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Heuristic Potential of Sammy Smooha Ethnic Democracy Concept

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Abstract

The article next to the hermeneutic methodology examines the key aspects of a special model of political regime: the «ethnic democracy» of S. Smooha, which is based on the idea of the development of an ethnic nation in a state. According to this author's point of view, the main idea of this form of stability is the absolute control of the ethnic majority over the minority. It examines the reasons for the emergence of «ethnic democracy», the characteristics of its implementation in practice and the conditions of stability. When this model is implemented in practice, the State pursues the objective of central ethnic-national development in the country, as well as its isolation from other ethnic groups. Under the concept of «ethnic democracy» the ethnic minority is granted limited rights, the state constantly monitors its scope, considering the interests of the «main» nation. It is concluded that the implementation of the «ethnic democracy» model deliberately violates the right to self-identification of a part of the population (ethnic minority), therefore «ethnic democracy» is an element of state policy that addresses inequality or a desire for total assimilation.

Keywords: ethnic democracy; ethnic majority; ethnic minority; ethnic-national elite; ethnocracy.

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Potencial heurístico del concepto de democracia étnica de Sammy Smootha

Resumen

El artículo próximo a la metodología hermenéutica examina los aspectos clave de un modelo especial de régimen político: la «democracia étnica» de S. Smootha, que se basa en la idea del desarrollo de una nación étnica en un estado. Según el punto de vista de este autor, la idea principal de esta forma de estabilidad es el control absoluto de la mayoría étnica sobre la minoría. Se examinan las razones del surgimiento de la «democracia étnica», las características de su implementación en la práctica y las condiciones de estabilidad. Cuando se implementa este modelo en la práctica, el Estado persigue el objetivo de un desarrollo central étnico-nacional en el país, así como su aislamiento de otros grupos étnicos. Aunque bajo el concepto de «democracia étnica» a la minoría étnica se le otorgan derechos limitados, el estado monitorea constantemente su alcance, tomando en cuenta los intereses de la nación «principal». Se concluye que la implementación del modelo de «democracia étnica» viola deliberadamente el derecho a la autoidentificación de una parte de la población (minoría étnica), por lo tanto, la «democracia étnica» es un elemento de política estatal que encubre la desigualdad o el deseo de asimilación total.

Palabras clave: democracia étnica; mayoría étnica; minoría étnica; élite étnico-nacional; etnocracia.

Introduction

Due to the accession of Eastern Europe countries and the former Soviet Union countries to the European Union, the institutions of the “old” Europe faced the problems of “new members”, which are based on ethnic stereotypes. Excessive politicization of ethnic stereotypes on the part of the ruling elite in these states has a destructive effect on the consolidation of society and leads to the confrontation between the ethnic majority and minority. In the course of this confrontation, the elements of ethnic nationalism are sharpened. It is believed that the ethnic state was a stage in the formation of a civil one (Volkogonova and Tatarenko, 2001). That is, before the nations of the West became civil, they were ethnic (Vakhitov, 2012), which was based on cultural values.

It is also believed that “liberal democracies grew on the substrate of ethnic cleansing, although outside the colonies this took the form of organized coercion rather than mass murder” (Mann, 2005: 590).

Thus, the implementation of a liberal democratic state classical model, based on multiculturalism, has been postponed indefinitely. At the same time, the understanding is ripening that if “one ethnic group dominates in political decision-making, and the other is concentrated on the periphery,” then this confrontation can develop into ethnic wars in these countries (Kharitonova, 2016).

1. Materials and Methods

The article uses the method of non-standardized analysis of textual materials regarding the heuristic potential of “ethnic democracy” model by S. Smooha. Within the framework of this method, the search for expert judgments concerning the “ethnic democracy” model is carried out according to the principle of “refutation - support” of the model elements. The scholars focusing on “ethnic politics” were selected as experts. The selection of texts was carried out according to the principle of “refutation - support” coincidence as the elements of this model, which underlie the statements of experts. The use of this method makes it possible not only to fix the content of experts’ opinions regarding the elements of “ethnic democracy” model, but also allows to analyze the heuristic potential of the “ethnic democracy” model by S. Smooha.

