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**Kirdina S.G. The system of political institutions of the Russian society:
Limits of transformation**

The report presents the author's hypothesis about the system of political institutions that form and regulate regional interactions in the Russian society. These institutions have been formed in the course of centuries-old activities of all layers of the population, they are a realization of the forms of social relations which made it possible for this country to survive and develop under the given geopolitical and economic conditions.

Some results of the verification of the proposed hypothesis made on the basis of historical material are expounded and a prognosis of the direction and nature of institutional changes in Russia is offered.

The structure of political institutions of Russia: a hypothesis

Attention to institutions is a characteristic feature of modern social thought. An acknowledgement of the institutional approach as an effective methodology of analyzing social processes is the Nobel Prize in economics in 1993 given to the American scientist D. North, the author of a fundamental theory of institutional economics of modern Western societies. The study of institutions has become a kernel of Russian evolutionist economic theories of the development of the Russian society[1]. The 80-s and especially the 90-s are characterized also by more active research into the processes of institutionalization in economic sociology[2], which is supplemented, by research into economic institutions as social constructions.

Institutions are viewed as formal and non-formal "rules of the game", existing in society, they give structure and order to human activity, they are long-lived, stable and inert. D. North offered a valuable addition to the understanding of institutions pointing out their ability to create a favorable environment for joint decision of complex problems of exchange. Furthermore, D. North indicated that institutions, including political ones, are determining factors of the economic process and, in the long run, stimulate economic growth[3].

According to D. North, political institutions "in the widest sense determine the hierarchical structure of society, its fundamental structure of decision-making and most important characteristics of control over political procedures" [4]. The importance of political rules lies in the fact that they form economic rules, though the reverse dependence also takes place[5].

The choice of political institutions or institutions of power as a subject for examination is connected also with the fact that today "serious and intensive research is needed to construct models of a state system appropriate for post-socialist countries" [6], for a state system to a great extent determines the functioning of both economy and social sphere.

The subject of our consideration are regional interactions in the course of which there goes a constant search for coordination of local (regional) and general (state) interests, which is reflected, in the end, in the formation of a corresponding system of political institutions that at the next step act as a regulator of regional relations. The trajectory of development of this system makes possible (proceeding from the essence of institutions) the economic development of a country and the increase of degrees of freedom of its citizens.

According to the author's hypothesis, the basic structure of political, authority's institutions, which regulate the character of regional relations, includes:

- administrative territorial division of the state;
- hierarchy of status of regions and settlements;
- authority's hierarchical vertical of regional management bodies with the central bodies on top;
- appointment of regional leaders;
- election of regional management bodies;
- unanimity or mutual guarantee as a form of territorial unit's responsibility;
- the administrative population's complaints as a regulator of management bodies' activities.

These institutions are interconditioned, support one another and form a stable system. This implies the impossibility in principle to change drastically one of them without a simultaneous change of all other elements in this system. The said institutions evolve in the course of historical development, acquire more complex forms but retain their basic content.

The administrative territorial division of the state

established in Russia is an institution characteristic of unitary centralized states and alternative to the institution of the federal state system. In a federal system federal bodies and bodies of the subjects of the federation have independent spheres of competence and do not interfere into the affairs of one another. In the administrative territorial division, on the contrary, the whole state territory is regarded as a single object of management by the state administration, and the apportionment of these or other territorial units serves, first of all, the idea of regulating a unified economy.

This became apparent, for example, in the territorial reforms in the Russian Empire. Thus, Peter the Great in 1699 made an attempt to divide Russia into provinces "for a better regulation and ensurance of monetary duties"[7]. Then he introduced a larger division into 8 big provinces, the idea being those local governors had the right to use local duties for approved expenditures bypassing central bodies[8]. Catherine the Great, when making province reforms in the XVIII century also proceeded from the tasks of rationalization of state management. The administrative division introduced in the course of the reform, which was based on the levelling of the number of population in new territorial units, was meant "for good management of a province or vicegerency..."[9].

