

Soviet Collapse and the Evolution of New Administrative System in Dagestan

VIPUL KUMAR VAIBHAV

Research Scholar

Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies, School of International Studies (SIS)
Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi (India)

ABSTRACT

Dagestan is a federal subject in the Russian Federation. It has republican status within Russia. In the Soviet rule, it had the status of Dagestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) within the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (SFSR) of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) or Soviet Union. In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991, Dagestan found itself in a state of confusion and chaos. There was also serious political crisis in Russia's political capital Moscow which plunged the country into instability and conflict. However, Dagestan managed to somehow recover from this situation in the 1990s by retaining some parts of its administrative system and evolving new ones. This paper seeks to analyse the transitional phase of the USSR and the nature of the evolution of Dagestan's administrative system in the 1990s.

Key Words : Federal subject, Russian Federation, Soviet Union, Administrative system, Conflict.

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Dagestan is among the eighty five federal subjects of the Russian Federation. It is today the largest and the most multi-national republic in the North Caucasus region of Russia. It had the status of Dagestan ASSR within the Russian SFSR of the USSR or Soviet Union. The USSR or Soviet Union comprised 15 republics including Russia with capital in Moscow. The USSR lasted for 70 years and disintegrated in December 1991 resulting in the independence of 15 republics accompanied by political uncertainty and chaos. The post-Soviet Dagestan emerged as the Republic of Dagestan, from previously Dagestan ASSR, within the post-Soviet Russia whose status also changed from Russian SFSR to the Russian Federation (Clemens, 1997: 137-138; Fuller, 1994; Lovell, 1996; Saunders and Strukov, 2010).

This transition was accompanied by massive political chaos and instability on the Russian landmass. Russia was in the grip of political and economic collapse so was Dagestan in the

How to cite this Article: Vaibhav, Vipul Kumar (2017). Soviet Collapse and the Evolution of New Administrative System in Dagestan. *Internat. J. Appl. Soc. Sci.*, 4 (11 & 12) : 601-609.

early 1990s. Political crisis occurred in Moscow which culminated into the serious Constitutional crisis in Russia in early 1993. However, amidst all these conflicts Russia adopted its new Constitution in December 1993 resulting in the end of political stalemate and confrontation between the political elites in Moscow. This also facilitated the adoption of Dagestan's Constitution in 1994 which marked the beginning of the evolution of new administrative system in Dagestan (Parliament of the Republic of Dagestan; Kisriev and Ware, 2001: 106-107; Kisriev, 2003: 2-3; Kisriev, 2004: 334-335).

Soviet Union in Transition:

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the subsequent transition of Russia from socialist economy to the market or capitalist economy was one of the most astonishing geopolitical events of the century. This event is also comparable to the collapse of the Ottoman and Habsburg empires during the First World War. The Soviet disintegration started on the peripheries and in the non-Russian areas. The Baltic States were the first to declare independence from Soviet Union. In 1987, Estonia, a Baltic Republic, demanded autonomy which was immediately followed by the remaining two Baltic Republics, *viz.*, Lithuania and Latvia. All other republics then followed suit and parted ways one after another. The USSR existed for 70 years and suddenly in December 1991, it died a peaceful death leading to the emergence of 15 independent sovereign countries on the world stage out of the former, among them were some new states with unfamiliar names, and the event was mournfully called by Soviets the "parade of sovereignties". Massive chunks of territory were torn away from the largest political landmass in the world leaving geopolitical confusion in their wake. Among all those 15 republics that emerged independent from the Soviet Union, Russian Federation was the most powerful (Clemens, 1997: 137-138; Fuller, 1994; Lovell, 1996; Saunders and Strukov, 2010).

