

## **Homogenisation and the ‘New Russian Citizen’: A Road to Stability or Ethnic Tension?**

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This article investigates the phenomenon of homogenizing policies in post-Yeltsin Russia. This consists of a series of measures that have effectively downgraded ethnicity and increased uniformity. First, the article outlines theories linking multiculturalism and ethnic pluralism, and indeed minority rights, to stability. Second, the article traces the trajectory of nationality policies from the Soviet to the post-Soviet periods, and explains the (post-Yeltsin) Russian authorities’ choice to distance themselves from earlier practices, opting for homogenization. Third, it delineates the forms of de-ethnification: the promotion of a civic Russian identity (the ‘the new Russian citizen’) to the detriment of minority identities, and the restructuring of the Federation to reduce the salience of ethnicity. In light of the theories linking multiculturalism and stability, the article then examines whether the current ‘homogenizing’ policies bring a fragile and ephemeral *or* a durable and solid political stability. The article concludes that, on one side, the measures might be reducing minorities’ demands for the preservation of ethnic distinctiveness, leading them to identify with a Russian civic identity. On the other, homogenizing policies, by downgrading ethnicity, have generated grievances, when such policies have been perceived as a form of repression. As such, the *status quo* does not guarantee long-lasting political stability.

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In its third periodic report to the Council of Europe’s Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM), the Russian government places a strong emphasis on its long tradition of accommodation of national diversity.<sup>1</sup> The presence of a plethora of diverse ethnicities at various

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historical junctions of Russian history—the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation—has necessitated special attention to diversity with a view to preventing conflict. According to government data there are over 160 ethnicities in Russia, or ‘nationalities’ (*natsional’nosti*). Nearly 20% of the population of Russia is made up of non-Russians: 79.8% are ethnic Russians, followed by 3.8% Tatars, 2% Ukrainians, 1.2% Bashkirs, 1.1% Chuvases, 0.9% Chechens and 0.8% Armenians; other, much smaller, minorities make up 10.2% of the population.<sup>2</sup> The country also has high levels of religious pluralism: in particular, over half of the persons belonging to national minorities are Muslims. This diversity, and the historic salience of the ‘national question’, led to the personal involvement of both Lenin and Stalin in attempts to ‘solve’ it. The modern Russian Federation has inherited both ethnic pluralism and the Soviet methods to regulate it, particularly its *ethnic* federalism. Yet former President Vladimir Putin’s leadership saw a departure from earlier nationality policies towards new forms of homogenization which command greater uniformity and a strong emphasis on a civic *Russian* identity—policies that continue under the Putin–Medvedev ‘tandem’.<sup>3</sup>

This article investigates the phenomenon of homogenizing policies in post-Yeltsin Russia. This consists of a series of measures that have effectively downgraded ethnicity and increased uniformity. First, the article outlines theories linking multiculturalism and ethnic pluralism, and indeed minority rights, to stability. Second, it traces the trajectory of nationality policies from the Soviet to the post-Soviet periods, and explains the (post-Yeltsin) Russian authorities’ choice to distance themselves from earlier practices, opting for homogenization. Third, it delineates the forms of de-ethnification: the promotion of a civic Russian identity (‘the new Russian citizen’) to the detriment of minority identities, and the restructuring of the Federation

to reduce the salience of ethnicity. In light of the theories linking multiculturalism and stability, the article then examines whether the current ‘homogenizing’ policies bring a fragile and ephemeral *or* a durable and solid political stability. It concludes that, on one side, the measures might be reducing minorities’ demands for the preservation of ethnic distinctiveness, leading them to identify with a Russian civic identity. On the other, homogenizing policies, by downgrading ethnicity, have generated grievances when such policies have been perceived as a form of repression. As such, the *status quo* does not guarantee long-lasting political stability.

This article includes data from in-depth interviews carried out in Russia in May, June and October 2010, and February 2011. The interviews were for a larger study on the implementation of the FCNM in Russia focusing on three minorities as case studies: Tatars, Mordovians and Karelians. The interviews took place in the following cities: Kazan (Republic of Tatarstan), Petrozavodsk (Republic of Karelia), Saransk (Republic Mordovia), Moscow, St Petersburg, Voronezh and Tver. Different questions were asked of different groups of respondents, depending on their specialization. The respondents were affiliated to one of the following categories: minority association (National Cultural Autonomy or similar) (9 respondents); minority non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (9); cultural association (6); congress of peoples (3); human rights NGO (11); academia (25); media (11); public official (16); school employee (2); and the judiciary (3). In total 95 people were interviewed—47 women and 48 men.<sup>4</sup> Of these, 22 interviews were particularly relevant to the section of the article analysing minority education and language preservation.

### **Stability through multiculturalism**

What approach is conducive to stability in a pluriethnic society? Numerous authors suggest that multiculturalism is the answer (Kymlicka, 2003; Kymlicka, 2007; Parekh, 2006; Phillips, 2007; Taylor, 1992; Young, 1990). Although multiculturalism is not a monolithic body of thought, multiculturalists argue for the “equal recognition of cultures” (Kelly, 2002: 5), as a vital underpinning of the ethnic groups’ coexistence.

Criticism of multiculturalism highlights the potential for fragmentation leading to the weakening of the state, for example by fomenting extremism (Kepel, 2005). Anderson sees multiculturalism in a negative light, noting that “many ‘old nations’ [...] find themselves challenged by ‘sub’-nationalisms within their borders—nationalisms which, naturally, dream of shredding this subness one happy day” (Anderson, 2005: 3). Barry criticizes multiculturalism’s attention to cultures, arguing that differentiated treatment is a menace to equality, as well as detracting attention from “universal human values” and shared disadvantages such as poverty (Barry, 2001). Multiculturalists, instead, argue there is a strong correlation between the acceptance of diversity, with the recognition of its intrinsic value, and stability. This is also the approach of the present minority rights system, which originated from a desire to prevent gross human rights abuses against vulnerable minorities.<sup>5</sup> The impetus for the adoption of the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities came from the 1990s military conflict in the Balkans (Martin Estebanez, 2005: 271). The post of the High Commissioner on National Minorities of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe was established in 1992 specifically to seek early resolution to ethnic tensions. Indeed, many incidents throughout history have shown that majority rule, without safeguards,

can lead to tyranny (Packer, 1993: 39-40), and that it requires counteraction through policies for the harmonious cohabitation of different cultures.

