the special services and law enforcement agencies that asserts its close ties to Putin. Tkhakushinov welcomed the head of the republican FSB, procurator, and one of the deputy ministers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Academy. Two months later he awarded them orders from the Academy. He also made them honorary professors.

Tkhakushinov made contact with many people from Putin's administration in 2004. Then he worked on Putin's presidential campaign as a "trusted official," a position only possible with good connections. Tkhakushinov never let an opportunity pass to make contacts. As a result, various members of the law enforcement agencies, federal and regional officials, parliamentarians, their wives and children have all held various positions at the university.

Personal contacts are extremely important in Russian politics and the quickest lift for advancing one's career. But Tkhakushinov also had party and social support built for him by federal party and state bureaucrats.

Organization of Party Support

In the second half of 2006, the Kremlin-controlled United Russia party officially recommended Tkhakushinov as Adygeya president. However, the recommendation only came after the party's Moscow organization intervened. The local party organization

had to accept Tkhakushinov as its candidate although earlier it had not considered him for this position.

Initially, the republican branch of the party backed Sovmen, the incumbent president and Aslan Khashir, one of Adygeya's representatives to the Federation Council. After meeting with Kozak, the party added Ruslan Khadzhebiekov, chairman of the republican parliament and leader of Adygeya's United Russia party.

Several days later, the Moscow leadership of the party met and proposed Tkhakushinov. On October 19, Andrei Vorob'ev, head of the United Russia Executive Committee and a State Duma member, came to Maykop and chaired a meeting of the party's political council, which finally nominated Tkhakushinov. It is not clear why the Moscow leadership decided to overrule local preferences.

Building Social Support

The cancellation of gubernatorial elections means that Kremlin bureaucrats must simulate the public support that the candidates they prepare presumably have. It is not hard to do this since there are a large number of social organizations that take orders from the authorities. Kozak arrived in Maykop to carry out this work. The main intrigue here was how Kozak's staff compiled the list of organizations that would be allowed to meet with him. Mostly this group consisted of organizations that were known supporters of Tkhakushinov.

These groups are dependent on state subsidies. They realized that the Kremlin had already decided to jettison Sovmen. They also realized that Sovmen still had a chance to return to power. As a result, they all began their speeches by thanking Sovmen and then continued with the formulation "if Sovmen were suddenly to depart," "then I would support Tkhakushinov."

Building Support in the Regional Parliament

Adygeya's legislature had to make an about face in supporting Tkhakushinov. In the beginning of October 2006, there was no support for his candidacy, but he won a nearly unanimous vote by December. The sharp change came after the federal and regional United Russia party leaders announced their new positions. When United Russia called a test vote on Tkhakushinov on October 25, 46 of 54 deputies voted for him. The voting was held in the open, so it was obvious how each member voted. A motion to vote in secret did not pass. Sovmen issued a statement saying that the voting was illegitimate, but there was little he could do. Finally on December 13, the legis-

lature held its final vote and Tkhakushinov won with 50 of a possible 54 votes.

Weak Opposition from the Former President

Sovmen could do little to block the election of Tkhakushinov once the federal authorities had decided to back him. During his tenure he had often insulted Putin's presidential envoys, various siloviki, and other federal bureaucrats. But ultimately he realized that he was in an extremely weak position and handed over the presidency.

One strength that Sovmen did have was the backing of the Adyge Khase, which united the ethnic Adygs in the republic. The Adygs make up about 25 percent of the population, while Russians are about 65 percent. The Adyge Khase saw Sovmen as protecting the ethnic interests of the republic, in particular, preventing a merger of Adygeya with the much larger Krasnodar Krai. Tkhakushinov's position on the merger was unclear. Ultimately, however, neither Sovmen's ethnic backing nor his control of much of the local media proved decisive.