The administrative character of the country's territorial division accounts for the continuous process of transformations of its territorial structure, the change of borders of these or other territories and their transfer, wholly or partially, to other territorial units within the state. The operation of the institution of administrative division of the state reflects a search for a territorial structure of management of the enormous country which would make possible to accommodate and use general economic resources in the best way, to the interests of the country as a whole.

The administrative territorial division does not rule out taking into account historical, geographical, national, economic and other peculiarities of the territory and nations. For example, the division of territorial units on the national basis was determined by the desire to ensure the levelling of political and administrative rights of various nationalities during the Soviet period. Before the beginning of the

Great Patriotic War the administrative-territorial division of the USSR, apart from regions, included 16 union and 19 autonomous national republics, 8 autonomous national regions and 10 autonomous national districts, over 100 national districts and 400 national village councils. "It was, as a matter of fact, an experiment which had no precedent in history - a territorial organization of poly-ethnic state (this experience was later used in China, India, Spain and other countries)"[10].

In the course of modern reforms the institution of administrative division of the state retains its significance. That is why experts point out that in post-Soviet Russia federation is still to a great extent formal[11]. This does not mean a change but a modification of the institution under review in accordance with the new conditions of the development of the country.

Hierarchy of status of regions and settlements

as a political institution has been formed in close connection with the aforementioned institution of the administrative-territorial division of the state. Apparently, one can conclude that while the federative system implies equality of the subjects of a federation, a hierarchy of status of regions and settlements is inherent in the administrative system of the state.

The structure of settlement in Russia had a clear hierarchic character beginning with the IX century, because the state at that period was "a union of volosts (small rural districts) and suburbs ruled by a senior town"[12]. The town of the area was a senior community, the next level comprised suburbs, then - rural volosts. At the top of the hierarchy there was the central town of the Russian State, at that period it was Kiev.

Law experts pointed out that in the history of development of Western states, for example, German ones, there were no hierarchies of territorial communities analogous to the Russian one. For example, in the historical period under consideration, there was a personal dependence of subvassals on vassals while the latter were dependent on a supreme suzerain, and not a hierarchical subordination of smaller communities to a senior one[13].

The position of a region or a settlement in the status hierarchy reflected its significance for the development of the Russian State in general. Thus, during the period of Kiev Rus' the seniority of old Russian towns and their adjoining territories was determined by their importance for the defense of Slav lands from the main enemy in the South and by their ability to ensure a safe way "from Varangians to Greeks" for overseas trade. Accordingly, Kiev's frontier lands, as the most important for the solution of this task, had the highest status which was manifested in the supremacy of the Kiev throne, it was followed by Chernigov's lands, then Pereyaslav's, and so on[14].

The hierarchy of regions and settlements was preserved during the whole historical development of the Russian State and continues to be Russia's peculiarity in the period of new and modern history. In the Soviet period the hierarchy of urban and rural settlements of the Russian Federation was expressed in the ranking of all populated areas explicitly represented in statistical reference books. On the top of the hierarchy there was Moscow, followed by Petersburg, centers of autonomous republics, territories and regions, cities of regional, municipal, district subordination and so on. The administrative status reflecting the role and significance of a settlement in the state, determined the scope of capital investments into its production-economic sphere and social infrastructure as well as the pace and effectiveness of its development[15].

Today hierarchy is preserved. It is expressed, in particular, by the concept of political-administrative (or constitutional-legal) status of the subjects of the Russian Federation. In accordance with the Constitution of 1993 (Art. 65) 21 republics have the highest status, at the next level of hierarchy there are 6 territories, 49 regions and 2 federal cities, then goes 1 autonomous region and 10 autonomous districts[16].

But the question about the internal content of the status of different subjects of the Federation is still open and continues to be discussed at all levels of authority. This means that in the course of present reforms the hierarchy of status of regions and settlements has not yet taken a final shape and is at the stage of further transformations.