Diversity cannot simply be eliminated: it is a fact that the majority of nations are and have been multiethnic.<sup>6</sup> In Russia the high levels of diversity are unlikely to decrease with the continuous flow of migrant workers from former Soviet Union republics.<sup>7</sup> Attempts to transcend difference, with the (unrealistic) objective of creating a colour- and difference-blind society is not a viable option (Phillips, 2002). The denial of difference does not solve its complexities, but merely removes them from official public discourse. Typically it results in a failure to assess minorities' special needs, undercutting opportunities for the formulation of *ad hoc* policies that would facilitate interethnic and societal harmony. This is the route taken by France, which effectively denies the existence of minorities on its territory altogether and has declined to accede to the FCNM.<sup>8</sup>

France is an exception in Europe.<sup>9</sup> There has been a departure from traditional Western theories of nationalism, which had been developed around “an idealized model of the polis in which fellow citizens share a common descent, language, and culture” (Kymlicka, 2003: 2). To attain this ideal, minorities have been eliminated, assimilated, expelled or segregated. From the ashes of old concepts of cultural and ethnic purity new notions of “cultural hybridity” have been born, centering around the view that nation-states cannot accommodate all their constituent peoples. Multiculturalism is a rejection of the “homogenous nation-state”, and of assimilationist or exclusionist policies (Kymlicka, 2007). Packer places this in the context of human rights and freedoms:

In contradistinction from the exclusivist, coercive and assimilating nature of the putative ‘nation-State’ which values ‘purity’, we must think in terms of securing and expanding opportunities for multiple, open and evolving cultures and identities: we must value *freedom* [italics in original] (Packer, 1999: 270).<sup>10</sup>

States have endorsed, through signatures and ratifications, international declarations and conventions that encompass multicultural approaches—if we accept Xanthaki’s persuasive argument that international law has promoted elements of multiculturalism (Xanthaki, 2010). For example, in May 2011 the 2005 UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions had 116 state parties. This means an emerging consensus that a plurality of minority cultures and identities “enrich[es] the fabric of society as a whole”.<sup>11</sup> Smith echoes this, noting that there is a new, “positive conception of the ethnicity of the margins”, with ‘new cultural politics which engages rather than suppresses *difference* [...]’ (Smith, 1998: 204). Similarly, Phillips talks of “democracy *through* difference” (Phillips, 2002: 5, italics in original).

While diversity cannot simply be ignored, ideals of ‘unity’ *and* the accommodation of minorities are not mutually exclusive. Multiculturalism does not forcefully imply fragmentation. Rather, it is the societal marginalization of particular groups that leads them to radicalization. Different ethnicities may feel a common loyalty towards their state, as in the often-cited example of Switzerland, with its multilayered identity: the canton, the cultural/linguistic group, and the overarching Swiss identity (Spillman, 1997: 203; 211). Indeed, Guibernau argues that the adoption of a “cosmopolitan attitude” does not necessitate renouncing one’s national identity. It simply necessitates adding another layer (a “cosmopolitan layer”) to it (Guibernau, 2007: 195). Multiculturalism, thus, leads to “a balance between cohesion, equality, and difference” (Xanthaki, 2010: 24).

Hence, with regard to Russia, we have to ask: are Putin-Medvedev policies creating a joint identity *while also* preserving cultural pluralism, or are they repressing

the latter to replace it with the former? Is Russia *engaging* with difference, as Smith puts it, or does it wish ultimately to eliminate it?

### **From pluralism to homogenization**

It is this article's contention that there are currently moves to reduce difference, with a departure from the focus on diversity of the Soviet period and the regional autonomy of the Yeltsin period.

The Soviet approach to the 'national question' had rested on the forging of a strong link between ethnicity and territory. This is encapsulated in Stalin's definition of a nation as a "historically evolved, stable community based on a common language, *territory*, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture" (Stalin, 1950: 239, italics added).

On the basis of this principle, Soviet *ethnic* federalism was established: numerous territories were 'assigned' to different nationalities (for example, the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic—current Tatarstan—to the Tatars) (Hirsch, 2005). With some adjustments, this structure has been preserved in post-Soviet Russia: in 2011 the Russian Federation consisted of 83 subjects (administrative units), of which 21 were *ethnic* republics.<sup>12</sup>

On one level, this system has been successful. With the exception of the post-Soviet Chechen conflicts, it has prevented ethnic strife (Bowring, 2010). The Soviet nationality policies affirmed the importance of ethnicity at the regional and local levels, through quota systems that guaranteed minority representation in the local authorities and academic institutions; it thereby ensured the establishment of regional elites composed of persons belonging to minorities. Yet, ethnic federalism also exacerbated some of the tensions originating from the cohabitation of different

ethnicities. First, it resulted in a heightened consciousness of ethnicity, Soviet federalism having subdivided the country around existing, perceived or ‘imagined’ *ethnic* lines. The strength of ethnicity was further reinforced through the institution of the Soviet passport, which recorded, and therefore *fixed*, one’s nationality (Gorenburg, 2003: 28). Soviet ethnic classifications, based on primordialist and essentialist perceptions of ethnicity (Tishkov, 1997), unequivocally placed each Soviet citizen into one or another totalizing ethnic category. This might have contributed to an exaggerated perception of ‘otherness’, insufficiently balanced against the overarching but vague identity of the ‘Soviet citizen’ (*homo sovieticus*). As Tishkov put it, “Soviet ideology [...] enforced mutually exclusive ethnic loyalties on the principle of blood” (Tishkov, 1997: 250). And non-Russian regional leaders soon learned to articulate their claims primarily as leaders of nationalities rather than of regions (Hirsch, 2005: 172).<sup>13</sup>

Second, despite clear efforts towards the teaching and promotion of national languages and cultures, Soviet policies lacked coherence, and for some nationalities led to fully-fledged repression.<sup>14</sup> At a minimum there was a lack of real autonomy from Moscow (Melvin: 207; Sakwa, 2008: 228); this would lead to ethnic mobilization in the *perestroika* and in the 1990s (Gorenburg, 2003) and, with it, to political instability. Third, the link between ethnicity and territory did not help a large section of minorities: smaller nationalities were not classified as ‘titular’ (meaning that they were not assigned a territory), and clearly not all persons belonging to a titular nationality resided in ‘their own’ ethnic republics. For example, during the Soviet Union, according to 1989 census data, approximately three quarters of Tatars lived outside the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, and only 49% of its population were Tatars. In Khakassia, only 11% of the population was Khakass in

1989.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, as Brubaker noted, “[n]ations are fundamentally groups of persons, not stretches of territory” (Brubaker, 1996: 40).

