

RACISM IN RUSSIA AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE CAUCASIAN REGION AND PEOPLES¹

Can KAKIŞIM²

Abstract

Nowadays, Russia is one of those countries which crucially suffer from the racist sentiments and movements. In this country, radical right has an extensive social base and both ruling party and some other political entities can put forward examples of extreme nationalism. Caucasian-origin people have been the most negatively influenced group from these approaches since the beginning. The Caucasian immigrants from Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as the Northern Caucasians already holding Russian citizenship have been target of numerous violent attacks especially in the 2000s. At the same time, rising racism in Russia strengthens expectations from the government to follow more active imperialist policies as racist groups more intensely defend and voice the rights of the Russians living in the former Soviet republics. Furthermore, these groups provide an additional fighting power in the clashes between Russia and post-Soviet countries and in this sense, they compose a significant dimension of the interstate relations in this geography.

Keywords: Russia, Racism, Caucasia, Immigration, United Russia

1 Makalenin Geliş Tarihi: 15.04.2018

Makalenin Kabul Tarihi: 22.01.2019

2 Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Karabük Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü Öğretim Üyesi. e-mail: cankakisim@karabuk.edu.tr

Atıf: Kakişım C. (2019). Racism in Russia and its effects on the caucasian region and peoples. *Tesam Akademi Dergisi*, 6(1), 97-121. <http://dx.doi.org/10.30626/tesamakademi.528002>

Rusya’da Irkçılık ve Bunun Kafkasya Bölgesine ve Halklarına Etkisi

Öz

Rusya son yıllarda ırkçı düşünceler ve hareketler sebebiyle en fazla sıkıntı yaşayan ülkelerden biri konumundadır. Bu ülkede radikal sağ geniş bir toplumsal tabana sahiptir ve hem iktidar partisi hem de diğer bazı siyasi oluşumlar aşırı milliyetçilik örnekleri ortaya koyabilmektedir. Kafkas kökenliler, başlangıçtan beri, bu yaklaşımlardan en olumsuz biçimde etkilenen grup olmuştur. Gürcistan, Ermenistan ve Azerbaycan’dan bu ülkeye gelen göçmenlerle Rus vatandaşlığına sahip Kuzey Kafkasyalılar 2000’li yıllarda çok sayıda şiddet eyleminin hedefi haline gelmiştir. Aynı zamanda, Rusya’da yükselen ırkçılık, aşırı sağ grupların eski Sovyet cumhuriyetlerinde yaşayan Rusların haklarını daha güçlü olarak savunmaları ve seslendirmelerinden dolayı, hükümetin daha aktif emperyalist politikalar izlemesi yönündeki beklentileri güçlendirmektedir. Üstelik, bu gruplar Rusya ve post-Sovyet ülkeleri arasındaki çatışmalarda destekleyici savaş grupları olarak da işlev görmekte ve böylece bu coğrafyada devletlerarası ilişkilerin kayda değer bir boyutu olarak öne çıkmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rusya, Irkçılık, Kafkasya, Göç, Birleşik Rusya

Introduction

During the 1990s ideological conflicts were replaced with identity issues and societies began to identify themselves more intensely in the context of their ethnic, national and religious characteristics than before. In such a period which brought identity differences to the prominence, it was not surprising that socio-economic problems gave rise to xenophobia and anti-immigrant attitudes. Indeed, in the post-Cold War era, ethno-cultural issues became the most common cause of the political violence and racism escalated all over the world. This point necessitates a special focus on the Russian Federation as radical right gained considerable power in this country and accompanied with a heavy wave of violence in the post-Soviet period. Escalation of extreme nationalism and racism in Russia made great influence on the Caucasian people living in the Russian cities and on the Caucasian region as a whole. This development represents the primary cause of severe attacks to the Caucasian immigrants in the country and opened door to new dimensions in the relations between Russia and the Caucasian states.

This study is prepared to answer the basic questions about the emergence and rise of racism in Russia as an acute problem and its main influences on the regional affairs of Caucasia and on the Caucasian people. In the first part of the study, process of “racist movements” growth in Russia is going to be dealt with and principal political bodies which use and empower the radical right and extreme nationalism; and the essences of their ideological orientation will be elaborated within this chapter. In the second part, process of racialization of the Caucasians into hostile elements in the Russian territory is going to be examined. To this end, internal and external factors that strengthened the opposition to the Caucasian-origin people in the country are tried to be made clear. In the third section, eventual consequences of racism in Russia over the Caucasians and the Caucasian region are handled. At this point, firstly, sorts of racist assaults on the minorities and immigrants of Caucasian origin and evolution of these violent actions in the course of time will be told as the most direct effects of racism in Russia on the Caucasian people. This chapter also deals with the impact of rising racism over the Russian foreign policy and use of racist groups within the regional clashes.

Rise of Racism in Russia

In the Soviet era, it was thought that the national question had been resolved in the most ideal way across the Russian territory and it was

assumed that thanks to the understanding of internationalism and “fraternity of peoples”, an ultimate remedy was introduced against racism and racist actions prevailing in other parts of the world. According to this assumption, Soviet people had fought against mighty historical difficulties by putting their ethnic differences aside and established a strong unity under the flag of communism. In this period, there were even some Afro-Americans who choose to live in the Soviet Union based on the allegation that racism was completely externalized there. Soviet leaders did not establish a relationship of inequality against either these foreigners or non-Russian subjects within the country and avoided placing the Russians as the supreme nation. The Russians were rather illustrated as a guiding community or a “big brother” since they were the most historically experienced ethnic group in the Soviet Union. Although they were treated as the “first among equals”, this position had not been based on any assumption of racial superiority (Roman, 2002, pp. 2-6).