Authority's hierarchical vertical of regional management bodies with the central bodies on top

has been preserved in the structure of political institutions of Russia since ancient times. As long ago as in the tale about calling to Varangian dukes who laid, as historians believe, the foundation of our statehood, it was written that Slav tribes decided: "Let us find us a duke who would possess and govern us and judge us by law"[17]. This kind of unification under the supreme power differs from another historically known way of the formation of a state as a contractual federation, of which the most prominent example is the history of North-American states.

In the Russian state the "center", no matter how paradoxical it might sound for linguists, is first and foremost the "top" of the authority's vertical which sets rules and powers of subordinated bodies of regional management. The hierarchical character of the structure of regional bodies makes possible for them to ensure the unity and general direction of activities in the state as a whole.

The principle of authority's vertical is alternative to the principle of subsidiariness. The principle of subsidiariness characteristic of federative relations substantiates the priority (other conditions being equal) of the rights of a smaller (lower) community over a larger (higher) community. In accordance with these principle authorities to realize certain competencies should be transferred to a higher level only in the case when a lower level has no possibilities for their realization[18]. On the contrary, in the authority's hierarchical vertical management bodies of lower levels are included into the system of the executive power of higher level bodies, are subordinated to them and use their means for their activities.

The institution of authority's vertical determines a special order of delegating powers among state management bodies. This delegating, as a rule, is not based on the agreement between parties, i.e. management levels, but on law adopted by the center - the upper level of management. The condition of the transfer of particular state powers to the bodies of local government is providing them with necessary material and financial resources and realization of transferred powers is controlled by the state[19].

This way of the transfer of powers is demonstrated, for example, by the aforementioned province reforms of Catherine the Great. In the course of these reforms in 1796 the so-called province states were issued[20]. They enumerated the cities of the Russian empire which were administrative centers of provinces or uyezds (districts) and which were given additional rights and obligations in governing corresponding territories. Being included in the province states implied that management bodies in these cities became, in fact, governmental, and their employees received their pay from the State.

The significance of the institution of authority's hierarchical vertical with the center on top as a bearer of the supreme power is confirmed by the ancient and modern history of the Russian State. After the

periods of crisis of supreme power in the country the center as the top of authority was being reconstructed in various forms, which confirms its objective necessity. Thus, after the period of interregnum of 1610-1613, the "Troubled times" of Russian history, the society felt the need to restore the monarchy with the functions of centralized authority, which was realized by calling the dynasty of the Romanovs. After the collapse of the monarchy in the course of revolutions in the beginning of the XX century the central organs of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) came to perform an analogous function. Now the president of the Russian Federation gradually begins to personify the supreme center of authority's hierarchical vertical forming a system of management bodies accountable to him.

During perestroika and market reforms the significance of the institution of authority's hierarchical vertical of management bodies with the center on top has been weakened considerably. Analysts point out that the "liquidation of the CPSU as a practically supreme state institution of concordance and coordination of interests was not made up with a creation of new Russian institutions with analogous functions", "the institutional vertical the need for which has increased drastically after the introduction of the post of president" has not been created yet[21].

The weakening of authority's hierarchical vertical of regional bodies brought to life a need for representatives of the president who would work in the local bodies. They were introduced practically simultaneously with the transition from the appointment of regional leaders to their election.

The task of plenipotentiary representatives of the president is to supervise expenditures of budget means in the territory and to determine whether laws and regulations adopted locally correspond to the federal legislation. In accordance with their powers they inform the presidential apparatus about violations and also they can apply to legal bodies with a petition in order to suspend these or other regional normative acts.

The weakening of authority's vertical is also expressed in the unceasing conflict between governing bodies of the subject of the federation and local municipal governing bodies. Its legal foundation leans upon a provision introduced in the new Constitution of the Russian Federation, that local self-government is not part of the system of state government bodies, thus it is taken out of subordination to higher governing bodies.

However, analysis of modern legislation in the sphere of local self-government, from the moment of adoption in 1990 of the law of the USSR "On general foundations and basic principles of local self-government", reveals a tendency to gradually re-create authority's vertical and re-determine the rights of local self-government bodies to the advantage of the rights of the subjects of the federation on the territory of which they are situated.