Yeltsin inherited these unresolved difficulties and, without the Soviet ‘glue’ that had held the Union together, these problems only increased in complexity. Following the Soviet Union’s collapse, the regions started to gravitate away from the centre as they increasingly acquired autonomy through devolution (Stoner-Weiss, 1999). In 1990, Yeltsin famously invited the regions to “take as much sovereignty as [they] can swallow”. This did not derive so much from Yeltsin’s liberal attitudes, but rather from an inability of the federal authorities to fill the power vacuum left by the Communist party’s dethronement (Reddaway and Orttung, 2004: 6). The Yeltsin years led to statutory and political fragmentation, as evidenced in a plethora of *ad hoc* bilateral treaties with the subjects not regulated through a coherent federal legislative and administrative framework. Special arrangements to satisfy the particularistic needs of regions (and their leaders) enabled the formation of effective fiefdoms, ruled by assertive leaders engaging in “regional warlordism” (Kirkow, 1995; Kirkow, 1998: 139). Substantial powers were enjoyed by prominent regional (ethnic) leaders in post-Soviet Russia, such as former (ethnic Tatar) President of Tatarstan Mintimer Shaimiev (1991-2010) and former (ethnic Bashkir) President of Bashkortostan Murtaza Rakhimov (1993-2010). A republic like rich, oil-producing Tatarstan, with a high concentration of Tatars living on its territory, could defy the Russian authorities and refuse to sign Yeltsin’s Union Treaty in 1990, insisting instead on a power-sharing treaty (Bowring, 2007).<sup>16</sup> The only other republic to refuse to sign the treaty was Chechnya, whose secessionist aims, internal strife and volatility led to the devastating First Chechen War (1994-1996).

Hence, at the end of Yeltsin's rule ethnic pluralism had become synonymous with instability 'from below' and ineffective management 'from above'. Yeltsin's rule was also associated with the social ills generated by the difficult transition to a market economy, such as large scale privatization and the rise of the oligarchs, increased poverty, lawlessness and crime. In turn, newly-found freedoms of the post-Communist period allowed forms of ethnic nationalisms to emerge, calling for autonomy and threatening further instability. It is these complexities that former President Putin attempted to resolve through the strengthening of the state, which involved, *inter alia*, processes of 'homogenization', with new forms of uniformity and centrism.

### **Russia's homogenizing efforts**

The Russian leadership has sought to promote basic, non-ethnic values that supposedly unify nationalities residing in Russia, to replace potentially destabilizing multiple forms of nationalism at the regional level. In its 2006 Comments to the Second Opinion of the Council of Europe's FCNM Advisory Committee, the Russian government stated that it was pursuing a "policy of de-ethnization of [the] domestic political scene", and that the choice of policy derived from the fact that "national and ethno-cultural issues blend perfectly in the concept of basic civil rights".<sup>17</sup>

The essence of this new approach is captured in Russia's Third Report to the FCNM Advisory Committee, in the expression 'unity in variety'. This is a civic unity combined with ethnic diversity, in the recognition that the two are intertwined.<sup>18</sup> It is supposedly an attempt to create what has been defined as "multicultural constitutional patriotism" (Codagnone and Filippov, 2000). *Russian* citizenship should substitute the forms of "quasi citizenship" in regions with strong national identities such as

Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, ending their ability to forge an “inner abroad” within Russia (Sakwa, 2008: 234).

The civic identity that should replace ethnic consciousness is an identity coloured by elements of Russian ‘patriotism’, yet after having been carefully disassociated from ‘nationalism’. Putin has espoused the view that ‘nationalism’ is a destructive force, generating conflict and secessionist tendencies. ‘Patriotism’, by contrast, represents the overarching values through which any Russian citizen might find pride in his/her country and its achievements (Daucé *et al.*, 2010). It brings together elements of imperial, Soviet and Russian history, whose threads have been pulled together. The former president has been at pains to trace a continuum throughout Russian history, and to find positive outcomes in all eras (Sakwa, 2004: 241). For example, while Putin denounced the excessively “bureaucratized” form of the old Communist Youth League (*Komsomol*), he upheld some of the principles behind it, such as “the spirit of love of the homeland, of the fatherland” (Putin, 2002).

Russia has seen instances of rampant Russian nationalism (Kozhenikova *et al.*, 2005).<sup>19</sup> Some neo-fascist views have reached the mainstream media, government institutions and academia through ideologues such as Aleksandr Dugin, founder, in 2002, of the Eurasia Party (Umland, 2009). Daucé argues persuasively that despite this the general, Putin-supported discourse is patriotic but non-militant and non-nationalist (Daucé *et al.*, 2010). So can it be a formula for ethnic harmony?

***Overarching civic identity or pervasive Russianness?***

Establishing an overarching civic Russian identity, rather than an *ethnic* Russian one, would seem to fit Smith's model, in which diversity and integration coexist. This process creates:

[An] overarching community housing, but also binding together, through a common symbolism and institutional network, different cultures and ethnic communities (Smith, 2008: 106).

The traditional distinction between civic (liberal and inclusive) and ethnic (illiberal and exclusive) forms of nationalism is drawn from Kohn's seminar work (Kohn, 1944). It has been argued that a form of inclusive civic nationalism (based on *ius soli*), rather than exclusive ethnic nationalism (based on *ius sanguinis*) is conducive to a common loyalty. As Hastings notes, "*ius sanguinis* leads logically to ethnic cleansing, *ius soli* to ethnic integration" (Hastings, 1997: 34). Brubaker, however, argues that the distinction between the two forms of nationalism are overstated (Brubaker, 1999); Smith adds that "even the most 'civic' and 'political' nationalisms often turn out on closer inspection to be also 'ethnic' and 'linguistic'" (Smith, 2010: 212-213).

And indeed, Russia's 'civic identity' has acquired an ethnic dimension by borrowing elements from Russian national motives. For example, the new overarching identity is shaped around the concept of the 'new Russian citizen', which simultaneously downgrades non-Russian ethnicities and reasserts Russianness.

Already in 1996 the Concept of State Nationality Policy, while upholding the right of ethnic minorities to their national and cultural identities, also stressed the "unifying role of the Russian (*ruskii*) people on the territory of Russia".<sup>20</sup> In 2000 Putin declared that the old Soviet anthem was to be the state anthem, the two-headed Tsarist

eagle the state emblem, and the Tsarist tricolour (white, blue and red) the Russian flag (Sakwa, 2004: 164-165)

One of the ambiguities of the patriotic discourse of a strong Russia lies in the nexus between Russian identity and Russian Orthodox Church. Although Putin has repeatedly emphasized Russia's religious pluralism, the former President is ostensibly a practising Russian Orthodox with a close relationship with the Orthodox Patriarch.

With regard to school education and religion, the representative of a minority organization whose son attended a school in Moscow said in an interview:

In schools there are textbooks on the bases of Orthodox culture [...] The music lessons have traditional Russian songs, Russian Orthodox. It is not for any particular policy [of Russian nationalism] but it's because that's what they [the teachers] know. There are no professionals in schools who have received training to deal with inter-religious issues[...] I don't like a member of the clergy to go to my son's school, and my son to tell me that a priest has been there [to talk to the students].<sup>21</sup>

Society is exposed to contradictory messages: on the one hand the current leadership insists that patriotism and diversity can, and should, coexist; while on the other, television programmes feature Dugin himself on Russia's First Channel (Umland, 2009). What is being presented is a model of *rossiiskii* (the concept of Russian 'citizen') that is being closely identified with *russskii* ('ethnic' Russian), in a movement towards a homogenized vision of Russia that is markedly at odds with official pronouncements concerning Russia's multiethnic multiculturalism.