However, the approach of patriotism and civic nationalism with regard to the cult of common victory against fascism in Russia has nowadays gained a content based much more on national supremacy and now it largely has an ethnic meaning. In fact, the Constitution of the Russian Federation includes various provisions restricting racism. For example, Article 19 prescribes that the state secures equality of people and citizens' rights and freedom regardless of their gender, ethnicity, nationality, language, origin, possession and rank, residence, religion, conviction or membership of public associations and bans any limitation of peoples' rights on social, ethnic, national, linguistic or religious grounds. Additionally, Article 29 prohibits propaganda and agitation on ethnic, national, religious or linguistic supremacy and strictly condemns all sorts of activities which would allow ethnic, national, religious senses of hate among people (The Constitution of Russian Federation, 1993). Nevertheless, although the constitution contains certain principles along these lines, problems created by the rise of radical-right wing since the 1990s suggested that aforesaid provisions were seriously breached (Asker, 2016, p. 176). Today, a considerable part of the Russians identifies themselves with “what they are not” with respect to “others” rather than “what they are”, and these inclinations depend upon the racial prejudices which are put in practice at both social dimension and official level.

The collapse of the Soviet Union indicates a significant milestone in the development of the radical-right wing in Russia as the disappearance of this state from the stage of history initiated a mental transformation in all

aspects in the country. The trauma caused by the fall of Russia from the great power (*velikoderzhavnost*) status and the establishment of a Western influence across the “natural” Russian zone of influence has triggered the mythicizing of national past from a romantic point of view. In this regard, the ideological vacuum created by the fall of socialism was filled with ethnic Russian nationalism. Indeed, aftermath of the fragmentation of the Soviet Union, the process of self-reinvention experienced in other former Soviet Republics existed for the Russians as well, and the Russian people also began to construct their national identity. In line with this purpose, as it was inspired from the European racist movements, the Russians were portrayed as the purest members of the white race by emphasizing their Aryan origins and Slavs’ natural skills to establish civilization (Laruelle, 2008, pp. 292-293).

In the meantime, the great economic problems which broke out following the collapse of the Soviet Union should be accepted as another principal cause for the development of the racist movement. Economic reforms put in action in the 1990s had not made any positive change on the daily life of the majority of population and deteriorated the distribution of income further in Russia (Leonova, 2009, p. 145). Accordingly, failure of these first-wave liberal reforms enhanced feelings of hopelessness and alienation among the citizens and allowed extremist ideologies to find a foundation. High unemployment rates in the country resulted in the quest for belonging and self-respect and thus, it became an essential factor cultivating nationalism and radicalism. The relevant studies clearly suggest that Russian youths from the lower socio-economic sections are more prone to racist views and tend to join racially motivated violence actions more intensely (Killeen, 2012, p. 41).

Under these circumstances, the precursor skinhead gangs emerged in 1995 as a dangerous subcultural group and committed their first attacks in St. Petersburg (Varga, 2008, p. 566). In this period, the aforesaid groups were mostly isolated from each other and they were acting independently since there was very low coordination among them. However, after the 2000s, owing to the proliferation of computer usage, these gangs set up more intimate relations and eventually racist violence took off across Russia to the highest levels (Zuev, 2010, p. 266). The number of officially registered racist homicides committed in the period of 2004-09 in Russia was 1,5 per week and this rate was very high even when compared with relevant statistics from any other country in the world (Umland, 2010).

In regard to the use of Russian nationalism at the official level, the role of

the president Vladimir Putin and the United Russia, which is the ruling party under his control, should be emphasized, primarily because “men of power” effectively utilize Russian nationalism in order to accomplish their political goals. Especially, the discourse of building the Great Russia once again with reference to the Russians’ historical “world mission” has been beneficial for Putin’s political agenda. Thus, a strong patriotic atmosphere was created in the country and nationalist sentiments have been continuously imposed on the society through the mass media, which was largely submitted to the regime. Such a social condition is highly functional for Putin to legitimize its authoritarian regime because it makes easier to discard of the opponents on the basis of allegation that they have violated these patriotic limits and it provides a psychological satisfaction to the members belonging to the low income groups as their attention could be distracted from the unfair distribution of income to the political and ethnic issues. In this context, the decreasing population rate of Russians is emphasized to provoke xenophobia against the Southerners, and social consolidation is ensured especially by suppressing the minority movements (Laruelle, 2009, p. 25).

The regime, along these objectives, also established a youth organization called Nashi (Ours) in 2005. This organization was founded in the period of “colour revolutions” across the former Soviet territory, which brought pro-Western parties to power in the neighbouring countries. In this sense, it had the aim of preventing similar developments in Russia and succeeded in gathering 60,000 people at its first massive meeting in Moscow. Nashi is successful when it comes to building the domination of regime’s ideology and nationalism on the streets as it successfully applies violence and some revolutionary methods to mobilize pro-regime masses (Horvath, 2013, p. 85-90).

The second political party, which needs to be brought to attention, is the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) whose leader is the radical nationalist politician Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. This party has managed to exist in the Russian Parliament, Duma, since the beginning. While this political party had a liberal image and supported private ownership in the 1990s, in the course of time it repositioned itself as the voice of economically disadvantaged masses which were negatively affected by the policies of privatization (Cichock, 2013, p. 72). In accordance with the provocative personality of Zhirinovskiy, LDPR has always expressed its xenophobic tendencies and even clearly stated that Russia needs to be cleansed from “inassimilable elements” such as immigrants from Caucasia and Central

Asia (Laruelle, 2009, pp. 27-28). In this respect, it can be argued that the policies of LDPR, as a party represented in the parliament, have become quite effective in the rise of racist and anti-immigrant ideas within the country. In line with this approach, the foreign policy orientation of LDPR poses radically nationalist views and it obviously displays an imperialist character. Because the party considers Russia as the centre of the Eastern Christian civilization, it even promotes the target of bringing the former Soviet Union Republics under a single democratic state once again (Shiraev, 2010, p. 165).