The political institution of authority's hierarchical vertical of regional bodies with the center on top has been developing historically. While retaining the general principle of interaction between levels of regional hierarchy, it is developing in the direction of a more free way of establishing reciprocal rights and obligations of management links that would take into account interests of the population living on their territories as well as strengthening the contractual element when establishing ranges of competence of various levels of regional government.

Appointment of regional leaders and election of regional management bodies

have been acting parallel during the whole Russian history. They could be realized in a different way at these or other levels of administrative division of the state - for example, election at the level of a local

community and appointment (before the Revolution) at the governors' level, but they have always been present simultaneously in society. There is a constant search for a measure between them that would make it possible to combine interests of a local community (through election of its representatives) and of the whole state (through appointment of leaders by higher management levels).

As an example we offer a brief historical account of the organization of government of volosts (districts) in the period from Ivan the Terrible to Peter the Great.

For governing of *a volost* in the XIV-XVI centuries a Moscow tsar appointed vicegerents (volostels). Then in 1555-1556 tsar Ivan the Terrible practically abolishes the post of vicegerents ordering elected "*beloved starostas* (headmen)" to serve the sovereign. After *the Zemscky sobor* (assembly of all-Russia's representatives) of 1613 the supreme power again introduces *voivode* government[22]. *Voivodes* (regional leaders) work for a sovereign's pay and are appointed by a sovereign. Parallel with them in accordance with the act of 1627 there act *gubnye starostas* - elected authority - substitutes for *voivodes* in *the volosts* where the latter are absent in principle or temporarily. In 1669 the institution of *gubnye starostas* was destroyed and their affairs were handed over to appointed *voivodes*. In 1684 elected *gubnye starostas* were restored and existed till 1702[23]. Then, by order of Peter the Great local self-government was liquidated and its functions were again laid on *voivodes* appointed by the center[24].

Prevailing of election or appointment at that period or another was connected with a concrete socio-economic situation. If there was a need for centralization of resources, for example, in connection with military activities, appointment of regional leaders prevailed. If the tyranny of *voivodes* or vicegerents in respect to local population became intolerable, the population's complaints on local authorities' malpractice's increased, the preference was given to elections.

In the XIX century the institution of appointment, for example, of municipal leaders implied taking into account interests of local population and the state as a whole, in the following way. The replacement of the post of mayor, according to the municipal regulations of 1892, took place through his election by a municipal *Duma*(Council). But then either a governor or a minister of internal affairs should administratively approve candidates. If primarily or secondarily elected candidates were not approved; vacant posts were filled by corresponding appointments[25].

The practice of appointment of regional leaders in the Soviet period is well known: formally they were elected and then approved, while in fact, they were appointed by the organs of the CPSU of the corresponding level.

Democratization of social life in the course of perestroika lead to the change of this order. In accordance with the new Constitution of 1993 appointment of regional leaders is abolished. The only condition is their election by the population of corresponding regions. But today there grows the awareness that "introduction into the Constitution in force of the principle of election of heads of regions and territories with complete absence of the Center's any legal possibilities to remove them from their posts leads to considerable weakening of authority's vertical. Under the conditions of regionalization of economic ties this inevitably weakens the unity of the Russian State"[26].

Abolition of appointments means a search for another legal mechanism, adequate to them, which would ensure performance by governors of their functions simultaneously as representatives of people who elected them and representatives of the Russian state under modern conditions. For example, the following propositions are made: "The Federal legislation in accordance with the Constitution should clearly set the limits of rights and powers of governors and provide for an effective mechanism of

impeachment in the case of violation of legislation by them ... up to deprivation of a governor of his powers by a presidential initiative” [27]. There are also other proposals. Thus, we can state that modern forms of realization of the institution of appointment, the significance of which is understood, have not been found yet.

Unanimity or mutual guarantee as a form of territorial unit’s responsibility

is another political institution, which determines interrelations in the regional structure of Russian society.