What is the impact of such conflicting messages? The Russian leadership can be perceived as representing the interests of the 'main group', the Russians (Pain, 2005). Some of the Muslim Tatars interviewed noted that the special relationship between Putin and the Orthodox Patriarch implicitly marginalized other religions in Russia.<sup>22</sup> A Muslim respondent referred to a generalized (and, in his view, institutionalized) "Islamophobia". He complained of non-Muslims' failure to

differentiate between the general Muslim population and the very few Islamic fundamentalists responsible for terrorist attacks from the Chechen wars onwards.<sup>23</sup>

***Top-down culture: homogenizing measures in language and education***

In addition to the ideological superimposition of *rossiiskii* and *russkii*, homogenizing policies have introduced new laws and regulations that impact minorities, mostly without the latter's participation in the decision-making processes. Primary examples are the treatment of minority language scripts and the teaching of minority languages and cultures.

While Tatar organizations were calling for the Latinization of their alphabet, in 2002 the Duma adopted an amendment to the 1991 Federal Law on Languages of Peoples of the Russian Federation.<sup>24</sup> Article 3(6) of the amended law states that the alphabets of the Russian language and those of the republics' state languages "shall be based on the Cyrillic graphic symbol". The Latin script in the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic had been replaced by Cyrillic under Stalin, in what was defined by Isaev as a form of "cultural centralism" (Isaev, 1985). Stalin had criticized the "local nationalism, including the exaggerated respect for national languages" that had characterized the first years of the Soviet Union (quoted in Lewis, 1972: 71). Following the 2002 amendments, the use of (non-Cyrillic) alphabets for the state languages of republics have to be established exclusively by federal law: as Russia's Third Russia Report to the Advisory Committee on the FCNM puts it, it "requires a justified managerial decision".<sup>25</sup> In line with this, in November 2004 the Russian Constitutional Court turned down a claim submitted by Tatarstan's parliament, arguing that the 2002 amendment preventing the republics' choice of their own scripts was unconstitutional.<sup>26</sup> This had followed a decision of the Tatar Constitutional Court

from the previous year, upholding Tatarstan's right to choose the script for the republic's state language, Tatar. The 2002 amendments also mean that Karelian cannot be declared a state language within the Republic of Karelia as long as the traditional Latin script is used. As a result, Karelian is the only language of a titular nationality within Russia not to be recognized as a state language within the ethnic republic. As a Karelian language expert noted during an interview, Karelian "needs to be a state language [within Karelia] but *also* it needs to keep the Latin alphabet".<sup>27</sup> The respondent could not see the language being divorced from its traditional script. Meanwhile, Karelian in 2011 continued to have a lower legal status than other titular languages within Russia.<sup>28</sup>

Federal (homogenizing) decisions have also affected minority languages and cultures in the area of education. The downgrading of ethnicity can be seen in shifts in policy with regard to: the teaching of minority languages and cultures; and the language of exams. In the first case, in 2007 Federal Law No. 309,<sup>29</sup> amending the Federal Law 'On Education',<sup>30</sup> was adopted "very quickly and without discussion".<sup>31</sup> Its objective was to create a "unified educational space" (Art. 7(3)(1)). The pre-309 Law 'On Education' had included three 'components': the federal level, the regional level and the individual school—each contributing to education programmes. At the regional level, regions devised the 'national-regional component', or the teaching of language, history and culture of non-Russian nationalities (approximately 15% of teaching time of the standard school curricula). The school component (an additional 10%) could be used at the school's discretion. The post-309 system foresees 70% of the curriculum being established at the federal level, and 30% at the local (rather than regional) levels, primarily by individual schools. In practice, the amendments deprive the regional authorities of legal independence in education matters, although the

Russian government stated that they can still participate in the preparation of education programmes.<sup>32</sup> Effectively the law's implementation continued to be postponed as modalities for its application remained undefined in the years following its adoption. It should have entered into force on 5 December 2007, but the date was initially postponed to 1 September 2009, and then for a further year

The amendments have met with resistance and demonstrations, particularly in Bashkortostan and Tatarstan (Gordeev, 2009). Demonstrators denounced the measure as a violation of non-Russian ethnicities' constitutional right to freely choose their language of education.<sup>33</sup> Some regions reliant on Moscow for subsidies, normally timid in their claims to the centre, on this occasion acted in unison with Tatarstan, joining the republic in its protests which were articulated with "one voice".<sup>34</sup>

Authoritative regional figures, such as former Tatarstan President Mintimer Shaimiev, also protested vigorously. Data from the interviews, however, reveals that grievances are much more intense in Tatarstan than in the other two republics. In Mordovia and Karelia most respondents had little knowledge of the amendments. The discrepancy can be explained by the much higher ethnic consciousness in Tatarstan than in the other two republics. The two most glaring reasons for this are the greater size of the Tatar minority (both within Russia and in its own ethnic republic),<sup>35</sup> and the much greater use of the minority language in education compared to the other two.<sup>36</sup>

A second change on education policy affecting minorities was introduced through a 2009 decree that removed the opportunity to take the state (secondary school) exam in minority languages.<sup>37</sup> The decree affected the Republic of Tatarstan, which had until then enabled students to access universities within the republic through an exam that could be taken either in Tatar or in Russian.<sup>38</sup> Presidential and ministerial decrees, by definition, do not envisage parliamentary discussions or public

consultation. The parents of a student in Kazan's Gymnasium No. 2, a Tatar school which teaches in Tatar, Russian and English, submitted a case to the Russian Supreme Court following the decree's adoption. The parents saw the right to take the exam in one's language as an extension of the right to receive an education in it, a right which in their opinion the presidential decree had violated. As the claim was turned down,<sup>39</sup> the complaint was submitted to the European Court of Human Rights.<sup>40</sup> The Tatar respondents repeatedly argued that the obligation to take the exam in Russian would inevitably lead to an increasing number of parents sending their offspring to Russian schools, hoping for better academic achievements in (Russian-language) exams and, consequently, enhanced job prospects.

