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Article



Yulia Igorevna Prokhorova

Institute of Service and Entrepreneurship (branch) of DSTU
 Bachelor

Vladimir Timofeevich Prokhorov

Institute of Service and Entrepreneurship (branch) of DSTU
 Doctor of Technical Sciences, Professor,
 Shakhty, Russia

Lyudmila Anatolyevna Romanova

Yug Test LLC
 Ph.D., Associate Professor, deputy Director
 Rostov -on-Don, Russia

Svetlana Yurievna Korablina

Orthomoda
 Candidate of Technical Sciences, Associate Professor, Deputy Director

Galina Yurievna Volkova

Orthomoda
 Doctor of Economic Sciences, Professor, General Manager. Director
 Moscow, Russia

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ENSURING THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE REGIONS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Abstract: The article analyzes the justified efforts of regional leaders in the North Caucasus and Southern Federal Districts through 2035 to implement socio-economic development in relation to the regions of the Russian Federation. The subject of the study is elements of the above-mentioned program that, by contradicting regional specifics, hinder the achievement of the goals set in government documents. The time frame of the study is from 2018 to 2035. The main goal of the study, therefore, is to develop an understanding of how the regional characteristics of the North Caucasus republics should be taken into account when formulating federal policy aimed at the socio-economic development of the regions. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to solve a number of problems, namely:

- a) analyze the State Program "Development of the North Caucasus Federal District", identify the main goals and methods for achieving the set goals;
- b) analyze the State Program "Development of the Southern Federal District", identify the main goals and methods for achieving the set goals;
- c) identify the specific characteristics of regions that prevent them from achieving their goals;
- d) propose specific ways to include regional specifics in the federal policy model in the North Caucasus and Southern Federal Districts.

Key words: responsibility, priority, technical regulation, certification, standardization, assortment, assortment policy, financial condition, profitability, profit, demand, preferences, relevance, competitiveness.

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Introduction

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The quality of life and well-being of the population, the economic development potential, and the investment priorities of the regions depend -on the level of socio- economic development -in the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts. An analysis of the socio-economic situation allows us to identify functional areas of strategic importance for the development of the region, as well as areas where more active actions are needed to correct the regions' positions. The Southern Federal District is a federal district in southern Russia established by presidential decree on May 13, 2000. The district included six constituent entities of the Russian Federation: the Republic of Adygea, the Republic of Kalmykia, Krasnodar Krai, and the Astrakhan, Volgograd, and Rostov Oblasts. In accordance with Presidential Decree No. 375 "On the Southern Federal District" of July 28, 2016, the Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol joined the federal district. The main features of the Southern Federal District are: - an outstanding transport and geographical position -on the scale of Eurasia , due to the presence of the Volga --Caspian route from Central and Northern Europe to the countries of Central, Southwest -and South Asia, as well as the Trans-Siberian --Black Sea route connecting the countries of the Asia- Pacific region (China, Korea, Japan) with the countries of the Mediterranean basin; - the most favorable natural -and climatic conditions -for living, recreation and agriculture and natural -resource potential; - a fairly strong industrial -and production potential, occupying in some sectors of the agro-industrial complex. To determine the socio- -economic situation of the regions, it is necessary to analyze the main socio- -economic indicators. The population of the Southern Federal District is slightly less than 10 percent of the population of the Russian Federation and, despite some increase in recent years, according to the main demographic characteristics, the district shows positive dynamics, although the rate of these changes is somewhat lower than the Russian average.

Under the influence of the economic and geopolitical situation, the geographic focus of the food import segment of the Southern and North Caucasus Federal Districts has identified new trends: - the emergence of new trading partners (import of tomatoes from Senegal, potatoes and onions from Pakistan, cheeses from Argentina, citrus fruits from Mexico); - an increase in import volumes from certain countries (apples and pears from South Africa, Brazil,

Chile, Macedonia, vegetables from Azerbaijan and Iran). Thus, the economic development of the regions is based on a favorable economic and -geographical location, the availability of natural resources, historically favorable development conditions, a high labor force, and a well-developed transport infrastructure. Currently, the economies of the Southern and North Caucasus Federal Districts maintain a strong competitive position in the national market for a fairly wide range of industrial goods, and also occupy a leading position in agricultural production. Significant development.

Despite the federal center's efforts to stabilize the situation in the North Caucasus over the past nearly twenty years, the region remains characterized by extremely high tensions between diverse social groups; and very often, the direct consequence of this tension is open violence. State policy goals toward the North Caucasus republics have changed little over the past twenty years: eliminating destabilizing factors and developing socio-economic infrastructure have always figured, in one form or another, among them. This persistence of goals indirectly indicates the failure of the center's policies. The conclusion is quite simple: if the center's policies fail to lead to reconciliation, political stabilization, and sustainable economic development, then some -crucial aspects have been overlooked in the development of this policy strategy. Our initial assumption was that at least one of the factors, which, while not factored into the model of interaction with the North Caucasus republics and regions of the Southern Federal District, is responsible for the unsatisfactory results of the policies pursued in recent years, is the cultural and -ethnic aspect. However, the hypothesis about the failure to take into account the cultural specificity of the regions as a reason for the failure of state policy was then rejected due to the fact that federal policy in the North -The Caucasus and Southern Federal Districts represent a typical example of the center's policy toward the regions of the Russian Federation: in its strategies for engaging with multi-ethnic regions that differ culturally from the European part of Russia, regional cultural specificities are fundamentally ignored. Thus, ignoring the cultural aspect is not a distinctive feature of the center's approach to these regions' problems and their solutions, but rather represents a pan-Russian model of interaction with the regions. Moreover, it is worth noting that federal experts insufficiently consider the regions' economic characteristics and their economic potential. They overlook such important factors as the specific economic and political institutions of a given region,