During Mikhail Gorbachev's rise to power in 1985 who was the last Soviet leader, the USSR was in the grip of severe economic and political crises. Seeing the severity of the situation, Gorbachev introduced a two-tiered policy of reform: "Glasnost (freedom of speech)" and "Perestroika (rebuilding) a program of economic reform". Under perestroika, he intended, indeed, to reconstruct both the CPSU party as well as the Soviet political system. Through glasnost, Gorbachev unknowingly unleashed people's sentiments and ignited their political feelings which had been built up for many years, and which ultimately became instrumental in the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, perestroika too failed to yield the desired results which he had earlier predicted. Armed with this newly allotted freedom of speech, called glasnost, the people of the Soviet Union began criticizing Gorbachev regime for its failure to protect the country's economy. Thus, glasnost and perestroika were also one of the main reasons behind Soviet collapse (Fuller, 1994; Lovell, 1996; Stoner-Weiss, 2009: 4; Saunders and Strukov, 2010).

On 25 December 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev resigned as the last leader of the Soviet Union and Boris Yeltsin, who was the President of Russian Republic's Parliament, became the first President of newly independent Russia. On the same day, for the last time the Soviet flag of hammer and sickle was hoisted in Kremlin, and then it was replaced by the Russian tricolor. The Soviet collapse was a peaceful transition resulting in the emergence of

multiple independent republics from a single Communist state. In January 1992, the Soviet Union ceased to exist. After Soviet Union met its demise, a new entity came up in its place which was called the “Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)” comprising 12 independent countries, except the Baltic States, of the erstwhile Soviet Union. The CIS member countries had full political independence and were associated with each other in economic and, to some extent, military spheres. Immediately after Soviet collapse, the newly independent Russia aggressively started pursuing economic reform programs of mass privatization under Yeltsin in order to revive the stagnant economy of the country (Fuller, 1994: 19; Lovell, 1996).

Political crisis in Moscow and the adoption of Russia’s new Constitution after Soviet collapse

Soon after the introduction of reform programs, glasnost and perestroika, by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1986-87, the floodgates of protest and resentment opened within the Soviet Union. This led to a severe political crisis in Moscow. Gorbachev also introduced the New Union Treaty which was a draft treaty meant to replace the 1922 Treaty on the Creation of the USSR, and also to replace the Soviet Union by a new entity known as the “Union of Sovereign States”. It was an attempt by him to reform and protect the Soviet Union from impending collapse. The treaty was scheduled to be signed between the Russian SFSR, the Ukrainian SSR and the Byelorussian SSR on 20 August 1991, but the Soviet coup d’état attempt that happened on 19 August, just a day earlier, had prevented this event from taking place (Clemens, 1997: 144-145; Grachev, 1996; Sturua, 1992; Kotkin, 2001; Hollander, 2000; Winters, 1999).

On 12 June 1990, Russia declared its sovereignty and restricted the application of Soviet laws, *i.e.* laws pertaining to finance and the economy, within Russian territory. The Supreme Soviet of the Russian SFSR adopted laws contradicting Soviet laws. In July 1990, Boris Yeltsin, then President of the Russian Republic’s Parliament, convened the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Republic and insisted on economic sovereignty for the republic. This enabled him to tighten his grip over the republic and grab control of its economy from Gorbachev. All other republics too followed Yeltsin’s move. Ukraine began recalling its soldiers from the Soviet military and called for the setting up of its own military. The Communist Party split into two factions, *viz.* the reformers and conservatives, which were critical about Gorbachev who was searching a middle path between socialist economy and market economy. He defended himself by showing support and allegiance for Communism and Socialism and referred to Lenin’s New Economic Policy of 1921 as his method for tackling crisis. However, he appeared for many Russians as weak and unable to take a clear stand. People were getting skeptical about his stand, and thus held him responsible for economy’s failure. Many people in the Soviet Union were also angry with Gorbachev for letting Germany reunify. Conservative and patriotic Communists believed that Gorbachev not only insulted but also disarmed the Soviet Union. They condemned Gorbachev arguing that he nullified the hard earned victory in World War II which had claimed around twenty million Soviet lives (Grachev, 1996; Sturua, 1992; Kotkin, 2001; Hollander, 2000; Winters, 1999).