At this point, Rodina (Motherland) is another important political party which also has representation in the parliament. Although it was a Kremlin-linked party and included many sects from both nationalist and leftist groups, Rodina significantly grew because of its anti-immigrant and ethno-centric nationalist approach in a short period of time. Then, the party succeeded in becoming the fourth political party in Russia by capturing 9,2% of overall votes in 2003 general election. The youth wing of the party is referred to as “Patriotic Greenpeace”, as it puts forward the aim of cleaning the Moscow market from non-Russian traders who were thought as “garbage”. This party’s ascent can be seen an indicator of the growth of radical nationalism in the country by the 2000s, but its success would induce a sense of threat from the government and thus the party would be banned from joining 2005 elections (Killeen, 2012, p. 42).

The essential actors which should be addressed behind these parties are two political organizations which could find ground to act freely owing to radical nationalism spread across the society largely by United Russia and LDPR: Russian National Unity (RNU) and National Bolshevik Party (NBP). These two parties were established by the former members of the Pamyat group formed in the 1980s as a precursor of the modern Russian radical-right wing (Varga, 2008, s. 566). RNU, under the leadership of Alexander Barkashov, deliberately displays a neo-Nazi character as its principles have apparent traces of the general program of the Nazi Party and it uses certain symbols of the Nazi such as swastika, the Hitlerian salute and the paramilitary uniform for members (Laruelle, 2009, p. 30).

Undoubtedly, the existence of such a party and its social support in Russia are very interesting when it is thought that Russia had lost more than 20 million citizens against the Nazi offensive in the World War II and Adolf Hitler had disgraced the Slavs as “subhuman”. However, in spite of this fact, some of the Russian skinhead gangs are composed of this party’s members. Russians are illustrated by Barkashov as innocent human

beings who could be easily seduced but are always ready to fight for high ideals and Barkashov regards the RNU as their guardian which will guide the nation and give them their national conscious back (Romov, 2001, pp. 69-72). RNU performs this aim on the basis of “master race” ideology and claims that it fights against threats of minorities and surrounding communities who are aiming the ultimate destruction of Russia.

Eduard Limonov’s NBP is distinguished from RNU, firstly by having more educated and intellectual people and secondly by relying on different ideological sources. NBP follows an approach built on the synthesis of Russian nationalism and Soviet-Russian counter culture and it includes revolutionary and radical elements from both right and left wings (Mathyl, 2002, p. 63). This party grounded on the doctrines of Alexander Dugin, who is well-known for his radical nationalist and neo-Eurasian ideas, envisages the foundation of a dictatorial regime in the country and highlights the fact that internal problems could be resolved by rejuvenation of the traditional Great Russian imperialism (Laruelle, 2009, p. 31). Although NBP was banned in 2007 because of its extremist discourses and actions, it still maintains its activities at the public stage.

In addition to the existence of such political formations, it is equally important that views of these groups are being shared by a substantial portion of the society. According to the relevant studies, the rate of the Russian population who believes that there could be a large-scale bloodshed in Russia because of ethnic issues is thought to be 56%. The rate of the population who finds the motto “Russia for Russians” correct is about 60% and the rate of the population who thinks that the government needs to stop the influx of non-resident aliens is close to 70% (Russian Analytical Digest, 2011, pp. 10-11). In this sense, the majority of the Russians supports the ideas and concerns of neo-Nazi groups even if they see their approaches rough or they avoid giving direct support to them. As the statistics indicate, the Russian public opinion considers these groups as an unreasonably radical version of the majority’s reasonable xenophobia (Verkhovsky, 2009, p. 93). This social substructure could be held as the primary factor explaining racism and racist violence in Russia to upgrade such a high level.

The Reasons of the Racism against the Caucasians in Russia

Racist sentiments which developed in Russia across the 1990s and reached its peak by the 2000s, were manifested mostly in hatred and violent actions against the Caucasians including immigrants from Georgia,

Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as the Northern Caucasians already holding a Russian citizenship. Especially, the Caucasians with non-Slavic physical characteristics such as dark hair, eyes and skin, frequently became the target of regular assaults. As they were called “blacks” like the Africans by Russian racists, these people were categorized as members of the criminal underworld, as people of African origin were typically considered criminals by racists within Russia. In this sense, no difference was made among Caucasian peoples in terms of being potential criminals in the eye of Russian racists and this tendency clearly indicates the racialization of former “little brothers” to the fierce enemies. While Azerbaijanis were previously known as artists, Armenians as poets, Georgians as musicians and Uzbeks as dancers, in the post-Soviet period, Azerbaijanis are perceived as drug-traffickers, Armenians as bookmakers, Georgians as car thieves and Uzbeks as weapons dealers (Roman, 2002, p. 6).

However, at this point the most significant problem is again that the aforesaid ethnic prejudice does not only belong to active racist groups, but also it is shared by the majority of the Russian people and by most of the government officials as well. In September 1999, aftermath of the terror attacks that hit Moscow, pursuit of Federal Security Service authorities towards all Chechen people and even all Caucasians instead of only Chechen terrorists and the Moscow mayor, Yuri Luzhkov’s precautions to limit the entrance of Caucasians into the city could be regarded as the most evident examples of this approach (Roman, 2002, p. 1). Similarly, in 2002, it was also remarkable that the governor of Krasnodarskiy Kray in Kuban and the head of the Committee of the State Duma on Nationalities Issues, Alexander Tkachev claimed that surnames following Caucasian naming customs such as “ian”, “dze”, “shvili” and “ogly” were illegal as much as the people who carried those names (Zakharov, 2015, p. 1).

In the meantime, the statistics reported by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance under the body of Council of Europe were also indicating that the Caucasians and especially Muslims were the most vulnerable groups against racism in Russia (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, 2006, pp. 22-23). Likewise, according to a survey conducted by the one of the prominent public survey institutions of Russia, Levada Center, the Caucasians were the first group among the undesirable immigrants for the Russians. 54% of the respondents were of the opinion that there should be certain limitations against the settlement of the Caucasians in Russia (Şamilkızı, 2013). Among the aforesaid

Caucasians, Azerbaijanis were the first group and 78,9% of Muscovites stated that they were against the existence of Azerbaijani immigrants in the city (Yudina, 2005, p. 598). Again, Chechens, Armenians, Georgians, Dagestanis and Ossetians incurred these similar xenophobic approaches.