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despite the fact that existing institutions directly determine the effectiveness of state policy. The federal center's disregard for local cultural and institutional specifics, which characterizes its interactions with all regions of the Russian Federation, has, however, more serious consequences for the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts: the incorrect assumptions and preconditions embedded in the center's projects for these districts not only fail to achieve their stated goals but, in some situations, negatively impact the level of tension within the

regions. The research problem can be formulated as follows: it is assumed that cultural and economic specifics should be taken into account when formulating a federal strategy for interaction with the regions of the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts, but how should local specifics be incorporated into sectoral state policy?

Main part



Figure 1 – Federal districts of the Russian Federation

Table 1. Numbers permanent population of the Southern Federal District as of 01.01.2026.

	<i>Square territories, thousand sq. m. km</i>	<i>Number of people population on 01.01.2026, Human</i>
Central federal districtCenter - G. Moscow	650.2	39 104 400
Northwest- federal districtCenter - G. Saint -Petersburg	1,687.0	13 901 069
Southern federal district Center - G. Rostov- -on- Don	447.8	16,434,898
North -Caucasian Federal District Center - G. Pyatigorsk	170.4	9,997,336
Volga Federal DistrictCenter - G. Lower Novgorod	1,037.0	28 844 264
Ural federal districtCenter - G. Yekaterinburg	1,818.5	12,294,961
Siberian federal districtCenter - G. Novosibirsk	4,361.7	16 889 404
Far Eastern federal districtCenter - G. Vladivostok	6,952.6	8,091,244

The Southern Federal District was formed in 2000.Center federal districts - Rostov- -on - -Don.

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Figure 2 – The Southern Federal District of the Russian Federation

Table 2. Area and population of the regions of the Southern Federal District as of 01.01.2026.

Area of the territory, thousand sq. m. km		Number of people population on 01.01.2026, people
Republic Adygea Center - G. Maykop	7.8	468 340
Republic of Kalmykia Center – Elista	74.7	267,756
Republic of Crimea The center is Simferopol	26.1	1,896,393
Krasnodar Krai Center – Krasnodar	75.5	5,687,378
Astrakhan region Center - Astrakhan	49.0	989 430
Volgograd Oblast The center is Volgograd	112.9	2,449,781
Rostov Oblast The center is Rostov- on- -Don	101.0	4,153,763
Sevastopol City of federal significance	0.9	522,057

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Table 3. General results migrations population South federal districts as of 01.01.2026

	Number of arrivals	Number dropped out	Migration increase and decrease (-)
Southern Federal District	57,065	61 331	-4 266
Republic of Adygea	2,866	3,564	-698
Republic of Kalmykia	1,352	1,522	-170
Republic of Crimea	6,514	6,496	18
Krasnodar Krai	21,297	20,577	720
Astrakhan region	2,526	3 185	-659
Volgograd Oblast	6,348	8,045	-1,697
Rostov Oblast	13,739	15,019	-1,280
Sevastopol	2,423	2,923	-500



Figure 3 - North Caucasus Federal District

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Figure 4 - North Caucasus Federal District



Figure 5 - North Caucasus Federal District

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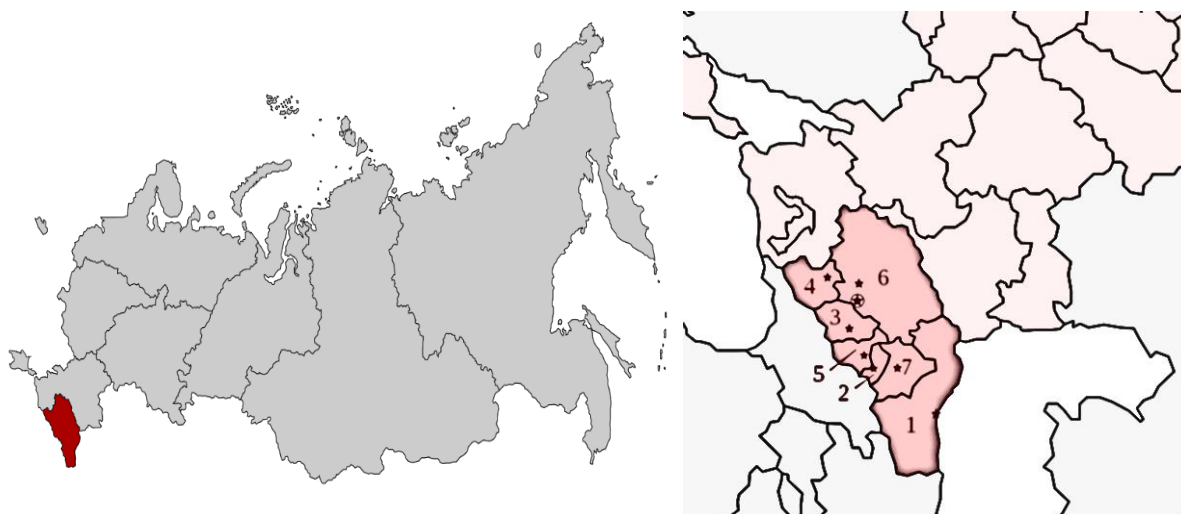