In 1991, more Soviet factories were at the verge of closure. The Parliament in the

Russian SFSR passed a few reforms towards promoting market economy and henceforth, funding to the Soviet agencies based in the Russian SFSR was stopped. Gorbachev found that the Soviet government was losing power and thus gave more priority to restoration and preservation of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's ally, Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, resigned accusing him of acting as a dictator. Meanwhile, Gorbachev had no option but to give free hand to the conservatives of his party and some prominent people of the Soviet military to take necessary and extraordinary actions for preserving the USSR (Grachev, 1996; Sturua, 1992; Kotkin, 2001; Hollander, 2000; Winters, 1999).

These political crises prevalent in Moscow over a few years culminated into the 1991 Soviet coup d'état attempt, also called August Putsch or August Coup, and further angered the Russians against Soviet government, although it was a failure and collapsed in just two days. The coup attempt ended Gorbachev's reign and further consolidated Yeltsin's political power. It also contributed in the demise of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and accelerated Soviet disintegration resulting in the birth of some new nation states. The coup attempt was staged by some members of the Soviet government with the intention of taking away power from President Mikhail Gorbachev and restoring Soviet Union. The coup leaders were hardline CPSU members opposed to the latest reform program introduced by Gorbachev and the new union treaty which decentralized considerable portion of Kremlin's powers to the republics (Grachev, 1996; Gibson, 1997: 671; Sturua, 1992; Winters, 1999).

On 19 August 1991, a small group of Soviet leaders tried to stage a military coup against Gorbachev regime taking Gorbachev's illness and his subsequent inability to carry out governance as excuse. The eight-man State Committee for the State of Emergency in the USSR (GKChP) imposed an emergency for a period of six-months that resulted in a ban on rallies, demonstrations and strikes, and strict restrictions on mass movements as well as activities of the political parties, and press censorship. Soviet tanks rolled on the roads and streets of Moscow but the people of Moscow, led by Yeltsin, strongly protested the involvement of the troops and, sometimes, even formed human chains to block the movement of the military vehicles. Yeltsin declared the coup illegal and spoke from atop a tank in front of the Russian White House, the seat of the Parliament of the Russian SFSR, appealing to the Russian people to resist any attempt for overthrowing democracy through protests and indefinite general strikes. Supporting Yeltsin's stand, people took to the streets in protest against the coup. The mayor of Leningrad also organized resistance against the coup. Yeltsin drew huge support across the Russian SFSR resulting in mass demonstrations against the coup throughout Russia (Grachev, 1996; Gibson, 1997: 671; Sturua, 1992; Kotkin, 2001; Winters, 1999).

On 20 August 1991, there was a mass demonstration of around 200,000 people in front of the Moscow City Soviet; 50,000 people staged mass demonstration at the Russian White House; 200,000 people participated in anti-coup rally in Leningrad's Palace Square; and 50,000 people demonstrated against the coup in Kishinev, Moldavia. A day later came a dramatic situation in the coup when even the CPSU turned against the coup meant for the seizure of Soviet power and all the leaders involved in the coup were later arrested. The next day after the failure of coup attempt, a large number of people assembled in front of the Russian White House and celebrated "a Rally of Victors". Within one week, a democratic

government was revived in the Soviet Union (Grachev, 1996; Gibson, 1997: 671; Sturua, 1992; Kotkin, 2001; Winters, 1999).

Finally, by January 1992, Soviet Union ceased to exist and Russian Federation, along with 14 other republics, emerged as an independent sovereign state with its capital in Moscow. Boris Yeltsin became the first President of new Russia the same year thus putting an end to many years of political crisis in Moscow (Grachev, 1996; Gibson, 1997; Lovell, 1996; Sturua, 1992; Kotkin, 2001; Hollander, 2000; Winters, 1999).

The 1993 Constitution of post-Soviet Russia was adopted following a political confrontation between the Russian President and the Parliament resulting into the constitutional crisis of 1993 which was resolved by using military force. The 1993 constitutional crisis was accompanied by bloody violence lasting for ten days and emerged as the single deadliest event in the history of Russia since the revolutions of 1917. It claimed 187 lives and wounded 437 people (Krylova, 1994; Saunders and Strukov, 2010).