It could be propounded that these hostile feelings against the Caucasians are subject to three essential reasons. The first one of these causes is the Chechen-Russian Conflict. The First Chechen-Russian War of 1994-96 which resulted in de facto independence of the Chechens remarkably intensified nationalist senses among the Russians and opposition against Caucasian communities. Substantial terror attacks experienced during and after the Second Chechen-Russian War in the period of 1999-2000 have strengthened this public view further. For instance, apartment bombings in the cities of Moscow, Buynaksk and Volgodonsk in September 1999 resulted in about 300 casualties. Additionally, other heavy terrorist attacks were the killing of 133 and 350 hostages during Dubrovka Theatre siege in Moscow in October 2002 and Beslan school siege in September 2004; a bus bombing with 8 casualties in Togliatti City, in Southern Russia in August 2007; an attack to Moscow-St. Petersburg high-speed train line with 28 casualties in November 2009; suicide blast at the Moscow Subway which left 40 dead and 100 injured in March 2010 and bombing attack to the international arrivals section of the Domodedovo, the largest airport of Russia, that left 37 dead in January 2011 (Snetkov, 2011, p. 2). Another suicide attack to Volgograd caused 34 deaths in December 2013. With regard to the study results reported by Levada Center in 2011, a great deal of Russian citizens under the influence of these terrorist actions were expecting new assaults in Moscow and other large cities. While the Russians believed that their relatives and they could be terror victim, they were not hopeful that government bodies were able to save them from such attacks (Russian Analytical Digest, 2011, p. 5). Thus, chernofobiya (a fear of dark skinned peoples) and Kavkazfobiya (a fear of individuals of Caucasian nationality) were on the rise and hostility towards Chechen terror groups was generalized against all the Chechens and other Caucasian peoples (Roman, 2002, p. 12).

The second reason was that rising Islamophobia all over the world started to proliferate across Russia as well in the post-Soviet period. Indeed, this factor was more significant in comparison with the Chechen-Russian Wars because during these armed conflicts a number of Caucasian Muslims joined the Chechens against the Russians and thus Islamic identity emerged as a common value rather than nationalist feelings. For

these wars, Islam was not only employed to reassure fighters but also to bring Muslim youth of Caucasia together by overcoming ethnic and national distinctions and it was the most important incentive to continue the war (Kisriev, 2011, p. 69). On the other hand, in the post-Soviet era, even if they were not regularly visiting the church, the Russians were increasingly identifying themselves as Orthodox and implying their ethnic Russian identity. For this reason, in addition to being non-Russians, the Caucasians faced racism because they had a hostile religion. Having dark skin was equalized to being Muslim and loyalty of the Caucasians to their religious identity was overemphasized. At this point, the assault on an imam and his pregnant wife in Kostroma in April 2007 was a meaningful example since attackers were shouting to the victims “go back to your Muslim country” (The Russian Federation Hate Crime Survey, 2008, p. 5).

Besides the Chechen-Russian conflict, the terrorist attacks of September 11 also boosted the hostility against Muslims and, accordingly, the Caucasians. Despite the existence of only four mosques in Moscow where there were about 2,5 million Muslims both legal and illegal, the declaration of the Moscow mayor, Sergey Sobyenin, in his press statement in March 2013 to imply that there was no need to build new mosques in the city, directly indicated an Islamophobic tendency (rt.com, 2013). It should be stressed that the increasing proportion of Muslim population in Russia with respect to ethnic Russians would also be effective in the development of Islamophobic feelings. Moreover, the confessional enclaves created because of the migration of ethnic Russians from the regions dominated by Muslims and conversion of some of them, especially their marriageable daughters into Islam further elevated the perception of threat among racist groups (Sokolovskiy, 2013, p. 185).

The third and the most significant reason of rising racism against the Caucasians is the high immigration rate from Caucasia to the Russian metropolises. Russia allows immigrants from all over the world and it is ranked among the countries receiving the most immigrants. However, the Caucasians and Central Asians are the largest ones among these immigrant groups. The most important reason of this status is that citizens of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) are not expected to have visa to enter Russia. Because of their hopes to have better life standards, Caucasian and Central Asian immigrants come to Russia with their exclusive visa exemption privileges and they find employment opportunities in all sectors of economy. According to various statistics of the Ministry of Labour and Economics, 8% to 10% of total labour force in

Russia is comprised of legal immigrants (Zuev, 2010, p. 265).

Additionally, it is known that high numbers of illegal immigrants from these territories have illegally crossed the border into Russia. The majority of the Caucasians arriving into Russia are looking after an employment opportunity and therefore, the proportion of Caucasian illegal immigrants and Caucasian illegal employees is quite similar. Illegal immigrants work without any social security and they are exploited by both employers and some corrupt members of the police force (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, 2006, p. 17). However, despite these sorts of exploitation, there is a common belief that the Russians suffer from unemployment because of immigrants' presence. Large proportions of population of Moscow, where almost half of overall immigrants live, believe that immigrants increase the crime rate, upset the balance of the labour market, cause the corruption in business and propagate drug trafficking (Yudina, 2005, p. 600).

Regarding the immigration issue, the most prominent actor in Russia is the Movement Against Illegal Immigration (DPNI). DPNI is not organized under a legal status similar to the regular NGO's or political parties. This group has a flexible network structure which brings radical nationalist Russian groups together (Zuev, 2010, p. 269). The most distinctive characteristic of this organization is that it does not follow traditional anti-Semitic or anti-Western discourse; instead it is directly against immigrants. One of the primary organizations in Russia which has conducted studies on racism, SOVA Center, stated in its 2005 report that DPNI oriented its efforts to more visible enemies like Caucasian and Central Asian guest workers in order to ensure the necessary social mobilization (Varga, 2008, p. 567). DPNI was also the main organizer of the Russian Marches of 2005-2008, one of the most extensive public protest events against the problems supposedly created by illegal immigrants especially coming from Caucasia. For the approach of DPNI, there is no distinction between the citizens of independent Caucasian states and Russian citizens with Northern Caucasian origin; they are all considered in the category of the "others". Partly as a result of such groups' activities, dislike and opposition against Caucasian immigrants constantly remain strong in Russia.