Figure 6 - North Caucasus Federal District

Table 4. Area of the territory and population permanent population of the North Caucasus Federal District as of 01.01.2026.

№	Флаг	Субъект Федерации	Площадь (км²)	Население (чел.)	ВРП, млрд.руб. (2016 ^[1])	ВРП на душу населения, тыс.руб./чел. (2016 ^[4])	Админ. центр и его население (чел.)
4		Карачаево-Черкесская Республика	14 277	↗469 865 ^[1]	73,2	156,6	Черкесск (113 226 ^[1])
6		Ставропольский край	66 160	↗2 907 593 ^[1]	651,9	232,6	Ставрополь (547 443 ^[1])
3		Кабардино-Балкарская Республика	12 470	↗904 200 ^[1]	132,7	153,7	Нальчик (247 054 ^[1])
1		Республика Дагестан	50 270	↗3 182 054 ^[1]	597,1	197,1	Махачкала (623 254 ^[1])
2		Республика Ингушетия	3 123	↗509 541 ^[1]	50,9	106,8	Магас (15 271 ^[1])
7		Чеченская Республика	16 171	↗1 510 824 ^[1]	166,7	118,7	Грозный (328 533 ^[1])
5		Республика Северная Осетия — Алания	7 987	↘687 357 ^[1]	125,5	178,4	Владикавказ (295 830 ^[1])

Table 5. Overall results of population migration in the North Caucasus Federal District as of January 1, 2026

	Human			On 1000 Human population		
	born	dead	natural increase (+), decline (-)	born	dead	natural increase (+), decline (-)
Russian Federation	320376	584652	-264276	8.9	16.3	-7.4
North -Caucasian federal district	31099	25798	+5301	12.6	10.5	+2.1
Republic Dagestan	10055	5072	+4983	12.9	6.5	+6.4
Republic Ingushetia	1900	556	+1344	14.7	4.3	+10.4
Kabardino- -Balkarian Republic	2370	2633	-263	11.0	12.3	-1.3
Karachay- Cherkessia Republic	1040	1530	-490	9.1	13.4	-4.3

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Republic Northern Ossetia - Alania	1835	2694	-859	10.8	15.9	-5.1
Chechen Republic	7831	2431	+5400	20.9	6.5	+14.4
Stavropol edge	6068	10882	-4814	8.9	15.9	-7.0

Table 6. Results migrations population in the North -Caucasus Federal District as of 01.01.2026

	<i>Number arrived, Human</i>	<i>IN % To 1st quarter 2026 G.</i>	<i>Number dropped out, Human</i>	<i>IN % To 1st quarter 2026</i>	<i>Migration increase (+), decrease (-), Human</i>
Russian Federation	855695	92.5	906370	104.1	-50675
North -Caucasian federal district	36133	96.2	40513	99.8	-4380
Republic Dagestan	9638	105.0	10695	101.5	-1057
Republic Ingushetia	1593	88.2	1170	88.1	+423
Kabardino- -Balkarian Republic	2276	105.8	3017	120.6	-741
Karachay- -Cherkessia Republic	2772	101.6	2717	97.8	+55
Republic Northern Ossetia - Alania	1533	115.0	2240	97.9	-707
Chechen Republic	2996	94.5	3795	106.5	-799
Stavropol edge	15325	89.1	16879	95.9	-1554

Table 7. Migration flows with the countries of the Far Abroad and the CIS member states and with the regions of the North Caucasus Federal District as of 01.01.2026

	<i>So countries distant abroad</i>			<i>WITH participating states- CIS</i>		
	<i>number arrived</i>	<i>number dropped out</i>	<i>migration increase (+), decline (-)</i>	<i>number arrived</i>	<i>number dropped out</i>	<i>migration increase (+), decline (-)</i>
Russian Federation	13987	23657	-9670	141120	182125	-41005
North -Caucasian federal district	772	1434	-662	3352	5859	-2507
Republic Dagestan	35	68	-33	818	1195	-377
Republic Ingushetia	10	4	+6	111	55	+56
Kabardino- Balkarian Republic	388	606	-218	156	406	-250
Karachay- Cherkessia Republic	18	24	-6	270	139	+131
Republic Northern Ossetia - Alania	65	122	-57	182	179	+3
Chechen Republic	15	39	-24	198	289	-91
Stavropol edge	241	571	-330	1617	3596	-1979

Table 8. The number of unemployed citizens registered with employment service agencies population for the purpose of searching suitable work for the regions of the North Caucasus Federal District as of 01.01.2026