According to the same Tatar respondents, sitting the state exam in Tatar does lead to a lack of fluency in Russian, or the existence of Tatar enclaves isolated from the rest of Russia. Part of the education in Tatar national schools is in Russian, including the study of the Russian literary classics, and most of the media and forms of public communication in Tatarstan are conducted in Russian. Loss of fluency in Russian is a particularly remote possibility in the Republic of Karelia, where Karelians amount to less than 10% of the republic's population, and where the language has virtually disappeared from public places with the exception of small pockets with high concentrations of Karelians. These are primarily villages that are gradually becoming uninhabited as most young people leave in search of employment opportunities. Despite this, a Karelian activist complained in an interview that two nurseries that operated exclusively in Karelian (with methodological support from Finland) had been closed by the Russian authorities.<sup>41</sup> The measure was justified by the authorities in this way:

The refusal of federal executive bodies to use in Russia [the] so called 'language nest' technique applied in Finland can [...] serve[s] as an example of

efforts taken to ensure equal access to education for persons belonging to national minorities. The above technique is aimed at learning by the Finno-Ugric minorities of their native languages. However, its mechanism creates [a] closed language environment within the frames of pre-school institutions where children plunge into native language from the early childhood. In [the] multinational environment of Russia this would significantly reduce their socialization opportunities and, accordingly, would entail [a] violation of the principle of equal opportunities of education, further employment etc. and is considered as segregation of children on ethnic grounds.<sup>42</sup>

With this statement, the Russian authorities appear to have distanced themselves from the commonly-accepted interpretation of equality. International standards for minority protection are very clear that equality does not mean enforcing uniformity to pre-empt potential instances of discrimination, but creating the conditions for the preservation of diversity, *while also* adopting ‘special measures’ to ensure that minorities enjoy equal opportunities despite their diversity.<sup>43</sup> The Russian authorities’ approach suggests a dilution of ethnicity as a route to levelling difference, perceived as a shortcut to social equality based on standardized values.

Moscow’s drive for cultural control has again been signalled by the establishment in May 2009 of a Commission against the Falsification of History.<sup>44</sup> Representatives of Kazan’s Institute of History have reported a new level of concern among some of their publishers, who have requested guarantees that textbooks submitted to them (and produced at the regional level) receive federal approval to pre-empt accusations of ‘falsifying’ history. Although the commission was ostensibly established to counter possible interpretations of history that might reduce Russia’s international prestige (Point 4.a), its existence may impede free historical debate within contemporary Russia. The decree prescribes “coordination of the activities of the federal authorities [...] [and] the subjects of the Russian Federation [...] to counter attempts to falsify historical facts and events that harm the interests of Russia” (Point 4.d). In May 2009 President Medvedev appointed as head of the

Commission Ivan Demidov, of the Presidential Administration and an Aleksandr Dugin supporter.

Data from the respondents indicate the perception, in some of them, that the state does not create the conditions to protect minority language and cultures. Some of the people interviewed, particularly in poorer regions, talked about the difficulties of preserving their ethnic and cultural uniqueness in today's Russia. A member of a local parliament in the region of Murmansk said:

Politicians say that people are not interested in national cultures but it's not true. The truth is that we have no funding. We hardly have any electricity. It's hard to think of culture when you don't even have electricity.<sup>45</sup>

Others referred to poor facilities for the teaching of minority languages, a lack of professional prospects for bilingual teachers and scholars, and the barriers to taking the state exam in minority languages. A Tatar respondent noted that these conditions mean that minorities have *no real choice* over whether to preserve their cultural differences. Focusing on their uniqueness and failing to assimilate might cost minorities good employment prospects and even, in some cases, the privileges of a political career.<sup>46</sup> In many countries the drive for the preservation of one's cultural identity may be overshadowed by a struggle for survival under trying economic conditions. While some groups' attention might be temporarily diverted from culture and identity, state parties to the FCNM, such as Russia, have a positive responsibility to create the conditions for the protection of minority languages and cultures.<sup>47</sup> In particular, regional and minority languages are seen as part of Europe's "cultural wealth and tradition".<sup>48</sup>

New centralized controls on education have, in some cases, fed the perception that not only do federal authorities fail to actively promote the FCNM, *but also* create obstacles to its implementation. A Tatar respondent noted:

The state does not support us [in Tatarstan] in fulfilling the international standards [for minority rights]. Tatarstan is ready to fulfil these standards [on its own], but the federal centre restricts our scope of action [...] With Law 309 [on education] even just maintaining the *status quo* is difficult.<sup>49</sup>

Not all respondents voiced grievances vis-à-vis state policies on nationalities for the preservation of minority cultures and languages. Some believed that, given the finite resources, the present efforts were still laudable. These were respondents who displayed limited awareness of the measures adopted at the federal level but overall judged local public officials and their efforts positively. They tended to be in Mordovia and Karelia, where ethnic issues feature less in the public discourse than in Tatarstan. Even when not nurturing grievances towards the federal centre, the respondents invariably expressed sadness that their languages were progressively losing prominence, and felt powerless to stop advancing russification. After all, language is so intimately bound up with identity that there is a great poignancy to “language death” (Crystal, 2000).

### **From ethnic federalism to civic centrism**

In addition to the construction of a Russian civic identity, Putinite homogenizing policies have involved a progressive de-ethnification of the Russian federal structure. The centralization measures have reined in powerful regional leaders, reducing their autonomy from Moscow. The much-mentioned “vertical of power” (*vertikal’ vlasti*) has seen the development of a steep hierarchy with the president and his administration at its apex. I focus here on the ethnic (de-ethnifying) aspects of the reforms.

As noted, fragmentation under Yeltsin had led to *ad hoc* bilateral treaties that formed a complex web of agreements, together with contradictory pieces of legislation and overlapping jurisdictions—for example in the form of regional laws

not in line with the federal constitution. The elimination of these contradictions was needed for the viability of the legal and federal systems. Putin referred to it as part of the process towards a “dictatorship of the law”.<sup>50</sup> Yet the package of measures also had a profound effect on ethnicity. Putin moved towards a generally ethnicity-neutral bureaucratization of the country. Among the relevant measures were: a movement from election to appointment of officials, the de-ethnification of the Federation Council, the redirecting of regional loyalties to the centre from the (both ethnic and non-ethnic) regions, and the merger of some ethnic regions with non-ethnic ones.

First the country was to be ruled through appointed managers and, in particular, through the Russian President’s new (since 2005) control of gubernatorial appointments.<sup>51</sup> Putin’s move from elections to appointment is described by Filippov as, “remov[ing] excessive politicisation elements from the Russian state system, to replace politicians, which hinder its effective operation, with managers and bureaucrats” (Filippov, 2004).

Although powerful leaders of ethnic regions, such as Tatarstan’s Mintimer Shaimiev and Bashkortostan’s Murtaza Rakhimov, were initially confirmed in their third term as presidents of their republics, in the absence of direct voting their powers became contingent upon the will and imperatives of the federal authorities. Between May 2008 and October 2010, Medvedev replaced 34 regional leaders (Vedomosti, 2010). Shaimiev and Rakhimov eventually left their positions, in January and July 2010 respectively. One of the respondents in this study’s interviews, a scholar specializing in Tatar history, noted:

Shaimiev had political weight. He was independent, even with Putin. He had authority at the federal level, not only in Tatarstan. The current president is in a very different position. They can remove him very easily. He always has this Damocles sword hanging over him.<sup>52</sup>

A much more pallid figure than Shaimiev, his successor President Rustam Minnikhanov has greatly reduced freedom in representing Tatar interests.