Effects of Russian Racism on the Caucasians and the Caucasian Region

The most direct consequence of the rising racism against the Caucasian people in Russia was the refreshment of racist violence on these ethnic

groups since the beginning. Indeed, large numbers of immigrants who came from Caucasia to Russia for work or study have been victims of racist attacks and the level of violence of these assaults has progressively increased. Even if they did not have any political stance or even a strong ethnic identity, members of Caucasian nationalities were exposed to serious acts of humiliation and violence since they were perceived as foreign invaders by the racists.

In the course of time, precursor random assaults on the Caucasians turned into collective racist violent actions. The first incident in this form was recorded in Kondopoga, in September 2006. As a result of an ordinary fight in an Azerbaijani-owned restaurant located in Kondopoga City in the Republic of Karelia, in Northwest Russia, two Russians were killed and some of others were injured by a group of Chechens. This incident resulted in an extensive violent uprising which may be called as pogrom, against the Northern Caucasians in the city. Within the scope of the uprising, violent actions targeted both the restaurant and neighbouring Chechen businesses and seriously spread because of the arrival and participation of nationalist groups coming from Moscow and members of DPNI in the events. However, the most important point here was that in addition to neo-Nazi gangs, regular ethnic Russians were also involved in these attacks. This violent uprising was calmed down only by the expulsion of all the Chechens from the city through an official order (Zakharov, 2015, p. 112). About at the same time, because of the homicide of two Russian students in Stavropol City located in Southern Russia, similar violent actions against the Chechens arose and again dismissal of non-Russian groups from the city was requested. These examples are so crucial in terms of indicating the broad social ground of racist prejudice against the Caucasians in Russia.

Among the incidents with tremendous effects on the social order, the ones which erupted in Moscow, in December 2010 should especially be emphasized. On this date, a severe fight broke out between a group of Muscovites and the Northern Caucasians in the north of the city and during the combat, Aslan Cherkesov, a man from Kabardino-Balkaria region killed by gunfire Yegor Sviridov, an ethnic Russian. The position of Sviridov as a prominent member of the fan club of Spartak Moscow, one of the leading football teams of the city, further increased the tension. Although Cherkesov was taken into custody and he declared that homicide was an act of self-defence, supporters of Spartak Moscow objected to this explanation and initiated protests on December 7 by blocking some

streets. A few days later, they organized another and much more extensive meeting at Moscow's famous Manezhnaya Square (Asker, 2016, p. 178). During this demonstration, about 5,000 protesters shouted slogans like "Russia for Russians" and "Moscow for Muscovites" and they made racist insults against the Caucasians. They also clashed with special police force called OMON and randomly attacked the people who had non-Slavic physical characteristics in the environment (Zakharov, 2015, p. 109).

Although there had been various minor and medium-scaled similar incidents before, these events were notable as the top-ranking state officials had to make public declarations regarding the issue. President Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin, who was the Prime Minister at the time, stated that people responsible for these racist attacks were to be found and punished and that similar protests were not going to be tolerated at all. They also emphasized that the use of disproportioned force and the corrupt law enforcement issues would be resolved (Zakharov, 2015, p. 121). Nevertheless, on December 12, tens of violent Muscovites came out on the streets once again and attacked to people who were thought to be immigrants and a person of Kyrgyz origin was stabbed to death. Moreover, because Putin visited Sviridov's grave, laid flowers and stood in silent homage there, some suspicions and comments were raised that Kremlin was guarding and encouraging racist groups and thus paving the way for new violent events (Asker, 2016, p. 179).

A similar incident like the ones experienced at the Manezhnaya Square occurred in October 2013, after the murder of another ethnic Russian, Yegor Sherbakov, in West Biryulevo, in the south of Moscow. Tension in the region was intensified after the statement of Sherbakov's girlfriend who was with him when he was killed, which indicated that the killer was a Caucasian man. Under these circumstances, protests emerged in front of the police building and the protestors requested strict measures to be taken regarding the immigrant laws and demanded that the Pokrovka flea market, in which mainly immigrants were employed, to be closed. However, in a short period of time, these protests turned into attacks of youngsters, in sportswear and having their faces covered, against all immigrants. Skinhead gangs raided in the markets where immigrants worked, attacked all Caucasian people at various times and clashed with police forces intervening in the incidents. This uprising would result in the closure of Pokrovka flea market where hundreds of illegal immigrants were working. Especially after the arrest of Azerbaijani citizen Orxan Zeynalov, who was the alleged killer of Sherbakov, the racist attacks in

Moscow, Sverdlovsk and St. Petersburg became more violent, a large number of Azerbaijani people were assaulted and more than a hundred of them were deported (Asker, 2016, p. 180).

While Azerbaijani media and the public opinion demanded the killer in the West Biryulevo to be found immediately, at the same time they emphasized that Orxan Zeynalov was indeed selected as a victim to intensify the oppression policies and attacks against the Caucasians, especially Azerbaijani people in Russia. Accordingly, the events experienced following the murder were, in fact, confirming this hypothesis. For instance, LDPR leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, who kept his usual disgracing tone regarding the Caucasians after the Biryulevo incident, stated that the Northern Caucasia had to be blocked with barbed wire and suggested limiting the population growth in that area –only two children to be allowed per family. Nadir Agayev, the spokesman of Azerbaijani diaspora in Kaliningrad where more than 5,000 Azerbaijanis live, declared that oppression on his fellow nationals intensified in the wake of the Biryulevo events (Şamilkızı, 2013). Following these incidents, as an individual example, Mais Kurbanov who was one of Azerbaijani members of the Russian Migrants Federation, was shot in November 2013 (themoscowtimes.com, 2013).

