FACTORS AND CONDITIONS OF LASTING SPATIAL VARIATIONS IN THE ECONOMY

In each period of time, Russian regions are at different levels of socioeconomic development. This manifests itself in the difference of their real potentials and possibilities of their development in different degrees of competitiveness on the markets of goods and services, in the capacity to perceive the world’s and best domestic achievements in technologies and management, in the degree of involvement in settling nation-wide problems, etc. It is quite obvious, therefore, that regions’ response to challenges of time, to principles of various scenarios for Russia’s socioeconomic development will be dissimilar and will eventually entail changes in regional proportions.

In analyzing the effect of different scenario parameters on socioeconomic development one is faced with the need for identifying lasting spatial variations, often defined as “spatial transformations” over the period preceding the accounting one. Subsequently, implied under spatial transformations of the economy will be long-term steady indices marking the development of the multi-regional system of the Russian Federation “freed” from national trends. Dynamic series of overall regional indices summarizing the diversity of particular indicators marking the socioeconomic development of individual regions can serve as measurable characteristics of this process. Transformations of the Russian economic space can be viewed both within the framework of a normative approach (movement to a preset territory structure of the economy) and in positivist traditions, studying evolution of the spatial distribution of economic activity and revealing its causes, factors and restrictions. Their real restrictions show themselves in the stability of summary characteristics (overall indices) of regions’ development.

Tendencies of spatial changes in the Russian economy and in the country’s eastern regions. Cardinal reforms of the Russian economy carried out in the 1990s were accompanied by serious adverse consequences for most regions of the country, including Siberia: by a decline in the production of goods and services, and in the intensity of interregional relations, a fall in people’s incomes, unemployment growth, etc. In these conditions the socioeconomic policy conducted in regions was primarily focused on containing the situation and solving many and sometimes almost catastrophic problems engendered by ill-considered innovations of the center rather than at boosting economic growth. On the whole, the policy of regional administrations in that period was of a pronounced paternalistic nature and was aimed at alleviating most painful consequences of the implemented reforms. It concerned, directly or indirectly, all participants in economic relations in the regions. Big business received tax privileges, small business was not vexed with payment of taxes and legalization of incomes, prices for food products and utilities were held in check for the population, wherever possible, subsidies were provided to low-income and poor families, etc. Local budgets were better controlled by stringent regulation of expenditures and regional budgets were to incur basic expenses of municipal communities on education and public health, etc. But, in general, the paternalistic policy potential was exhausted by the beginning of the 21st century. The point is not so much in redistribution in favor of the Federal Center of tax proceeds to the Russian budgetary system and the growing local budgets stringency in view of the toughness of municipal reforms and a rise in the compensation of public sector labor. The main thing is that the economic situation in Russia has changed on the whole, that is, the Russian economy has begun switching over from production slump to stabilization and...
growth. It has taken time and effort to realize the irreversibility of these changes, and resolve the most pressing problems (repayment of arrears of wages and pensions, reduction of nonmonetary forms of payment for products, services, etc.). And it was only in recent years that there came the awareness that we need to conceptualize and work out a new economic policy.

Possible changes in the spatial distribution of economic activity are a major factor in setting priorities of such a policy. It is no secret that the spatial structure of the Russian economy evolved under the influence of principles and real practices of economic management way back under centralized planning. The transition to a market economy alters the distribution of forces influencing regional development, transforms in many aspects incentives to the movement of goods, investments, material, financial and labor resources. The growth of the domestic market, consumer demand and import substitution, diversification of the economy sectoral structure with an accent laid on the manufacturing industries predetermine the competitive advantages of regions in this country’s European part. Under these conditions one can expect that a majority of eastern regions will develop in clusters: point (focal) “oases” of economic activity will alternate with notably underdeveloped inter-cluster regions. Already today, their major economic resources are concentrated on an increasing scale in big and medium-sized cities. Spontaneous processes in settlement evolution pose a potential threat to the stability of regions’ economic development. “Voting by feet” impairs demographic reproduction in the countryside and small towns and eventually causes degradation of the established system of settlement. These processes have affected most regions in Siberia and the Russian Far East and increasingly hamper their economic growth.

Should a greater part of the country’s eastern regions be subjected to clustering (with obvious consequences for the satisfaction of even minimal needs of their population, enterprises and institutions, then the formation of intensive development zones in more advanced areas of Siberia and the Russian Far East may serve as the only possible compensation for the macro-region as a whole. Under the influence of geopolitical threats the significance of such zones for this country will only grow with time.

In the Siberian Federal District (FD) the regions in the south of West Siberia are most suited for the role of such a “supporting territory” The development of this zone is based on two megalopolises (Novosibirsk and Omsk), large cities (Barnaul, Kemerovo, Novokuznetsk, Tomsk) and on a system of medium-sized and small cities forming centers of economic activity between them (from Barabinsk and Kuibyshev in the west to Asino and Marinsk in the east). A purposeful support of these cities through building a network of branches of large manufacturing complexes, cultural and educational establishments situated in regional capitals, developing the local industry, processing farm produce, promoting maintenance-service stations, etc.) can breathe new life in them and provide conditions for a more even distribution of economic potential, normalize reproduction of the population (objectively opposing clusterization processes). Already now urban agglomerations are being formed successfully around Novosibirsk and Omsk, the cities in West Siberia. Their influence goes beyond the Siberian FD. The Severny airport (Novosibirsk), for one, services mostly shift settlements in the oil-and-gas fields of Tyumen North. Software producing companies, specialized medicinal and rehabilitation centers, educational establishments in these cities provide services to enterprises and the population of not only the Siberian FD, but also to Tyumen oblast, Yakutia, etc.

Individual regions in the south of the Far East play a similar role in the Far Eastern FD. But it would be premature to attribute them in a broad sense to supporting territories.

Sverdlovsk and Chelyabinsk oblasts contribute more and more to a steady development of the Ural FD. The analysis of development trends in the country’s eastern regions confirms these assumptions. The estimates published in the study [1] show that over the period from 2000 to 2004 the summary socioeconomic indices in the supporting regions grew faster than those in the federal district as a whole. In the Ural FD it is Sverdlovsk and Chelyabinsk oblasts, in the Siberian FD, regions in the south of West Siberia, and in the Far East, regions of the southern zone (Table 1).

Possible spatial changes in contrasting scenarios of the socioeconomic development of the Russian Federation. There are few basically different scenarios for Russia’s socioeconomic development. Described below are general approaches to the analysis of possible spatial changes within the framework of three main scenarios, namely, evolutionary, reduction of regional differences, and innovation development. The effect of these scenarios on spatial proportions is studied within the scope of the following assumptions about the composition of territories and a set of indicators.

The country’s spatial structure. 25 regions of Russia are under consideration [2]:

- Central 1: Vladimir, Ivanovo, Kostroma, Tver, and Yaroslavl oblasts
- Central 2: Moscow city and Moscow oblast
- Central 3: Bryansk, Kaluga, Orel, Ryazan, Smolensk, and Tula oblasts
- Central 4: Belgorod, Voronezh, Kursk, Lipetsk, and Tambov oblasts
- Northwest 1: Republic of Karelia and Murmansk oblast