Second, there has been a de-ethnification of the Federation Council (the Russian Parliament's Upper Chamber). The regional governors were excluded from it, following a law of July 2000, according to which governors and the presidents of the republics had to be replaced by representatives (or 'senators') in the Federation Council.<sup>53</sup> The new Federation Council has been effectively de-ethnified as senators, in many cases, have no direct connection with the regions they represent, and tend indeed to come from Moscow or St. Petersburg (Alexander, 2004). Their background, connections and geographical location mean that they are, in principle, well-placed to lobby central structures in favour of the regions they represent. However, Alexander argues that appointing non-titular representatives undermines the republics' distinct ethnic bases, and indicates that ethnic issues have lost much of their saliency (Alexander, 2004: 255-256). Third, in May 2000 the many subjects of the Russian Federation were grouped into seven presidential *okrugs*,<sup>54</sup> under the supervision of presidential envoys. The branches of the main federal agencies (the Prosecutors' Office, the Federal Security Service, the Ministry of Interior and the Tax Inspectorate) were affiliated to the *okrugs* themselves rather than regional leaders, so as to redirect their loyalty to the centre (Melvin, 2007: 209). Again, the influence of the ethnic republics was reduced to reassert the influence of the centre.

Finally, mergers of predominantly Russian regions with ethnicity-based autonomous *okrugs* are an illustrative example of regional homogenization processes that involve the reduction of regional autonomy through top-down, non-consultative measures. Between 2005 and 2008 there were five mergers.<sup>55</sup> The mergers, enabled by Federal Law No.6-FKZ of 17 December 2001,<sup>56</sup> aimed at "equalizing the levels of

socio-economic development” and the “optimization of regional management, infrastructure and resources”.<sup>57</sup> The authorities argued that the mergers “did not affect the position of national minorities in the new administrative and territorial entities”, as guarantees on the rights of minorities, including on the preservation of their cultural and linguistic distinctiveness, are clearly stated in regional laws on the mergers.<sup>58</sup> The former “autonomous *okrugs*”, now just called “*okrugs*”, in principle maintain a “special status”; yet such status is devoid of legal meaning in Russian law (Oracheva and Osipov, 2010).

Some analysts have welcomed mergers. For example, Taimyr and Evenkia have very small populations (respectively, 30,000 and 18,000 people), and separate administrations imply a proliferation of bureaucratic structures (Bransten, 2005). Financial imperatives have also been strong: the creation of a common Russian market, breaking through the barriers of local economies across Russia, may indeed facilitate economic development.<sup>59</sup> Others have feared that the real motivation for the mergers might be the elimination of the ethnic republics altogether (Yasmann, 2006). The idea of resuscitating the (non-ethnic) administrative units of pre-revolutionary Russia<sup>60</sup> is not new. Often dismissed as unrealistic, these ideas have intermittently resurfaced. Preoccupied with the power of the governors elected in 1996-7, many of whom were in opposition, Yeltsin also entertained the idea of reducing the number of subjects from 89 to 24 (Reddaway and Orttung, 2004: 10). Similarly, a number of governors, presidential envoys and Duma members have stated publicly that they are in favour of the reduction of administrative units (Chirkin, 2002). The Russian Academy of Science reportedly compiled a plan to reduce the number of regions from 89 to 28 (Netreba and Tseplyaev, 2006). Even more radical proposals advocated the slashing of regions down to eight to ten territories (Mitin, 2008: 52). In 2006 Liberal

Democratic Party leader Aleksei Mitrofanov proposed a new constitution listing new administrative divisions, so that the process of centralization could be accelerated rather than taking “50 years” (Netreba and Tseplyaev, 2006). After the process stalled between 2008 and 2010, in late 2010 *Vedomosti* reported a possible plan to replace Russia’s 83 regions with 20 large “agglomerations” around Russia’s main cities (Pis'mennaya and Kostenko, 2010).

Given their continuing strength, the full abolition of ethnic republics is still a remote possibility. In 1992-3 the (then) Minister of Nationalities Valeriy Tishkov warned of the likelihood of violence if ethnic territorial units were eliminated (Tishkov, 1993: 18; *id.*, 1997: 64). Yet the mergers are uncomfortable precedents for many nationalities. Although referenda appear to have provided the democratic and legal bases for the mergers,<sup>61</sup> opposition to amalgamation surfaced (Artobolevskii *et al.*, 2010; Bowring, 2010; Dmitriyev, 2007). I focus here on the merger of Irkutsk *oblast* with the Ust-Orda Buryat Autonomous *Okrug*. The central government strove to convince locals of the financial gains to be reaped from the mergers, while strongly hinting that the region could not survive without federal support. Buryats were deeply preoccupied with their loss of status, as they identified the existence of territorial autonomy as an imperative for the survival of the national group, along with funds earmarked for the promotion of Buryat cultural life. The Irkutsk administration committed to maintaining a special status for the *okrug* post-merger, along with special cultural and social programmes for Buryats. The analysis of the impact of the mergers by the Institute of Contemporary Development has revealed that, overall, promises of financial incentives have not been kept (Artobolevskii *et al.*, 2010).<sup>62</sup> Meanwhile, the Moscow Helsinki Group reported voting irregularities during the

referendum on the merger of 16 April 2006, including strong incentives and even threats, to induce voting among the local population (Moscow Helsinki Group, 2006).

In sum, as Bowring put it, “since 2004 there has been a premeditated assault on the foundations of Russian federalism, with profound consequences for the potential for ethnic conflict” (Bowring, 2010: 48). In relation to the mergers, scholar and Mari leader Ksenofont Sanukov said that he considered the formation of federal districts as leading to “the spread of [central] state power”, and the “liquidation [of ethnic minorities] and our republic”.<sup>63</sup> While not wishing to belittle the importance of some of the measures (such as the creation of a more coherent legal framework), the process has also created ‘collateral damage’: the reduction of the ethnic content of the Federation. This has occurred through a series of measure conceived and set into motion ‘from above’. Undemocratic elements of the measures are particularly evident in the abolition of elections and voting irregularities in referenda. This has the potential to lead to grievances that may develop into internal tensions.

## **Conclusions**

Russia remains a multicultural, multiethnic country. There are schools teaching a myriad of minority languages, in numerous cases teaching *in* the languages of minorities. There are governmental institutions, both at the federal and regional levels, working to promote minority cultures and languages. These efforts are the continuation of a long tradition of attention to diversity, made imperative by the coexistence of a plurality of ethnicities in Russia.

Unlike other countries, Russia recognizes ethnic diversity within its borders. At the same time, Putinite homogenizing policies are pressing for the development of a common loyalty, a joint identity unifying the country’s nationalities. These

homogenizing measures are not necessarily born by a quasi-imperialist desire to ‘russianize’ national minorities, but may be linked simply to the objective of strengthening and mainstreaming the state. Yet, in practice homogenizing policies act to simultaneously downgrade (non-Russian) ethnicity and reassert Russianness, in a manner that can generate grievances among minorities. The notion of overarching civic Russianness, which I have called the ‘new Russian citizen’, has not been conceived through an all-inclusive process. It does not amount to a *fusion* of cultures, or the selection of common elements from a plurality of cultures which are all afforded equal respect. Rather, the pervasive nature of Russianness signals that the Russian culture is ‘dominant’.