The new Constitution of Russia was approved on 12 December 1993 by the people who voted for it at the referendum. It came into force on 25 December 1993 abolishing the Soviet system of government. This Constitution replaced that of Russian SFSR adopted in 1978 when Russia was a Republic within the USSR. In 1991, a new state, viz. the Russian Federation, emerged. The transformation of the state started a process of transformation of the Constitution. The 1978 Constitution was amended more than three hundred times. It was full of contradictions. It was quite obvious that the new country needed a new Constitution (The 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation; Krylova, 1994; Saunders and Strukov, 2010).

Evolution of new administrative system in post-Soviet Dagestan:

The Soviet disintegration and the ongoing political crisis had tragic consequences for the Caucasus. Dagestan, with its distinctly segmented ethnic and social structure and internal contradictions, was at the verge of acute inter-ethnic conflict. Under this volatile situation, a distinct and independent political system began to emerge and the deep rooted socio-cultural and ethnic features started gaining prominence anew in Dagestan's politics. As a result, various political institutions emerged from this complex and sometimes conflictual process which still exist today in Dagestan (Kisriev, 2003: 2; Kisriev, 2004: 329).

The Republic of Dagestan was acceded to the Federation Treaty in March 1992. The 1992 Federation Treaty provided for priority of local legislation over the Russian legislation when the two were in conflict. Thus, it weakened the power of the federal government and provided significant economic, cultural, and legislative autonomy to the constituent units (now federal subjects) of the Russian Federation. Moscow retained control of currency, finance and banking, communications, justice, and space exploration, while sharing responsibility for the environment, historic preservation, education, and key areas of the national economy. The ethnic republics, in particular, gained substantive control of their own affairs while the oblasts received less independence, thus creating a system of asymmetrical federalism¹ (Federation Treaty, 1992; Saunders and Strukov, 2010; Gidadhubli and Kumar,

1. Asymmetrical Federalism refers to a federal system of government in which power and autonomy are unevenly divided between constituent states.

1993).

Dagestan is the most ethnically, culturally, territorially and linguistically diverse and extremely heterogeneous republic in the Russian Federation as it is home to 14 ethnic and 34 sub-ethnic groups, which are linguistically affiliated to these 14 groups (Ware *et al.*, 2003: 04-05; Kisriev and Ware, 2001: 107). Its multi-national political system, although a complex system, is a clear example of ethnic speciality which took several centuries to evolve and has sustained the republic's socio-political system. Dagestan adopted its own constitution on 26 July 1994, and during the adoption of the latter, a need was felt to accommodate all the ethnic groups in the political and administrative system of the republic based on consociational model of democracy (Kisriev and Ware, 2001: 106-107; Kisriev, 2003: 2-3; Kisriev, 2004: 334-335).

The People's Assembly of Dagestan is the legislature or Parliament of the Republic of Dagestan. It was created replacing the Supreme Soviet of the Dagestan ASSR in 1995. It comprises 90 deputies elected by proportional representation for a period of 5 years through secret ballot and universal suffrage. In the administrative system, it is necessary that senior officials in various government branches must belong to the different ethnic groups, and the same is applied to their deputies too. Elections take place according to a majority system in single mandate constituencies with the goal of ensuring proportional representation and avoid ethnic confrontations within constituencies. Thus, Dagestan's political stability till 1999 owed much to its quasi-consociational political system (Parliament of the Republic of Dagestan; Kisriev and Ware, 2001: 106-107; Kisriev, 2003: 2-3; Kisriev, 2004: 334-335).