First Steps of the New President

Tkhakushinov's first steps in office show that the Kremlin now has a compliant regional leader. He ended the ethnic Adyg monopoly on all the top offices in the republic and greatly increased the representation of ethnic Russians, a move that the Kremlin had long sought. In February Tkhakushinov accompanied Putin on a trip to Jordan, where he met with local Adygs (Cherkess) and helping the president deal with awkward questions from these people who seek easier ways of becoming Russian citizens.

Tkhakushinov also raised the status of federal bureaucrats in the republic. If Sovmen treated them with contempt, Tkhakushinov now seats them in places of honor in a wide variety of meetings.

However, although the Kremlin now formally has a loyal leader, it is in danger of weakening its real control over the republic rather than strengthening it. Experience shows that many federal bureaucrats working in the regions are likely to form behind-the-scenes alliances with the regional elite rather than their federal superiors. They have many common interests with the regional elite: shadow business, finding employment for themselves and their relatives, educating their children, obtaining comfortable housing, and a host of other issues. The best way to realize these goals is to work with the regional elite.

Tkhakushinov is very effective at developing ties with federal officials and most likely will work in that

direction. For example, he, and not the Russian procurator general, asked the republican procurator to figure out who owns which property in the republic. The procurator of course said nothing with the Diamant firm let Tkhakushinov use an expensive car for his purposes.

For the federal government, Tkhakushinov's main task will be to round up votes for the 2008 presidential election. In other spheres, the new leader will have a free hand. Tellingly, the federal government did not even draw up a list of tasks for the new republican president to perform.

Conclusions

The process of naming a new republican leader shows that there are high risks of corruption at each step of the way. Cancelling governors' elections means that those seeking this office have changed the focus of their activities. Instead of seeking the support of the electorate, they now vie for the backing of bureaucrats who can influence the president's choice. The extensive corruption in this process now could have catastrophic consequences for the country.

Having achieved relative stability in the North Caucasus, the Kremlin is now interested in "successfully" conducting the 2007 State Duma and 2008

presidential elections. For this it needs obedient regional leaders and access to their administrative resources.

If this is the federal plan, it is deeply mistaken. Rejecting radical improvement of the situation in the North Caucasus and fighting corruption means that the region will drop farther into a "gray zone." The existing problems will be exacerbated and the chances of instability increase. The current model of federalism, in which the Kremlin appoints regional leaders loyal to it, is leading to a dead end. The situation in Adygeya and other regions where Kremlin-appointees rule shows that federalism is becoming a fiction. The development of a tradition of rational administration and civic associations is being put off to an indeterminate future.

Instead, Russia is building a form of "contract federalism" in which the parties to the agreement are not the region and the center, but regional leaders, conditionally appointed by the Kremlin, and the Kremlin itself. The two sides easily sidestep constitutional and legal limitations. Ordinary citizens are pushed to the edge of this behind-the-scenes game. And Russian state power is increasingly turning into a monopoly of the ruling bureaucratic class, working beyond civil oversight.

About the author

Oleg Tsvetkov is a senior researcher in the Social-Political Problems Division of the Russian Academy of Sciences' Southern Scientific Center.

Statistics

An Overview of Russia's Regions

The Russian Federation originally consisted of 89 subjects of the federation (*subyekty federatsii*), commonly known as the "regions" (*regiony*). As of January 2007 six regions had merged, bringing the total number of regions down to 86. Brief statistical profiles of these 86 regions are given in the graphs and tables below.

Of the present 86 regions, 49 carry the official name *oblast* (in English also translated as "region"); 21 are republics (*respublika*); 7 are autonomous districts (*avtonomny okrug*); six are territories (*krai*); two – Moscow and St. Petersburg – are federal cities (*gorod federal'no znacheniya*), and one is an autonomous region (*avtonomnaya oblast*). The regions are grouped into seven federal districts. The federal districts are shown on the map included after the following graphs and tables.

By next year two further regions will cease to exist. On July 1, 2007, Kamchatka Region and Koryaksky Autonomous District will merge to form Kamchatka territory. On January 1, 2008, Ust-Ordynsky Buryatsky Autonomous District will become part of Irkutsk Region.