Mutual guarantee is a form of solidarity responsibility of territorial units before the supreme level of government and implies simultaneously internal unanimity of members of this community in respect to undertaken obligations. This corresponds to the correal (solidary) obligation known in juridical practice of Western countries.

In one of the first forms of territorial government in ancient Russia - *veche* (town’s residents assembly) - achievement of unanimity and realization of the principle of mutual guarantee are encoded for us in the so-called *polje* - a duel or fight between the sides that had differing opinions. If in the course of *veche* the sides could not come to unanimity or a proposed position was not authoritative enough for its opponents to stop defending their view, the matter was settled through fight. *Polje* as a judicial duel had to follow certain rules [28]. Everybody adopted the view of a winning side, and it was fixed by society.

Later on, *polje* as a way of attaining a common view dies out. The Decree of 1556 ordered to replace it by the rite of kissing the cross, which consolidated the unity of the sides’ positions [29].

Historians of law paid attention to the role of mutual guarantee in the organization of territorial government in Russia. They point out that “supreme power is executed through mutual guarantee... Mutual guarantee predominated at *Zemsky sobors* (all-Russian assemblies). It was ensured by principles of unanimity, traditional for Russia - a matter was discussed until everybody came to a general opinion after which participants in the discussion were brought to kiss the cross” [30]. A general resolution, which ended an *Zemsky sobor’s* deed, was the most essential moment. To kiss the cross at one’s own words meant to commit oneself on oath to fulfil the agreement. Thus, a general “mutual” formal obligation was fixed those bound members of *Zemsky sobor* into something integral as regards its decision [31]. Therefore mutual agreement ensured state interests.

Analyzing the nature of these political institutions one can assume that it is based on economic necessity, for the purpose of institutions, as D. Nort emphasized, in the long run, is to create favorable conditions for economic development. This economic reason lies in that special, communal character of basic production resources and material-technological environment used in Russian society.

As mentioned above, “communality means an organization of the material-technological environment such that all its parts present a unified inseparable system and isolation of any part could lead to the disintegration of the system as a whole. This communal environment serves the societal welfare and is a condition of the society’s survival” [32]. The use of communal environment can be only coordinated, unified, when no one breaks established common rules, no one tries to use it for the benefit of some group.

In ancient Russia the communal environment was materially based on the system of river ways which ensured internal interrelations and access to overseas markets. Another important element of the

communal environment was land that, due to certain characteristics, required communal, joined protection and cultivation.

At present the basis of the communal environment is made up of, apart from land resources, transport surface communications, first of all railway ones, as well as unified power and heat supply. The said peculiarities of the communal environment of Russia are today fixed legislatively. In a new law "On federal railway transport" it is directly stated that railway transport in this country is a unified production-technological complex. The analogous provision is in the Decree "On a structural reform in the electric power industry of the Russian Federation" adopted by the State Duma on February 18, 1998, which directly states that dividing the unified power system of Russia into separate power organizations leads to its destruction.

Attempts to use the unified material-technological environment to the benefit of some region lead to the weakening of the state in general and therefore were stopped in a most cruel way. The struggle of the Moscow principality with citizens of Novgorod in the XVI century is a prominent example of this situation. Being a northwestern outlying district of the Russian State, Novgorod, on the one hand, lived at the expense of Russian bread delivered from central regions of the country, and on the other hand, used advantages of foreign trade for its benefit. Attempts to ensure unanimity of citizens of Novgorod in fulfilling general state affairs, to include them into the system of mutual guarantee, failed which resulted in bloodshed. Ivan the Terrible conquered the free Novgorod destroying physically some part of the population and displacing the other part to central Moscow lands, while immigrants from other regions of the Moscow kingdom populated the Novgorod lands.

Stability of the institution of unanimity or mutual guarantee can be observed throughout the whole Russian history. For example, congresses of the CPSU characteristic of the Soviet period are similar to *Zemsky sobor* of earlier times, and as well as this one they were brought to life by administrative needs of the state. At them there was attained unanimity of regional representatives as regards the decision of fundamental issues submitted to congresses, and party discipline provided the very mutual guarantee which ensured fulfillment of adopted decisions.