	<i>Number of people unoccupied labor activities</i>	<i>IN %</i>		<i>From them registered unemployed</i>	
		<i>by March 202 6 G.</i>	<i>To to sum it up</i>	<i>thousand. Human</i>	<i>in % to to sum it up</i>

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	<i>citizens, thousand. Human</i>				
Russian Federation	838.3	41.9	100	665.0	100
North -Caucasian federal district	149.8	42.6	17.9	141.7	21.3
Republic Dagestan	29.2	38.5	3.5	26.8	4.0
Republic Ingushetia	35.3	76.2	4.2	35.1	5.3
Kabardino- -Balkarian Republic	10.3	22.4	1.2	9.6	1.4
Karachay- -Cherkessia Republic	4.1	79.5	0.5	2.9	0.4
Republic Northern Ossetia - Alania	4.6	27.8	0.6	4.1	0.6
Chechen Republic	53.0	50.6	6.3	52.0	7.8
Stavropol edge	13.1	23.1	1.6	11.1	1.7

Table 9. Migration flows with countries of the Far Abroad and with the CIS member states and with the regions of the North -Caucasus Federal District as of 01.01.2026

	<i>So countries distant abroad</i>			<i>WITH participating states- CIS</i>		
	<i>number arrived</i>	<i>number dropped out</i>	<i>migration increase (+), decline (-)</i>	<i>number arrived</i>	<i>number dropped out</i>	<i>migration increase (+), decline (-)</i>
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Chechen Republic	15	39	-24	198	289	-91
Stavropol edge	241	571	-330	1617	3596	-1979

We use normative institutionalism as our primary methodological approach, as this approach allows us to view research results (government documents as formal rules of the game and the practical application of government directives as informal rules) as an existing institution and analyze the specifics of this institution. To successfully achieve these objectives, we will need to rely on the following principles of normative institutionalism:

1. A broad understanding of institutions as external frames within which authors operate (one can analyze how formal rules, in the event of inconsistency with external conditions or internal inconsistency), transform into informal practices or standard operating procedures. Thus, the starting point for analysis will be the definition of institutions given

by J. March and J. Olsen (an institution as a relatively stable set of rules and organizational practices embedded in semantic structures, which at the same time possesses the property of invariance with respect to the change of political authors, as well as relative stability in the face of changes in the external environment and the preferences and expectations of individuals).

2. Relative endogeneity of institutions (institutions are viewed as relatively independent of individuals, i.e., they are not reducible to the result of a social contract between elites, but are self-dynamic). Institutions operate not only with resources but also participate in the creation of meaning, ethics, and the interpretation of life.

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3. Analyzing the degree of development of the problem under study in the scientific community, it is worth noting that numerous studies exist that specifically address the cultural characteristics of these regions of the two districts, and specifically their economic specifics. However, comprehensive studies that link regional specifics with the goals and methods of implemented state policy are currently lacking. In general, it can be said that the policy direction Analysis in Russian political science is only just emerging. Our primary sources were the works of S. Markedonov⁴ and E. Muratova, devoted to modernization processes in these regions and the factors hindering them; articles by M. Eneeva⁶ and I. Starodubrovskaya⁷ on the importance and possible directions of institutional change in the regions; and the works of N. Zubarevich, devoted to regional policy in contemporary Russia.

4. Analysis of the State Programs "Development of the North -Caucasus and Southern Federal Districts" until 2035.

In this article, we will analyze the key goals set by the federal center in formulating the development strategy for the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts, as well as the proposed methods for achieving these goals. It should be noted from the outset that the primary focus of this analysis will be the Russian Federation State Program "Development of the North -Caucasus and Southern Federal Districts" through 2035, as this program incorporates the fundamental elements of sectoral and local federal target programs (the federal target program for the socio- -economic development of Ingushetia, Chechnya, Adygea, and Kalmykia), and also represents an adjusted continuation of completed target programs. This state program was adopted by the Government of the Russian Federation in 2018 and has been adjusted and continually analyzed, resulting in amendments. Regional governments of the North Caucasus and Southern Federal Districts, as well as the Ministry of Regional Development, participated in the development of the Program. The program's implementation period is proposed to be divided into three stages:

1. 2020–2025 – the "initial stage," during which legislative frameworks for more comfortable investment activities in the region should be developed and implemented, and the Federal Target Program "South of Russia" should be completed. Its implementation "will create conditions that ensure financial discipline, transparency of public policy in these regions, rational use of federal resources, planning and control of budget expenditures."

2. 2026–2030 – the "main period," during which it is planned to increase the investment attractiveness of the North Caucasus -Federal District, commission the first stage of construction of tourism clusters in the North Caucasus, and create conditions for the

transition of the North Caucasus Federal District to innovative, socially -oriented economic development.

3. 2031 – 2035 – "forecast stage", the details of which will be determined based on the results of the implementation of the main stage.