The 1994 Constitution of Dagestan and the electoral laws along with several rules of political behaviour resembled a consociational political system with the objective of giving comprehensive stability to the republic. The 1994 Constitution disapproved the absolute role of a single President of Dagestan, recognizing that the concentration of power in an individual would be detrimental to the whole political balance. The President of Dagestan is appointed by the Russian President and serves a four year term. His task is to function under the ambit of, and in compliance with both the Constitution and federal laws as well as the Constitution and laws of Dagestan; and the preservation of the unity and territorial integrity of the republic (President of the Republic of Dagestan; The 1994 Constitution of the Republic of Dagestan). The State Council is the highest executive body elected by the members of the Constitutional Assembly. It is composed of 14 members comprising one representative from each of the 11 titular ethnic groups of the republic and remaining three representatives coming from ethnic Russian, Azerbaijani and Chechen communities. In order to check the concentration of power within a single ethnic group, a norm was set up under which, the post of chairman of the State Council would rotate on ethnic principle, i.e. the post must not be held for more than two consecutive terms by the persons of same ethnic group. The Chairman of the State Council would propose a Prime Minister who is not allowed to have the same ethnicity as of the former. The Prime Minister is the member and first deputy chairman of the State Council. The other members of the Council are elected according to the ethnic group. The Constitutional Assembly consisting of 242 persons is the organ that adopts a constitution and elects the Chairman of the State Council. The members are elected in order to reflect proportional representation of the main nationalities in Dagestan (Kisriev, 2003: 2-3; Kisriev, 2004: 337-

338; Hille 2010: 307-308; Abdullaev, 1997).

With Putin's coming to power in 2000, the process of "recentralization" and "reconsolidation" of power slowly and steadily began in Russia, and Dagestan also underwent this development which changed its internal political system. The federal government sought to find out all those articles of the 1994 Dagestani Constitution that were not consistent with the federal (Russian) Constitution. It was later discovered that the federal Constitution was contradicted at forty five points by twenty five articles of the Dagestani Constitution. After going through long legislative procedures, the amendments to the Constitution of Dagestan were approved by the Dagestani Parliament. On 22 June 2000, amendments to the articles – Articles 65(6), 65(8), 66, 70, 75, 81(1)(5), 81(4), 81(7), 91(13), 112(3), 113 and 113(5)(2) – of the Dagestani Constitution were passed by the Dagestani Parliament. In 2003, the 1994 Constitution of Dagestan was finally amended and brought fully within the compliance of the federal constitution. The amendment also changed the election of Dagestani President on the basis of the principle of rotation (Ware and Kisriev, 2010: 154-162; Hille, 2010: 308).

Conclusion:

The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 giving independence to 15 republics. Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost, perestroika and New Union Treaty were instrumental in unleashing the wave of Soviet collapse. A military coup was staged in August 1991 by the CPSU to restore Soviet Union. However, it failed in just two days and further angered Russians against Soviet regime. In December 1991, Gorbachev resigned as the last leader of the Soviet Union and Boris Yeltsin succeeded him as the first President of the new Russia. The Soviet collapse and the subsequent demise of Communism put Russia into a transition from socialism to liberal market economy.

The new Constitution was adopted by the Russian Federation on 12 December 1993 after a 3-day bloody Constitutional crisis in Russia. It came into force on 25 December 1993 replacing that of Russian SFSR adopted in 1978. Many new provisions were added and possible changes undertaken during the making of 1993 Constitution which made it look better and more liberal as compared to 1978 Constitution of the Russian SFSR. However, it favored the Russian President more than the Parliament and gave him the absolute political power.

The Soviet collapse and 1993 Constitutional crisis in Russia tarnished Russia's image in its peripheries inducing fierce separatist struggles in the North Caucasus. Since Soviet collapse, Chechnya has been the main epicenter of all conflicts and disturbances like terrorism, Islamic extremism and separatism in the North Caucasus and thus, it has been a grave area of concern for the Federation. The Federation has realized that in order to maintain peace and stability in the whole of North Caucasus region which is a vital area of Russian interests, the restoration of order and peace; and elimination of terrorists and separatists in Chechnya must be given utmost priority.