In the meantime, for the radical nationalists, dark-skinned women are also posing a danger to the law and order of the Russian cities as well as immigrant males, who are viewed as potential members of crime organizations. It was believed that women make their husbands' stay in Moscow persistent and this results in the birth of new minority members who would be the source of incoming problems in the future. Moreover, dark-skinned women were considered as a direct threat to the racial purity and whiteness of the Slavs in case they live with the Russian men. In accordance with these views, racist attacks to the immigrants from the CIS countries are not only targeting adult males but also they may hurt women and even children as it could be observed in many events (Roman, 2002, pp. 10-11). For the latter, the wildly murder of a 9-year-old Tajik girl Khursheda Sultonova in St. Petersburg, in February 2004 (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, 2006, p. 32) and the assault on three Azerbaijani minors in Moscow in April 2008 by unidentified skinhead gangs can be shown among the clearest examples (The Russian Federation Hate Crime Survey, 2008, p. 4).

In this framework, the rise of extreme nationalism and racism in Russia introduced a process of great oppression and violence against Caucasian

immigrant and minority groups and made their life quite different in the Russian cities. Racist groups' propaganda claims that ethnic Russians continuously incur attacks of the Caucasians, but the government is not fulfilling its relevant tasks to protect its citizens and it even continues to provide economic support to the Caucasian region and immigrants. These groups try to find ground within the Russian society through such discourses and mostly they manage to gain support. However, according to a number of human rights organizations, police forces fail to take adequate precautions against the racist attacks targeting the Caucasians and Central Asians, detain members of the minority and immigrant groups, usually without legitimate evidence and create pressure and use an obvious violence policy on them.

On the other hand, the ascent of racist feelings and violent incidents in Russia against the Caucasians would increasingly capture attention of officials of the Caucasian independent states. The first official intervention relevant to this issue was displayed by Geidar Aliev, President of Azerbaijan, in 1996. Aliev met with mayor Luzhkov and the police chief Nikolai Kulikov during his Moscow visit and passed his concerns about the security of 240,000 Azerbaijanis living in the city at the time. Whereas Aliev admitted high criminal rate of Azerbaijani community in Moscow and suggested collaboration for the resolution of this problem, he informed Luzhkov about his disturbance regarding the use of anti-crime campaigns against certain nationalities, especially the Caucasians rather than criminals themselves (Roman, 2002, p. 13). Later on, increasing frequency of incidents, which jeopardized security of the Caucasians, would grab further attention of the Azerbaijani government regarding this issue.

However, although Azerbaijani officials are disturbed about such incidents, they prefer to avoid earning fury of Moscow in conveying these hesitations to the Russian authorities. For instance, in 2013, it was remarkable that Ali Hasanov, the Department Chair of Internal Policy of Presidency, stated that even though no adverse official attitude was adopted by the Russian authorities against the Azerbaijanis, some informal chambers were trying to damage the relations between two countries. Azerbaijani diaspora also fails to put forward a collective and strong response related to this issue. While the Diaspora Committee and the All-Russian Azerbaijani Congress were emphasizing that racist attacks and the oppression against the Azerbaijanis in Russia intensified significantly just after the Biryulevo incidents, the Federal National-Cultural Autonomy of Russian

Azerbaijanis (Azerros), comprised of Russian citizens with Azerbaijan origin, and which operates in relation with Kremlin, displayed a different attitude. In the letter sent by the Azerros to the Chair of the Diaspora Committee, it was claimed that there was no evident opposition against the Azerbaijanis in Russia and warned that some problems could arise due to the accusations by the Azerbaijani side (Şamilkızı, 2013). This moderate and cautious attitude of the government of Azerbaijan and Azerbaijani diaspora could be explained by the hegemonic power of Russia over the CIS countries and Azerbaijan's dependence on Russia in many aspects.

The violent actions against the Caucasians in Russia were also accompanied by protests in Armenia. In this context, one of the most noteworthy examples was the official complaint in 2006, voiced by the Armenian President Robert Kocharian and the Prime Minister, Andranik Markarian, to Dmitry Kozak, Putin's representative for South Russia, after rise of racist attacks against the Armenians. Especially, the disturbance of Armenian public opinion and civil society organizations regarding the issue and their pressure compelled Kocharian and Markarian to request from their Russian counterparts to take the necessary precautions to prevent aforesaid violent attacks (asbarez.com, 2006). Kocharian and Markarian were expecting from Russian law-enforcement bodies to act faster and more effective in terms of prosecution of racist violence incidents and detainment and punishment of criminals. Indeed, these concerns were reflecting the general expectation of the former Soviet member states whose citizens were incurring racist treatments. Therefore, the relevant concerns were voiced by the presidents of the relevant countries at the CIS summit in February 2008. In return, Putin declared that his administration was aware of racism issues in the country and felt upset for these circumstances and he assured the relevant countries about taking steps to solve this problem (The Russian Federation Hate Crime Survey, 2008, p. 9).

However, the increasing Russian racism strengthens the expectations from the government to follow more active imperialist policies; provokes it to establish an imperial hegemony over the former Soviet geography once again and indeed, it proved partly successful in this regard. In the post-Soviet period, Russia had adopted a civic nationalist attitude in its foreign policy for a long time; but now it occasionally acts with ethnic motives towards its near environment. In the crisis experienced with Georgia in the middle of 2000, examples of this point of view were explicitly

displayed. In the wake of the tensed relationships between two countries, it was meaningful that Russia deported a large number of Georgians and Russian citizens who were of Georgian origin. Furthermore, deported individuals were harshly mistreated during this process and even two Georgians died while under detainment and one at the airport. This situation triggered Georgia's ethnic cleansing accusations against Russia (bbc.co.uk, 2006). Indeed, with its attitude, Russia took a stand similar to the one displayed by the DPNI towards the Caucasians. Russia regarded Georgia as an illegitimate and hostile entity who sought to tarnish its great power status and it wanted to harm this nation while effectively manipulating the hatred against the Caucasians in the society (March, 2011, p. 202). The August War fought in 2008 between Russia and Georgia was the ultimate product of this policy and it can be perceived as the last stage of the process.