The State Program of the Russian Federation "Development of the North -Caucasus and Southern Federal Districts" for the period up to 2035 is divided into 11 thematic subprograms, dedicated respectively to:

1) increasing the investment attractiveness of regions;

2) development of the resorts of KavMinVody , Sochi and Crimea;

3) development of the tourism cluster in the North Caucasus and Southern Federal Districts,

4 -10) ensuring sustainable socio- -economic development of the regions of the North Caucasus and Southern Federal Districts;

11) ensuring the implementation of this state program and "other activities in the area of balanced territorial development."

The main objectives of the program are as follows:

1. Creating conditions for the development of the region's real economy, which involves attracting investment, developing tourism clusters that increase capacity and the number of jobs, repurposing unused production capacities of the military- -industrial complex, and diversifying production.

2. Improving the quality of life and well-being of citizens, which requires ensuring income growth, reducing unemployment, developing social infrastructure, and creating conditions for increasing the birth rate and reducing mortality.

When analyzing this program and the goals and objectives it presents for the development of the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts, one cannot help but note the "traditional" nature of the goals: developing the economy through investment and improving quality of life by raising wages and building necessary infrastructure. However, it is important to note that, for example, the development of real sectors of the economy does not include goals for supporting and developing small businesses—this goal is present only in the third, forecast stage.

4. Thus, it appears that the authorities' top priority is increasing the region's investment attractiveness, i.e., attracting capital from large companies to the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts and creating jobs through these companies, rather than through the development of small businesses and citizen self-organization. This is precisely why they invest heavily in subprograms for developing tourism clusters. These are image-building megaprojects -aimed at attracting investment, but the residents of the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts benefit far less from the implementation of such projects than if comparable resources, and most

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importantly, efforts, were directed toward improving the business climate. Furthermore, it is important to note the vague nature of the methods for achieving these goals, characteristic of state programs and strategies: responsibility for achieving these goals is shifted to regional authorities, who must report to management on, for example, the number of jobs created during the planning period. Meanwhile, regional authorities often lack not only the resources to implement the stated objectives but also a clear understanding of possible solutions. One of the key shortcomings of both this state program and other government documents is the lack of clear guidelines on what measures and in what sequence must be taken to achieve the clearly defined results. Thus, the federal government sets fixed targets for regional governments to achieve, but does not specify the methods for achieving these targets. In other words, the goals of this program appear trivial and equally applicable to all regions of the Russian Federation. However, the adequacy of these methods in light of existing problems and the overall goals should be questioned. Thus, addressing unemployment by increasing the number of jobs in the tourism sector appears to be a rather controversial undertaking: this sector of the economy is highly susceptible to seasonal fluctuations, and the number of necessary personnel also depends on the occupancy of resorts. This raises a key question: what will happen to the population of the North Caucasus regions working in the tourism sector if resorts are insufficiently occupied? There are two possible scenarios: either employers retain "unnecessary" workers and ask the government for subsidies to maintain employment levels, or resort owners and service companies reduce their staff. Both options imply a strong dependence on the government for employment, as either the citizen remains unemployed and relies on state benefits, or the citizen's wages are paid indirectly by the state through subsidies to tourism cluster owners. Essentially, the unemployment problem in this scenario is solved through indirect government funding of jobs, which is by no means an adequate solution to unemployment or the development of the real sectors of the economy.

5. The state program under review prioritizes large companies willing to invest in infrastructure projects, which in return can count on loyalty and a variety of support from local authorities. However, the issue of small business development remains under-addressed: not only is small business development not among the key objectives for developing the real sectors of the North Caucasus and Southern Federal Districts, but such undoubtedly important tasks as improving the business climate and strengthening oversight over regional law enforcement agencies, whose arbitrary actions in most cases (and not only in the Southern and North Caucasus Federal Districts) pose the main threat to the development of the private sector in the economy, are also absent.

6. In summing up the chapter's interim results, it is important to note that the Ministry of Regional Development's program for the development of the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts is superficial: the goals are trivial and could be applied to any constituent entity of the Russian Federation, the methods are not spelled out, the target indicators differ significantly from current indicators, and some key features of the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts were not taken into account by analysts during the program's development, either due to inattention or political inexpediency.

7. Specific characteristics of the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts not addressed by state policy. First of all, it's worth noting that the socio- -economic and political problems characteristic of the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts—such as clannishness, corruption, the shadow economy, high crime rates, a lack of economic diversification, low productivity and a low-skilled workforce, unemployment, and a large number of bureaucrats—are also common to the Russian Federation as a whole. However, all of these problems are compounded by the region's traditional lifestyle and disregard for Russian legal norms.

8. According to the results of a study conducted by political geographers V.A. Kolosov and J. O'Loughlin, "the economic situation and unemployment occupy, in the opinion of respondents, a top place in the list of the most serious problems of the regions of the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts. This is the opinion of 47.5% of survey participants. The state of the economy causes people more concern than armed conflicts and terrorist acts (17.0%), although it is precisely these problems that receive the greatest amount of attention in the media. The high level of corruption, closely linked to the state of the economy, also occupies a more important place in the list of problems of the region in the opinion of residents than terrorism (21.0%). Quite a few people expressed concern about crime (8.9%). Interethnic strife and the desire of radical forces to separate their republics from the Russian Federation do not seem to respondents to be a pressing problem or are seen as a derivative of the unfavorable economic situation (only 3.5%)."