At the present stage the principle of unanimity and mutual guarantee is expressed in modern legal norms. An example is found in the federative agreement signed on March 31, 1992 and approved by the IV Congress of people's deputies of Russia on April 10, 1992. The federative agreement is incorporated into the text of the new Constitution of 1993. It is in principle a new legal act in the state construction of Russia.

The federative agreement, on the one hand, was signed by the bodies of the federal center, and on the other hand, it was signed by governing bodies of the subjects of the Federation - territories, regions, the cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg, national autonomies, except Chechnia and Tatarstan.

The subjects of the Federation, which signed this agreement unanimously, agreed with those political conditions that were declared by the federal center, since their legislative and economic rights were considerably expanded. The signing of the federative agreement made it possible to retain the unity of the country and stop the "parade of sovereignties" that had begun in the Russian Federation[33].

The need to observe this principle of unanimity is evident in the procedure of introduction of alterations in the Constitution as established by the federal law "On the procedure of adoption and coming into force of amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation" of March 4, 1998.

According to this procedure, a corresponding law of Russia first is passed through the both Chambers of the Federal Assembly and then, within a year, should be approved by legislative (representative) government bodies of not less than two thirds of the subjects of the Federation. But even in this case the President of Russia or the legislative body of a “disagreeing” region has the right to appeal against the enactment of this law to the Supreme Court of the country. “In case of appealing a law of the Russian Federation about an amendment to the Constitution is not submitted .. to the President of the Russian Federation for signing and official publishing” [34].

In other words, if only one region in Russia does not agree with the necessity of corresponding amendments, a law about amendments to the Constitution will not be passed.

A brief historical excursus of the realization of the political institution of unanimity or mutual guarantee as a form of responsibility of regions reveals a clear tendency. This institution develops in the direction to a more free manifestation of interests of regional subjects, decrease of the role of compulsory forms in solving arising conflicts and strengthening of the legal character of procedures.

The administrative population’s complaints as a regulator of regional bodies’ activities

represent a political institution that is an element of historically established structure of decision-making and determines forms of control over the realization of adopted decisions.

O.E. Bessonova discovered the institution of administrative complaints in Russian society. She was the first to formulate this idea, to verify it empirically, to prove it theoretically and substantiate by historical facts [35].

The importance of this discovery lies in the fact that a well known in domestic practice and described in juridical literature phenomenon of complaints is singled out as a fundamental mechanism of regulating the razdatok-economy of Russia. The significance of this discovery is also in that appeals and complaints are feedback signals not only in the economic system, as O.E. Bessonova correctly points out. They represent an important political institution that regulates social relations in the sphere of authority and forms a fundamental structure of decision-making and controlling throughout the whole authority’s vertical of regional management bodies with the center on top.

While in Western countries the struggle with the infringement of people’s rights on the part of regional management bodies is realized, first of all, in the form of legal actions, through judicial system, in Russia such a basic mechanism was an administrative complaint to a higher organization. In this sphere an administrative complaint is understood as “any report made to a higher administrative authority on actions of a lower one which violated any personal or property rights or interests, or dissatisfaction with any petition which by law could or must be satisfied” [36].

Some researchers noted the role of complaints in the functioning of regional government. For example, law experts of the Institute of State and Law of the Russian Academy of Sciences in their historical research of territorial self-government in Russia point out that of significant importance was the interaction of the supreme power and a territory “through petition activities” [37], i.e. through submitting individual or group (from estates or territorial communities) petitions to supreme governing bodies.

On the grounds of people’s complaints the supreme governing bodies made judgement about effectiveness of regional leaders of various levels both elected and appointed. For instance, when appointing *voivodes* during the reign of Mikhail Romanov (early XVII century) the government

simultaneously set up a special department to receive complaints from those people who “petitions against the powers” [38].