2. Research Results

An opportunity to avoid the problems of multiculturalization of a multinational society that were experienced by such countries as Great Britain and Australia is one of the projects of the so-called limited democracy in the form of “ethnic democracy” model.

A special model of the political regime - “ethnic democracy” - is based on the formation of one ethnic nation in one state. This concept, in its essence, justifies the dominance of the titular nation and discrimination against all other ethnic groups.

This model, like the term “ethnic democracy” itself, was proposed by Professor S. Smooha in the book published in 1989 (Smooha, 1989). He believes Israel is a classic example of “ethnic democracy.” In addition to Israel, he mentions such states as Slovakia, Northern Ireland, Poland, and the Baltic states among the countries implementing the model of “ethnic democracy” (Smooha, 2002).

From the point of view by S. Smouha:

Ethnic democracy combines the expansion of civil and political rights for all permanent residents with the legalized ethnic domination of the majority group. The ethnic-national elite controls the state of society and uses the nation to achieve its national interests and provides its members with the most favorable conditions (Smooha, 2001: 5).

However, according to the fair remark by M.Kh. Farukshin, "... ethnic democracies constitutionally place "one ethnic group - the indigenous nation - in a privileged position over all other groups within the borders of the state", which unambiguously indicates their ethnocratic nature" (Farukshin, 2015: 46).

S. Smouha identifies the following reasons for the emergence of "ethnic democracy": 1) an independent state revived in a certain territory; 2) the presence of a threat (real or perceived) to the nation; 3) commitment of the ethnic majority to democracy, which can be ideological or pragmatic; 4) control over ethnic minority.

Based on the conditions, the ethnic majority can vary the methods of government from democracy to its restriction. If the minority is disunited, then the ethnic majority builds "ethnic democracy." If the minority is consolidated, then the ethnic majority uses the authoritarian methods of government.

A number of conditions ensure the stability of "ethnic democracy".

- 1) The main ethnic nation constitutes a demographic majority; therefore, it can manage democratic processes on its own without the political support of "non-mainstream" groups.
- 2) The "minority" population should be a minority, so it can be ignored.
- 3) The main core of an ethnic nation must be committed to democracy, if there are few supporters, then "ethnic democracy" is degenerating.
- 4) The status of the main ethnic nation can be obtained by the persons belonging to this nation, namely those who lived in their homeland and the representatives of the diaspora who returned to their homeland.
- 5) The remaining representatives of the ethnic majority who make up the diaspora living in other states should actively lobby for the interests of their nation.
- 6) The representatives of other ethnic groups receive the status of immigrants, so that they can be controlled more easily through the restrictions in their rights and suppress the interference of their historical homeland.
- 7) The international community should not interfere in the internal affairs of the country, which improves the chances of "ethnic democracy" for survival (Smooha, 2001).

S. Smooha defines eight features that are the main elements of his model of "ethnic democracy":

The first element is the dominance of ethnic nationalism, which asserts the absolute, exclusive, and indivisible right of the main “ethnic nation”, legalizing the unequal status between the main ethnic group and the “non-main” ones.

The second element is that the state forms the ethnic-national nucleus in the country and clearly separates it from other ethnic-national groups. The state, first of all, takes care of the “main” ethnic nation from assimilation and depopulation.

The third necessary element is the development of the relationship between the state and the ethnic nation. The state territory is the exclusive homeland of the “main” ethnic nation, the state apparatus is an instrument at the disposal of the main ethnic nation for the advancement of its collective goals, including security.

In the fourth element, S. Smootha suggests that the state must mobilize the main ethnic nation in order to strengthen the national identity of the “main” ethnic nation members, to prevent apathy and assimilation. Thus, within the framework of “ethnic democracy” there is the process of ethnic political mobilization: “...by the means of which an ethnic community is politicized for its collective interests and aspirations and then organized as a collective subject with the resources for political action” (Esman, 1994: 216).