9. However, the problem of unemployment in the region is perhaps the least effectively addressed: jobs are created through government efforts, essentially by expanding the already swollen bureaucracy and indirectly increasing the number of public sector employees. At the same time, a large percentage of the population (about half, according to Kolosov and O'Loughlin) considers itself poor and cannot afford basic material goods. All this points to the need for a targeted fight against unemployment in the region, not through indirect state job creation and shifting the costs of maintaining new public sector employees to taxpayers, but through stimulating

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entrepreneurship and creating a safe and comfortable environment for small businesses. According to Irina Starodubrovskaya, "the problem lies not so much in unemployment (there are plenty of jobs in agriculture, but young people are flocking to the cities) as in the lack of social mobility, which, among other things, is one of the reasons for the spread of extremism. Obstacles arising from -clannishness and -the closed nature of the social system -are truly a very serious factor."

10. Thus, many researchers, primarily economists, draw attention to the specific institutional structure in the regions of the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts, the combination of traditional institutions and modern, externally imposed rules and practices, while there are frequent cases where all-Russian institutions serve only as a cover for truly functioning traditional institutions, especially in matters of property.

11. The infusion of funds into the regions will not be effective without corresponding institutional reforms aimed at fundamentally changing the rules of life and creating truly functioning channels for social mobility. However, this is impossible without taking into account local specifics; -institutions imposed from above will, at best, fail to take root. According to the results of a study conducted by Kolosov and O'Loughlin, "the overwhelming majority of respondents do not trust federal government institutions and are much more skeptical of them than the Russian population as a whole." Ninety-one percent of respondents do not trust the police, -93.3% the courts, and 95.7% the State Duma -. As in other regions of Russia, including Moscow, people do not trust public organizations associated with instruments for self-interested politicians to achieve power (92.3%). Residents of the North Caucasus also experience strong distrust of international charitable organizations (93.3%).

12. Returning once again to the topic of developing tourism clusters in the Southern and North Caucasus Federal Districts, it's worth considering the economic feasibility of funding such projects, as well as the assumptions the Ministry of Regional Development used to justify the need to support tourism in the North Caucasus, Sochi, and Crimea. Officials explain the investment attractiveness of tourism clusters in the Southern and North Caucasus Federal Districts by the presence of primary (natural) competitive advantages, i.e., certain natural and -climatic characteristics. However, in global practice, secondary and tertiary advantages, such as transport infrastructure, safety, and communications, are prioritized. These parameters can be used to evaluate the resorts of the Southern and North Caucasus Federal Districts in a variety of ways: Presidential representatives in the Southern and North Caucasus Federal Districts, commenting on the need for an integrated approach to regional development,

spoke of the unbalanced development of Caucasian territories, where tourist and social facilities are built in one location, while transport infrastructure and communications are built in another, resulting in inaccessible access to schools or sanatoriums. Experts say the demand for resorts in the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts is an even more problematic issue, as the federal target program for developing tourism clusters is apparently being implemented solely on the basis of favorable climatic conditions, rather than any understanding of who the end consumers of the resort and ski services will be, or whether there will be any demand for them at all.

13. The question of where to find sufficiently qualified personnel for sanatoriums and resorts also remains open, given the limited availability of educational institutions in the region, as well as the reluctance of qualified personnel from other parts of the Russian Federation to migrate to the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts due to the unstable and unsafe environment. The goal of transforming the regions into a safe transport corridor linking Russia with Asia is similar in its unrealistic nature to the project of developing tourism clusters in the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts. This goal is stated in the analyzed state program for the development of the North Caucasian and South Caucasian Federal Districts until 2035. However, the threat of terrorist attacks, even assuming that the actual level of threat is much lower than media perceptions, as well as the high probability of inappropriate behavior by law enforcement officers towards transit vehicles, make the prospect of transforming the North Caucasian and South Caucasian Federal Districts into a federal transport artery quite uncertain. Federal policy aimed at increasing the region's investment attractiveness faces similar challenges: a lack of security guarantees, opaque business conditions, and repeated high-profile murders related to the seizure of control over tourism clusters do not make the Southern and North Caucasus Federal Districts more attractive to private investors. The lack of initiative on the part of private investors, coupled with the need to somehow -develop the region, has led to the creation of the North Caucasus Development Corporation, which, using private investors and budget funds (and therefore state guarantees), finances regional infrastructure projects, such as the aforementioned tourism clusters, as well as the development of production facilities.²⁶ Vnesheconombank owns 100% of the corporation's shares, which negatively impacts its independence and effectiveness. The lack of transparency in the distribution of budget funds in the region, coupled with the clan-based social organization deliberately supported by Moscow, continues -to pose a serious problem for the North Caucasus Federal District, as only in conjunction with the Southern Federal District regions would plans be successful. Federal orders and

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decrees are not implemented, budget funds are spent inappropriately—a situation generally typical of all regions of the Russian Federation. However, a distinctive feature of the Caucasus regions in this regard is the even weaker level of oversight from Moscow: the myth of the omnipotence of the vertical power structure and its effectiveness as a method of governance is particularly noticeably undermined in the Caucasus. Federal control over the region is weaker than over other federal subjects, which is complicated by the need to find a compromise with disparate and conflicting regional elites and the need to financially support these elites as part of the latest stage of the "pacification policy."