Moreover, Russia is able to use racist gangs in the country as paramilitary forces for the clashes in the neighbouring territories. For instance, thousands of volunteers from the Russian cities went to Ukraine where there is a substantial Russian population, in order to join the armed conflicts between Russia and Ukraine. In this sense, racist groups in Russia could play a crucial role in the interstate problems as they more intensely defend and voice the rights of the Russians living in the former Soviet republics and also provide an additional fighting power which can be utilized for this aim. Therefore, some comments come to prominence which stress that the existence of the Russians in surrounding countries is exploited by Russia to interfere in the internal affairs of those countries.

Hence, there is a strong argument in the CIS countries that resident Russians are the fifth-columnists of Russia and, accordingly, they could be the potential threat for their hosting states as they may constitute justification for a possible Russian intervention (Hagendoorn, Linssen and Tumanov, 2001, p. 87). Russians' omission of using local languages and some disloyal attitudes to their residence countries or their feelings of national superiority towards titular groups strengthen these views (Hagendoorn, Linssen and Tumanov, 2001, p. 134). At the same time, this perception of threat is valid also for the federal structures in the Northern Caucasia just as the independent states. For example, a petition which was written to President Medvedev and published on the internet in September 2010 requested the borders of the North Caucasus Federal District to be drawn again. In this way, Stavropol, the only city dominated by the Russian population, would be dissected from there to join to

Southern Federal District and this request stirred up significant clashes between ethnic Russians and the Caucasians living in the city (Foxall, 2011, p. 12). These issues provide clear evidence of the increasing influences of the Russian racism on the distant territories of Russia and its near environment.

Conclusion

In sum, racism in Russia today has an extensive social base. Although majority of ethnic Russians does not join neo-Nazi groups or racist violence actions personally, a considerable part of them share views of radical right about minorities and immigrants. The Caucasians have been the most negatively influenced group from these approaches since the beginning and thus, Caucasian immigrants have been target of numerous violent attacks. Hundreds of people from Caucasian origin lost their lives and additional thousands were compelled to leave the country by force. At this point, internal and external immigration issue is particularly important because in Russia there is a widespread belief that ethnic Russians live at worse conditions than individuals belonging to minorities, or even than guest workers and illegal immigrants.

The most intense period of racist violence was observed in the second half of the 2000s and according to the statistics, it appeared more moderate along the last couple of years with respect to the aforesaid period. However, this progress should not be interpreted as footsteps of a bright future, since hostility against the Caucasians has already gained a general ground in the society and as long as government policy igniting nationalism remains unchanged and as socio-economic problems prevail in the country, it is very likely to persist. Furthermore, the most important reason of current decrease in the racist attacks is the fact that attention of radical right turned towards outside rather than immigrants in the country. Especially, deepening crisis between Russia and Ukraine introduced a new target for the Russian racists. However, this external-oriented approach causes new issues in the relations of Russia with its neighbours and federal regions. Therefore, it seems highly possible that Russian racism will continue to be a critical factor in both internal and foreign policy of the country in the forthcoming years and because of this reason it deserves greater intellectual and academic interest.

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Özet

Etno-kültürel meseleler küreselleşen dünyada ulusal ve devletlerarası düzeyde belirli toplumsal ve siyasal huzursuzlukların en yaygın sebebi olmuştur. Aşırı milliyetçilik, ırkçılık ve bununla birlikte gelişen şiddet olayları ise bu tür meselelerin en dikkat çekici boyutlarından biri konumundadır. Tüm dünyada önemli yansımaları sebep olan bu süreç Rusya Federasyonu üzerinde de ciddi etkiler doğurmuştur. Gerçekten de Rusya, Soğuk Savaş'ın sona erdiği dönemden beri, ırkçılık ve onun yarattığı sorunlarla en fazla karşılaşan ülkeler arasında başı çekmektedir.

Rusya'da ırkçılığın gelişiminde ülkenin Büyük Güç konumunu yitirmesi süreci ve bunun halkın belleğinde yarattığı dönüşüm önemli pay sahibidir. Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde Rusya'nın eski küresel etkinliğinden uzak kalması ve Batı'nın siyasi ve kültürel tahakkümünü Rusya'nın doğal nüfuz alanı olarak gördüğü ülkelerde dahi genişletmesi geçmişin mitleştirilmesine sebep olmuş ve bu durumda sosyalist dönemin bitişiyle oluşan ideolojik boşluk Rus milliyetçiliği tarafından doldurulmuştur. Aynı zamanda Rusya'da 1990'lı yıllar büyük ekonomik sorunların da kendisini gösterdiği bir zaman dilimidir. Liberal reformlar toplumun önemli bir kısmı için hiçbir yarar sağlamamış, aksine toplumsal gelir dağılımını olabildiğince adaletsizleştirmiştir. Ülkedeki ciddi işsizlik ve hayat pahalılığı sorunları özellikle gençler arasında umutsuzluk ve yabancılaşmaya sebep olmuş ve bir aidiyet odağı arayışındaki insanların aşırı milliyetçi düşüncelere sarılmasına yol açmıştır.

Ülkede aşırı milliyetçilik zaman zaman Putin yönetimi ve onun partisi Birleşik Rusya tarafından etkili biçimde kullanılabilirdiği ve yönlendirilebildiği gibi, Rusya siyaset sahnesinde doğrudan ırkçı fikirleri savunan belirli oluşumlar da mevcuttur. Bunların arasında, Jirinovski'nin Rus Meclisi'nde başından beri var olmayı başaran LDPR'si, Kremlin yönlendirmeli bir parti olarak Rodina, Limonov'un aşırı milliyetçi ve devrimci fikirleri sentezlemeyi denediği NBP'si ile Barkaşov liderliğinde bizzat Nazi simgelerini kullanan RNU sayılabilir.