Admittedly, minority issues are highly complex. To guarantee stability, a state must create a form of integration that stops short of assimilation, provide the opportunity of separatedness (if this is the minorities’ wish) that does not lead to segregation, and balance out the right to equality with special measures (and even affirmative action) for minorities (Thornberry, 1991: 4-5). The essence of the problem here is that the reassertion of Russianness appears to be fed by a perceived ‘threat’ of multiethnicity so well captured by a statement by M.N Kuz’min: a former Director of the Institute of National Issues in Education of the Ministry of Education and Science, in 2004 he said that “[c]ompared to mono-ethnic countries, multi-ethnicity predestines a country to less stability, to the presence of additional areas of inner contradictions” (Kuz’min, 2005: 16).<sup>64</sup> This was echoed by the observation of one of the respondents from Tatarstan: “In Moscow there is a prejudice, a fear that if Russia has too many strong ethnicities and languages there will be problems.”<sup>65</sup>

Similarly, a high-ranking public official working on nationality issues argued in an interview that state policies for the preservation of ethnic diversity are “both

good and bad”.<sup>66</sup> Although ‘positive’ in allowing the preservation of minority cultures, they are ‘negative’ inasmuch as they create fragmentation. There is an echo of Anderson’s preoccupation with forms of sub-nationalisms surfacing with force to destabilize the country. And indeed, the Tatars who called for the use of the Latin, rather than Cyrillic, alphabet in Tatar-language texts were linked to separatism and described as a “threat to national security”.<sup>67</sup>

Minority identities are at risk if their very existence is perceived as being somehow antagonistic to majority culture and language. Only if minorities are respected can the creation of an overarching (federal) identity bring and cement stability. In this case, multiple identities and cultural frameworks can be perceived as “concentric circles around the individual” (Xanthaki, 2010: 39), coexisting in the recognition of their equal dignity. Article 5(2) of the FCNM upholds the importance of “integration” but obliges the parties to refrain from assimilatory practices. The Explanatory Report of the FCNM aptly summarizes this by noting the “importance of social cohesion and [...] cultural diversity [...] [as] a source and a factor, not of division, but of enrichment to each society” (Art. 5(2), para. 46). Yet Russia’s approach to the pursuit of civic (Russian) centralism brings with it the danger that this new identity may *replace*, rather than add to, ethnic identity.<sup>68</sup>

The interviews revealed negative perceptions of contemporary nationality policies by persons belonging to minorities. A recurring perception is that the authorities, while to some extent accommodating minorities, prevent alternative ethnic identities from flourishing into something more than marginal (for example, children becoming more fluent in Karelian than in Russian, as in the above example of ‘language nest’ nurseries). The restructuring of the Federation, its division into federal districts, mergers, and official statements on the possible further reduction of

administrative units, have contributed to feelings of precariousness and instability in the ethnic regions. It signals the centre's position that the status of an ethnic subject may be reviewed at will (Mitin, 2008: 52). It reinforces the feeling of ethnic minorities not having a 'real choice', of being forced into a cultural straightjacket. Hence, the Russian project of de-ethnification carries the very real risk that it might be seen as "a disguised and embellished version of the old Soviet rhetoric of the fusion of all nations into a non-national Soviet nation" (Codagnone and Filippov, 2000: 283).

Several authors have warned about the potential risks of these centralizing policies (Artobolevskii *et al.*, 2010; Bowring, 2010; Cashaback, 2003; Goode, 2010; Melvin, 2007). And indeed, the protests following the adoption of Law 309, modifying education policies, point to how local resentment of 'stabilization' measures may flare up, leading to a build-up of grievances. Yet there is also the risk that Russia might *succeed* in reducing Russia's ethnic and cultural pluralism. Some respondents displayed the attitude that the advancing russianization, or even globalization, can no longer be stopped. That would lead to a diminishing of cultural and linguistic wealth—a loss not only for minorities themselves, but for the country as a whole.

### Notes

1 Russia's Third Report to the FCNM Advisory Committee, 9 April 2010, 3. Available at <[http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/minorities/3\\_FCNMdocs/PDF\\_3rd\\_SR\\_RussianFed\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/minorities/3_FCNMdocs/PDF_3rd_SR_RussianFed_en.pdf)>. The report was submitted in accordance with Art. 25(1) of the FCNM, ratified by Russia in June 1998.

2 Data from the 2002 census. The data of the 2010 census was still not available at the time of writing.

3 Although it has been argued that President Dmitrii Medvedev is not merely a powerless entity in the *duumvirate* with Putin—and has instead become increasingly independent in both internal and foreign affairs, encouraging reform, modernization and anti-corruption programmes—under Medvedev there has been no significant departure from the direction given by Putin to Russia's reforms (Hahn, 2010). Among

- other things, Medvedev has replaced several regional governors, in line with regulations established under Putin.
- 4 Most of the interviews were in Russian and excerpts reported in the article were translated into English by the author. In the interests of anonymity the names of the respondents are not indicated. Dates and places of the interviews are specified only in case of direct references.
- 5 The Preamble of the FCNM states that “the upheavals of European history have shown that the protection of national minorities is essential to stability, democratic security and peace in this continent”. Recommendation 1134 (1990) on the Rights of Minorities of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe qualifies minority rights as “an essential factor for peace, justice, stability and democracy”. Available at <<http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta90/EREC1134.htm>>.
- 6 For example, Smith notes that “most nation-states are polyethnic [and] many have been formed in the first place around a dominant *ethnie*, which annexed or attracted other *ethnies* or ethnic fragments into the state [...]” (Smith, 1991: 39).
- 7 See for example *Eurasianet*, “Central Asia: Russia Grapples with Labour-Migrant Dilemma”, 4 March 2010. Available at <<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/civilsociety/articles/eav030510.shtml>>.
- 8 France argues that it does not have minorities on the basis of Art. 2 of its constitution, which states that France is a “[r]epublic, indivisible, secular, democratic and social. It shall ensure equality of its citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race and religion.” However, similar provisions are present in the constitutions of other countries that do not deny the existence of minorities within their borders (Rodley, 1995: 51). A number of Latin American countries also reject the notion of ‘minorities’ as relevant to their population (Thornberry, 1991: 3).
- 9 Of the Council of Europe member states, in May 2011 there were only four countries that had not signed or ratified the FCNM: France, Turkey, Monaco and Andorra. 42 had ratified had it and 4 had signed it.
- 10 See also Art. 1, FCNM, which states that minority rights are “an integral part of the international protection of human rights”.
- 11 General Comment No. 23: The rights of minorities (Art. 27), 8 April 1994. CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.5, para. 9 (general comment to Art. 27 of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by Russia). United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, available at <<http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/0/fb7fb12c2fb8bb21c12563ed004df111?Opendocument>>.
- 12 See Bowring (2010) for a history of Russian federalism.
- 13 For example, in preparation for the 1927 List of Nationalities of the USSR, they tried to inflate the number of their members to obtain additional privileges, first and foremost land (Hirsch, 2005: 104).
- 14 Some ethnicities were accused of collaboration with the Nazis and deported to Siberia and Central Asia. In addition to deportations, different ethnicities were subjected to repression, particularly during the Great Terror in the 1930s. This affected, among others, Germans and Poles. Among the ethnic groups whose members (entirely or partially) were subjected to forced relocation within the USSR were Koreans, Chinese, Finns, Greeks, Bulgarians, Armenians, Crimean Tatars, Poles, Belarusians and Meskhetian Turks.
- 15 The figures varied little in the 2002 census.
- 16 The power-sharing treaty was signed two years later, in 1992.
- 17 Comments of the government of the Russian Federation on the Second Opinion of the Advisory Committee on the FCNM, 11 October 2006, 2. Available at <[http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/minorities/3\\_FCNMdocs/PDF\\_2nd\\_Com\\_RussianFederation\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/minorities/3_FCNMdocs/PDF_2nd_Com_RussianFederation_en.pdf)>.