14. According to N. Zubarevich, the Russian Federation lacks a unified strategy for interaction between the center and the regions on all issues, but this problem particularly concerns funding. Thus, the greatest financial support is not always received by the regions with the greatest need, but rather by those that have managed to build a "special" relationship with Moscow, such as Tatarstan or Chechnya, and whose leaders have the opportunity to convey their wishes to the center.²⁸ This "personal relations" regime also negatively impacts the effectiveness of social mobility, competitiveness, and economic performance of the regions. Furthermore, experts are typically reluctant to engage in regulatory impact assessments in the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts, due to concerns for their own lives and safety should financial and legal inconsistencies be discovered. At first glance, it might seem that clannishness is the only sociocultural characteristic taken into account in the model of interaction between the federal center and the regions of the North Caucasian and South Caucasian Federal Districts; however, this is not entirely true. A focus on the clan system is characteristic of Moscow's policy toward all Russian regions and is not a distinctive feature of "Caucasian" policy, as the practice of appeasing regional elites is widespread not only in the Caucasus but also in other regions of the Russian Federation. In other words, Moscow's consideration of the traditional structure of Caucasian societies does not solely indicate a consciously adopted model of interaction, as this practice is widespread nationwide. Among the cultural characteristics of regions not accounted for in current state policy, we suggest a particularly close look at the factor of regional political culture. This factor influences not only the specifics of voting in a region, although it is also worth noting. For example, the regions of the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts are characterized by a more conformist vote, expressed in high support for the current government, as well as the widespread use of administrative resources and other "unclean" electoral techniques, even violence, especially at the municipal level. A high percentage of unemployment and the overwhelming majority of the population employed in

the public sector also make for very convenient social groups from a governance perspective. Characteristics of regional political culture, such as a lack of trust in the government and a reluctance to participate in the country's political life, allow us to characterize this political culture as patriarchal (traditional). Interestingly, today we can say that the federal government generally disregards the specifics of regional political cultures, preferring to delegate this complex task to regional authorities, who are much more familiar with the specifics of the region. The federal government also generally disregards the religious identities of the regions when formulating state policy. This disregard for the religious identities of the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts is particularly evident in regular conflicts between believers and law enforcement agencies. Moreover, as previously mentioned, issues of law enforcement abuses are hushed up, and issues of reforming the management of law enforcement agencies in the North Caucasian Federal District are not raised publicly. Discontent among the populations of the Caucasus republics stems from the fact that law enforcement officers are predominantly ethnic Russians and are unfamiliar with local traditions, customs, and religious norms, leading to numerous problems. At the same time, the leadership of the security forces is reluctant to accept large numbers of local residents into their ranks, fearing the emergence of a "fifth column" among law enforcement officers.

15. In summary, it is important to note that there are numerous economic, social, political, and cultural factors that are not taken into account in the state policy being pursued in relation to the regions of the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts. This, in turn, leads, at a minimum, to the failure to achieve the stated goals, and, at a maximum, to the escalation of the conflict, exacerbated, for example, by the confrontation between local residents and security forces, who are culturally alien to them.

Conclusion

Ultimately, we will need to formulate recommendations for the federal center regarding which previously unaccounted factors, and how they should be taken into account when developing and implementing state policy in relation to the regions of the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts, namely:

Firstly, we believe it's crucial to conduct a high-quality, professional assessment at the initial stage of formulating state policy towards the regions of the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts. It's also crucial that the assessment involve not only representatives of the Moscow expert community, but also experts located directly in the regions and familiar with local specifics.

Secondly -, a national development strategy for specific regions, which essentially encompasses all

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regions of the Russian Federation, should be based on the most comprehensive possible set of regional characteristics, including economic, social, political, and, no less important, cultural specifics. As we have already seen in the analysis, ignoring any of these factors can lead, at best, to a lack of positive change, and, at worst, to the emergence of negative consequences that will be difficult to address. It is characteristic that national strategies include a mandatory section describing the problematic situation and the most pressing issues, but lack a description of regional specifics. It would be advisable to develop a unique matrix that would serve as the basis for a uniform expert assessment of the region's specific characteristics in the above-mentioned areas.