Similarly, with the expansion of election, for example, in rural communities in the XIX century, a decree of 1889 introduced local heads who had broad rights to supervise elected peasant leaders and investigate complaints on them up to temporarily remove wrongdoers from their posts [39].

The institution of complaints regulated the operation of other political institutions. For example, as noted above, the quantity and character of people’s complaints were one of the reasons for prevailing of the elective or appointive aspects in the formation of the bulk of regional leaders.

Control over the activities of regional management bodies through investigating complaints depends on what groups of the population and in what form can make these complaints, as well as on the response to them. In pre-Revolutionary Russia the most effective, from the point of view of problem solving, were the petitions and complaints directly to the Emperor. In the middle of the XIX century the right to make petitions “about putting an end to local malpractice’s or about eliminating inconveniences noticed in local government” directly to His Majesty the Emperor belonged only to the nobility. Other groups of the population did not have these rights at that period [40].

During the Soviet period the right to make complaints on the regional management bodies of any level became practically universal, since all layers of the population could realize it. At that period there was a system which ensured reception of complaints and their going through the instances, implementation of their solutions and responsibility of executives.

The operation of the institution of administrative complaints is also embodied in such a form of activities of leaders of various levels of regional hierarchy, characteristic of Russia, as “to consult people”. Kept in the background during perestroika, now it comes into practice again. An example of this is a meeting of the president of the Russian Federation that took place on March 10, 1998 in the Kremlin with elder people and non-formal leaders of the North Caucasus, at which, surpassing regional management levels, representatives of peoples of this region directly expressed their problems.

It is precisely through the institution of complaints people and organizations can to a great extent carry out institutional changes according to their interests. D. North pointed out that the development of the structure of institutions of any society makes it possible for people to express their ideas, opinions and beliefs at a very low cost for themselves and this permits to carry out changes in a society [41]. In a Western society, the elective process serves this purpose. Under Russian conditions, a similar purpose is attained by the institution of administrative complaints which, like elections, is a form, a mechanism of feedback. The more developed is this mechanism, the broader are possibilities of people to express their complaints, the better is their registration, control and fulfillment - the more effective can be transformations carried out in society.

In the period of social transformation of Russian society in the course of market reforms the mechanism of complaints and petitions is being considerably renewed. New, more effective channels for their transmission begin to take shape. This is connected, first of all, with the growth of formal and non-formal organizations that are used for these purposes. The State *Duma* now acts as a spokesman that directly expresses complaints of various groups of people. Stability of its operation (in contrast to, for example, *Zemsky sobors* and congresses of the CPSU that were convened episodically) permits regional representatives to regularly supervise the activities of central government bodies.

The collapse of the administrative-command system of management that received petitions and complaints through its regional subdivisions is compensated by the creation of other kinds of organizations that serve these purposes, on the initiative "from the bottom". An example is the creation of interregional associations of economic interaction, which are voluntary unions of regions. By the middle of the 90s 8 regional associations was registered. Created for the purpose of horizontal cooperation of regions, they, as their experience shows, in fact perform the function of submitting collective complaints of regional leaders to central governmental executives who are present at regularly held meetings of the associations.

Conclusion

At the end of our survey of the structure of political institutions that regulate, according to the author's hypothesis, regional interactions, we point to the qualities of the institutions per se. It has been proved that the institutional process has an increment character[42]. This means that institutional changes are not discrete. They are characterized by the flowing, normally the full one, of the content of old institutions to the new ones, even in the course of revolutionary, at first sight, changes.

The effect of dependence on the trajectory of earlier development pointed out by many researchers determines the institutional stability of society. Therefore, the institutional matrix that determines developmental space for basic social structures is of great importance.

Due to this, the described system of political institutions, which determine interactions in a regional structure, in our opinion, will be preserved. At the same time, in the reproduction of the basic content of these institutions the forms of their realization will be renewed. A criterion of choosing and fixing these institutional forms or other will be their ability for better solving the tasks of economic development of the country and contributing to the growth of political freedoms of its citizens.

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