During Soviet collapse, Dagestan became vulnerable to violence and inter-ethnic conflicts but slowly and steadily it shaped its political structure along the lines of social and ethnic edifice. On 26 July 1994, it adopted its constitution and embraced consociational model of democracy to accommodate more than 30 nationalities on the basis of their proportional

representation in Dagestan. Under the 1994 Constitution, an administrative setup was established which assigned different roles to the Parliament and the State Council to maintain consociationalism. Despite ethnic conflicts and internal contradictions, Dagestan managed to ensure some degree of political stability.

REFERENCES

- Abdullaev, Nabi (1997). Constitutional Amendments Threaten To Destabilize Situation In Daghestan. *Prism*, **4** (8).
- Clemens, Walter C. (1997). Who or what killed the Soviet Union? How three Davids undermined Goliath. *Nationalism & Ethnic Politics*, **3** (1): 136-158.
- Fuller, Graham E. (1994). The New Geopolitical Order”, in Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner (eds.) *The New Geopolitics of Central Asia and Its Borderlands*, London: I. B. Tauris.
- Gibson, James L. (1997). Mass Opposition to the Soviet Putsch of August 1991: Collective Action, Rational Choice, and Democratic Values in the Former Soviet Union”, *The American Political Science Review*, **91** (3): 671-684.
- Gidadhbli, R.G and Rama Sampat Kumar (1993). Crisis in Moscow. *Economic & Political Weekly*, **28** (41): 2197-2198.
- Grachev, Andrei S. (1996). *Final days: The inside story of the collapse of the Soviet Union*, Oxford: Westview.
- Hille, Charlotte (2010). *State Building and Conflict Resolution in the Caucasus*, Leiden: Eurasian studies library.
- Hollander, Paul (2000). *Political Will and Personal Belief: The Decline and Fall of Soviet Communism*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Kisriev, Enver (2003). Dagestan: Power in the balance. *The Caucasus: Armed and Divided*, London: Saferworld Arms & Security Programme.
- Kisriev, Enver (2004). Political Process in Daghestan: Prospects for Democracy, in Yaacov Ro'i (eds.) *Democracy and Pluralism in Muslim Eurasia*, Abingdon: Routledge.
- Kisriev, Enver and Robert Ware (2001). Ethnic Parity and Democratic Pluralism in Dagestan: A Consociational Approach. *Europe-Asia Studies*, **53** (1): 105–131.
- Kotkin, Stephen (2001). *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Krylova, Ninel S. (1994). The New Constitution of Russia: Main Principles and Features. *Akron Law Review*, **27** (3): 397-406.
- Lovell, Tom (1996). The Fall of the Soviet Union: Whys and Wherefores, Paper presented in 1996 Conference at The Raleigh Tavern Philosophical Society, Tomball, TX: USA.
- Saunders, Robert A. and Vlad Strukov (2010). *Historical Dictionary of the Russian Federation*, Maryland: Scarecrow Press.
- Stoner-Weiss, Kathryn (2009). “Domestic and International Influences on the Collapse of the Soviet Union (1991) and Russia’s Initial Transition to Democracy (1993)”, Lecture delivered on 5 March

2009 at Center on Democracy, Development, and The Rule of Law Freeman, Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University: Stanford.

Sturua, Melor (1992). "The Real Coup", *Foreign Policy*, (85): 63-72.

Ware, Robert and Enver Kisriev (2010). *Dagestan: Russian hegemony and Islamic resistance in the North Caucasus*, New York: M.E. Sharpe.

Winters, Paul A. (1999), *The Collapse of the Soviet Union*, San Diego: Greenhaven Press.

Webliography:

Federation Treaty 1992 between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Dagestan, URL: http://russian_federation.enacademic.com/185/Federation_treaty_of_1992

Parliament of the Republic of Dagestan, URL: http://eng.nsr.dagestan.ru/republic_of_dagestan/about_republic/spravochnaya_informaciya

President of the Republic of Dagestan, URL: <http://president.e-dag.ru/>

The 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation (after amendments in 2008), URL: <http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-01.htm>

The 1994 Constitution of the Republic of Dagestan (after amendments in 2003), URL: <http://e-dag.ru/2013-05-27-06-54-30/konstitutsiya-rd.html>.
