

Donna Bahry

The New Federalism and the Paradoxes of Regional Sovereignty in Russia

February 20, 2004

Abstract

During the 1990s Russia appeared to be a classic example of the perils of federalism in political transition. Powerful ethnically based republics challenged the center on key reforms and a weak federal government appeared unable to counter their claims to sovereignty. Since the election of 2000, however, regional prerogatives have been substantially curtailed. An assertive center has dramatically reined in much more pliant republics.

If regions were so powerful, how could the center roll back their privileges so quickly? This paper argues that in fact republic sovereignty was seriously limited. Federal authorities retained key controls over local resources, and federal inability to create effective market institutions constrained regional opportunities to develop countervailing external ties.