Bu noktada, Rusya'daki ırkçı hareketlerin en yoğun biçimde Kafkasya kökenlilere yönelik olarak geliştiği ifade edilmelidir. Gerçekten de, bu ülkede Rusya yurttaşı olanlar da dahil olmak üzere Kafkasya kökenlilere dönük ırkçı eğilim ve saldırılar söz konusu dönemde büyük bir yükseliş içine girmiş ve ciddi mağduriyetleri beraberinde getirmiştir. Özellikle koyu saç, göz ve deri rengi gibi Slavlarda az bulunan fiziksel niteliklere sahip Kafkasyalılar, Afrika kökenliler gibi "siyah" olarak adlandırılarak ırkçı tacizlerin sıklıkla hedefi olmuştur. Toplumsal bazda gücünü hissettiren ve istatistiklere de yansıyan bu Kafkasyalı karşıtı eğilimler Rusya'da yetkili isimlerin söylem ve davranışlarında da zaman zaman kendisini göstermektedir.

Kafkasyalılara karşı ırkçı düşüncelerin gelişiminde kilit rol oynayan başlıca üç sebepten bahsedilebilir. Bu sebeplerden birincisi Rus-Çeçen Savaşı'dır. 1994-96 yılları arasında yapılan ve Çeçenistan'ın savaşın ikinci perdesine kadar devam eden fiili bağımsızlığıyla sonuçlanan bu süreç Rus toplumunda tüm Kafkasyalılara dönük tepki yaratmıştır. Özellikle bu savaş sırasında sivillerin ölümüne sebep olan belirli terör saldırıları

Rusya'da Çeçenlere yönelik bakış açısını olumsuz yönde etkilemiş ve onlarla birlikte diğer Kafkasya halkları da bu tepkisel yaklaşımdan payını almıştır. İkinci sebep, küreselleşme sürecinde dünyanın önemli bir kısmında kendisini gösteren İslamofobi eğilimidir. Savaş sırasında Çeçen liderlerin İslami kimliği öne çıkarmaları ve Kafkasya'nın diğer ülkelerinden çok sayıda savaşçının Çeçen tarafına dini duygularla katılmış olmaları da bu düşünceyi artırmıştır. Üçüncü ve en önemli sebep ise Soğuk Savaş'ın bitişinin ardından Kafkasya'dan çok sayıda insanın daha iyi yaşam koşulları ümidiyle legal ve illegal olarak Rusya'ya giriş yapmalarındır. Göçmenlerin ekonomik yapıya zarar verdikleri ve suç dünyasını kontrol ettiklerine dair Rus toplumunda yaygın bir algı söz konusudur. Özellikle DPNI adlı grup göçmenlerin eylemlerini dikkatle izlemekte ve göçmen karşıtı fikirlerin toplum tabanında güçlenmesini sağlamaya çalışmaktadır.

Kafkasyalılara karşı gelişen ırkçı eğilimler kendisini en net olarak bu insanlara yönelik fiziki saldırıların çok keskin bir yükselişe geçmesinde göstermektedir. Üstelik, önceleri münferit karakter taşıyan bu saldırılar zaman içerisinde kolektif eylemler halini alacaktır. 2006 yılında Kondopoga'da yaşananlar bu tür saldırıların ilk örneğidir. Bu toplu saldırılar arasında en dikkat çekici olan eylemler ise 2010 yılında Moskova'da yaşanan Manezhnaya Meydanı Olayları ve 2013'te Batı Biryulevo'da yaşanan gerginliklerdir. Söz konusu saldırılardan dolayı Kafkasya kökenli insanların Rus şehirlerindeki yaşamları ciddi biçimde zorlaşmıştır. Kafkasya devletlerinin yetkilileri ise zaman içerisinde konuyla daha yakından ilgilenmek ve devletlerarası toplantılarda bu sorunları dile getirmek zorunda kalacaklardır.

Rusya'da ırkçılığın gelişiminin Rus dış politikası üzerinde de önemli etkileri olduğu düşünülmektedir. Öncelikle aşırı milliyetçiler rejimin daha net emperyalist politikalar izlemesini talep etmekte ve ülkenin bilhassa da eski nüfuz alanında tekrardan üstünlük kurmasını desteklemektedir. Bu kitleler, bağımsız Kafkasya ve Orta Asya devletlerinde yaşayan Rus azınlığın çıkar ve haklarını daha yüksek sesle savunmalarından dolayı da Rus dış politikasına etki edebilmektedir. Bu arada Rus milliyetçi grupların Putin yönetimi tarafından gerekli görüldüğü takdirde işlevsel biçimde kullanıldığına da şahit olunmaktadır. Bu grupların varlığı bazı dış politik amaçları meşrulaştırabilmek için malzeme olarak kullanılabilirdiği gibi, Ukrayna krizinde de görülebileceği üzere bu gruplardan paramiliter güçler olarak faydalanılması dahi söz konusu olabilmektedir.

Rusya'da ırkçı şiddetin en yoğun olarak yaşandığı dönem 2000'lerin ikinci

yarısıdır ve bu tür şiddet eylemlerinde son yıllarda bir düşüş olduğu göze çarpmaktadır. Ancak bu düşüşün Rus milliyetçiliğinin yönünü yakın dönemde yurtiçinden çok yurtdışına çevirmiş olmasından kaynaklandığı düşünülmektedir. Rusya'da aşırı milliyetçiliğin ve özellikle Kafkasyalılara yönelik göçmen karşıtlığının bu derece geniş toplumsal taban kazandığı bir süreçte konunun halen daha önemli boyutta akademik ilgiye ihtiyacı bulunmaktadır.