The fifth element of the model assumes that the ethnic minority should be limited in rights, both individual and collective. The state does not recognize the national rights of “non-mainstream” groups, they are not perceived as autonomous national minorities. Restrictions are also imposed on the expression of the national identity of “non-mainstream” groups (identification with an external homeland, school curriculum, national history, and literature).

The sixth point of the model assumes that the state allows “non-mainstream” groups to conduct parliamentary struggle. “Ethnic democracy” makes available various forms of protest: it is allowed to use voting, petitions, media, courts, political pressure, lobbying, demonstrations, strikes and other legal means to change the status of an ethnic minority.

In the seventh element, the author suggests that the state should perceive “non-core” groups as a threat. This perception is consolidated as an integral and permanent part of the system. Threats include demographic growth of an ethnic minority, excessive accumulation of political power, economic superiority, belittling of the ethnic majority national culture, the risk to national security, loyalty to a foreign homeland, subversion, unrest and instability.

The eighth element of his system is that the state imposes some control over “minor” groups. The members of “minor” groups are perceived as a threat to stability, even if they are generally law-abiding people, their potential for disloyalty is assessed through the number of law violations, and this increases suspicion (Smootha, 2001).

S. Smootha admits that “the ethnic principle establishes clear ethnic inequality” and contradicts the democratic principle. He also recognizes the fact of infringement of the minority rights in favor of the majority through state institutions, and the state builds up interaction with the ethnic minority in advance, as with a potential “subversive element” destabilizing the country. Thus, a forceful nature of influence, which does not exclude repression, is laid in the system of governance in relation to the ethnic minority. Therefore, his assertion that, being an incomplete democracy, “ethnic democracy” is closer to democracy than to “undemocratic regime”, sounds paradoxical (Smootha, 2001).

Thus, we can assume that, from the point of view of the author of the term, “ethnic democracy” is a kind of transitional state from ethnocracy to a full-fledged democratic regime, where the leading role is played not by a class or a party, but by an ethnos. Such an ethnos is an active political actor striving for democracy due to its cultural superiority, influencing passive actors, namely other ethnic groups, through forced assimilation.

A myth is created in “ethnic democracy” about the denial of discriminatory measures against an ethnic minority against the background of the inferior status of these minorities. In fact, the thesis of the low culture of the ethnic minority is being imposed, which does not allow it to take the advantage of democracy benefits. Only a complete denial of their identity, the “low culture” of their ethnos will allow them to join the family of “civilized peoples”.

Conclusions

Summing up, the model of “ethnic democracy” allows the use of authoritarian methods of power and, thus, the violation of the announced rights of an ethnic minority. The aggravation of the ethnic-national issue and its solution in an authoritarian way is supposed. Aggravation of international relations is possible with the states where the minority prevails or has a strong lobby.

Thus, “Ethnic democracy” is an element of state policy that covers up inequality for national unity and for the sake of ending the struggle against assimilation. Within the framework of the “ethnic democracy” model, part of the population is deliberately infringed upon its rights.

The model of “ethnic democracy” by S. Smootha is based on the idea of forming one ethnic nation in one state. The high heuristic potential of “ethnic democracy” concept by S. Smootha makes it possible to analyze the implementation of this model in practice, where Israel is a classic example of “ethnic democracy”, and he mentions the Baltic states, Slovakia, Northern Ireland, Poland among the states that have embarked on the path of this model. The conditions for the stability of “ethnic democracy”, from the author’s point of view, are the provisions, the “red thread” of which is the dominance of the ethnic majority over the ethnic minority.

Within the framework of the “ethnic democracy” model, a part of the population - the ethnic minority - is deliberately infringed on its rights. Thus, in our opinion, “ethnic democracy” is an element of state policy, which is used to cover up inequality for the national unity and for the sake of ending the struggle against assimilation.

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