Third -, we believe that law enforcement reform is inevitable, particularly in the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts. When over 90% of a region's population distrusts law enforcement, this is a clear and tangible signal from the authorities to implement proactive reforms. Continuing to ignore this problem and exclude it from public political discourse will only lead to negative consequences, possibly leading to increased violence in these districts. We see the following as the key areas for change in law enforcement: it is crucial to improve the overall level of knowledge and broaden the horizons of law enforcement personnel. They must be familiar with the cultural characteristics of the region through the introduction of mandatory courses on the culture of the North Caucasus republics taught by civilian sociologists and cultural experts. We also believe it is essential to increase the percentage of "local" law enforcement personnel. This measure will reduce tensions between the local population and law enforcement officers, who will no longer be perceived solely as "external invaders" and enemies. Furthermore, the problem of ignorance of local cultural traditions is automatically resolved. The problem of the emergence of a "fifth column" is then proposed to be addressed by raising the general level of education among law enforcement officers and promoting civic, rather than ethnic, values among them. Law enforcement agencies in the Southern and North Caucasian Federal Districts should be under greater control of the center or regional authorities, since in the current unclear situation with a vertical power structure that exists de jure but is de facto dysfunctional, it is often unclear who controls the actions of law enforcement, or whether anyone controls them -at all. In general, the task of protecting the population from law enforcement abuses, as in other regions of the Russian Federation, is becoming more important, replacing the task of combating organized crime, which was characteristic of the 2000s. In this regard, it is imperative to note the need to build relationships with regional elites according to new principles, since it is clear that the existing model of distributing resources among key clans, aimed at

preventing a war of all against all, is not sufficiently effective. In general, the Ministry of Regional Development can begin working on key areas of interaction with regional elites with the involvement of the expert community.

Fourth -, and finally, it seems essential to prioritize funding for infrastructure projects over aimless cash injections into the region. Moreover, infrastructure projects should be understood in a slightly different light than the current government. The need for infrastructure projects should also be assessed with the participation of the expert community across various categories, including the population's need for and ability to use the new facility. Social infrastructure (education, healthcare, etc.) is of particular importance for the regions of the North Caucasus and Southern Federal Districts. It is in these areas that the regions of the Southern and North Caucasus Federal Districts lag significantly behind the Russian average, and it is education and healthcare that have a significant impact on the population's attitude toward the government and life satisfaction.

In this context, N. Zubarevich proposes prioritizing social policy measures for regional development over investment in the real sector. According to the researcher, the state is unable to effectively invest in the real sector, while policies aimed at improving social capital (i.e., raising the level of education, the quality of healthcare services, etc.) produce truly positive results. The federal center's strategy for job creation also needs to change – moving from direct or indirect budgetary financing of new jobs to creating favorable conditions for entrepreneurship and enhancing citizen self-organization. This objective is closely linked to the reform of law enforcement agencies and, in essence, is doomed without qualitative changes in the law enforcement and judicial systems, as the main guarantors of private property protection. We believe it is necessary to emphasize the importance of institutional changes in the region, which are, in essence, fundamental, since no "sustainable development," declared as the main objective in the federal target program, is possible without properly functioning institutions. We believe the most effective and appropriate method is the intelligent integration of traditional institutions with national ones, so that the new institutions become an integral part of the region's cultural environment and do not provoke rejection. In conclusion, we would like to note that strategic government documents on interaction with the regions of the North Caucasus and Southern Federal Districts can be considered insufficiently developed and of insufficient quality, namely:

Firstly - the degree of potential regulatory impact is reduced by -the absence of specific methods for achieving the stated goals in the national program, despite the very specific goals being set. This combination of specific goals and vague methods

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shifts responsibility for achieving the goals solely to regional authorities, who are forced to independently develop methods for achieving the targets;

Secondly - a characteristic feature of government strategies is the fundamental disregard for regional specifics: despite the presence in program documents of descriptions of key regional problems, an analysis of regional specifics (institutional, cultural, social) is present only at the level of a "brief overview" of the region, which is certainly insufficient for the development of an adequate strategy for socio- -economic development.

It is curious that the strategic documents being analyzed ignore not only the cultural characteristics of the North Caucasus region, which have a very serious impact on all spheres of life in these societies through existing institutional structures, but also socio- -economic characteristics, such as the causes of unemployment and the specifics of employment in the region or the presence of demand for sanatoriums. -Tourist services. All of the above factors, as well as many others, have a significant impact on both the strategy implementation process and the potential outcomes. In other words, without a comprehensive preliminary analysis of regional specifics, developing a national strategy for the socio- -economic development of the North Caucasus and Southern Federal Districts appears a political gamble. Initially, we were guided by the assumption that state policy toward the North Caucasus and Southern Federal Districts fails to take into account

certain -important factors that negatively impact policy outcomes. It was assumed that the center ignores cultural specifics due -to their complexity and ambiguous impact on socio --economic processes, or because culture is not a "sphere of interest" for the Ministry of Regional Development, which is responsible for territorial development. However, it was discovered that regional institutional characteristics are also not considered in strategic documents. Consequently, the results of applying the same measures in the North Caucasus and other parts of the Russian Federation may differ significantly, at least due to -differences in informal rules of the game and sustainable working procedures. However, the socio- -economic characteristics of the north -The Ministry of Regional Development's analysis of the Caucasus republics, which fall directly under the authority of this agency, is far from exhaustive in its strategic documents. Ignoring regional specifics is not a distinctive feature of the Center's policy toward the Caucasus: regional cultural and institutional characteristics are not taken into account when developing federal strategies and target programs, in principle, for all regions of the Russian Federation. However, in the case of the North Caucasus, this disregard for cultural and political- -economic specifics is compounded by significantly more complex conditions and leads to significantly more serious consequences. In the North Caucasus, Sochi, and Crimea, regional specifics simply cannot be ignored.

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