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- 18 Russia's Third Report to the FCNM Advisory Committee, 6-7.
- 19 See also the numerous reports of the SOVA Centre, on racism and xenophobia in Russia. Available at <<http://www.sova-center.ru/en/xenophobia/reports-analyses/>>.
- 20 Concept of State National Policy of the Russian Federation, Presidential Decree No. 909, 15 June 1996.
- 21 Interview with a minority representative working for a minority NGO, 21 February 2011, Moscow. The respondent was referring to religious classes carried out in pilot regions of Russia from the spring of 2010. Together with the pupils' parents, the schools decide on the type of religious education, including Russian Orthodox or Islamic variants, or religions approached from a secular perspective. In this case the school opted for classes on Orthodox religion as the majority of children in the school were Orthodox.
- 22 Mordovians and Karelians did not comment on this issue as traditionally they, like ethnic Russians, embrace the Russian Orthodox faith.
- 23 Interviews between 8 and 11 June 2010, Kazan, Tatarstan.
- 24 Law No. 1807-I, dated 25 October 1991, with amendments of Law No.126-FZ of 24 July 1998 and 165-FZ of 11 December 2002.
- 25 Russia's Third Report, *op.cit.* note 1, 55.
- 26 Decision of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation, 16 November 2004, No. 16-P 'On the Case on the Examination of the Constitutionality of the Provisions in Article 10(2) of the Law of the Republic of Tatarstan 'On Languages of the Peoples of the Republic of Tatarstan'', Art. 9(2) of the Law of the Republic of Tatarstan 'On the State Languages of the Republic of Tatarstan and Other Languages of the Republic of Tatarstan', Article 6(2) of the Law of the Republic of Tatarstan 'On Education', and Article 3(6) of the Law of the Russian Federation 'On Languages of the Peoples of the Russian Federation', in relation to the Complaint of the Citizen S. I. Khaputin and the Request of the State Council of the Republic of Tatarstan and of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Tatarstan'.
- 27 Interview with an expert on Karelian language, 20 May 2010, Petrozavodsk.
- 28 There were no issues with script in Mordovia.
- 29 Federal Law of the Russian Federation, 1 December 2007, No. 309-FZ 'On the Amendment of Legal Acts of the Russian Federation for the Amendment of the Understanding and Structure of State Educational Standards'. Available at <<http://base.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc;base=LAW;n=72965>>.
- 30 No. 3266-1, 10 July 1992. Available (in Russian) at <[http://www.consultant.ru/popular/edu/43\\_1.html#p53](http://www.consultant.ru/popular/edu/43_1.html#p53)>.
- 31 Interview with a representative of the Institute of History of Kazan, Russian Academy of Science of Tatarstan, 9 June 2010, Kazan.
- 32 Russia's Third Report, *op.cit.* note 1, 45.
- 33 Art. 26 of the Russian Constitution.
- 34 The expression was used by an advisor at the Ministry of Culture the Republic of Tatars, Kazan, 12 June 2010.
- 35 According to the 2002 census, out of 145 million citizens of the Russian Federation, there were 5.5 million Tatars, 843,350 Mordovians and 93,344 Karelians; 52.9% of the population of Tatarstan were ethnic Tatars, 31.9% of the population of Mordovia were Mordovians, and only 9.2% of the population of Karelia were Karelians.
- 36 Data for the period between 2001 and 2004 show that in Russia there were 2,166 schools in which Tatar was used as a language of instructions *and* 1,466 in which Tatar was studied as a subject. For Mordovian languages (Moksha and Erzya) the figures were, respectively, 200 and 275. There were no Karelian schools where Karelian was used as a language of instruction, and 40 where the language could be studied as a subject. Russia's Third Report *op.cit.* note 1, Appendix 6, Table 1.
- 37 Decree of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, 28 November 2008, No. 362 'On the Approval of Regulations on the Methods and Procedures for

- Conducting State (final) Certification of Students having Completed the Main General Educational Programmes of Full Secondary Education’.
- 38 Karelia and Mordovia were not affected by this decree, as the exam was taken in Russian even before the decree was adopted.
- 39 Ruling of the Cassation Collegium of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, No. KAC09-295, 2 July 2009, on the claim by Aida Kamalova, upholding the ruling of the Supreme Court of 21 April 2009.
- 40 Interview with the Director of Kazan’s Gymnasium No. 2, 15 June 2010, Kazan. A decision on the case’s admissibility had still not be reached at the time of writing, in January 2011.
- 41 Interview, 24 May 2010, Petrozavodsk, Karelia.
- 42 Russia’s Third Report, *op.cit.* note 1, 103-104.
- 43 See Art. 7(2), European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages Charter (ECRML) (signed by Russia in 2001) and Art. 4(2) FCNM.
- 44 The full name is the Presidential Commission of the Russian Federation to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests. Established by Presidential Decree No. 549, 15 May 2009. Available at <<http://document.kremlin.ru/doc.asp?ID=052421>>.
- 45 Interview, 20 May 2010, Petrozavodsk, Karelia.
- 46 Some persons belonging to minorities might see their leadership of minority groups as a springboard for propelling themselves into politics. Interview with a specialist of the Institute of Ethnography and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Science, 12 October 2010, Moscow.
- 47 Art. 5 FCNM.
- 48 The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages states in its Preamble that “the protection of the historical regional or minority languages of Europe, some of which are in danger of eventual extinction, contributes to the maintenance and development of Europe’s cultural wealth and traditions”.
- 49 Interview, 9 June 2010, Kazan.
- 50 The expression “dictatorship of the law” was first used in Putin’s first State of the Nation Address to the Federal Assembly, “The State of Russia: The Way to an Effective State”, July 2000.
- 51 This relatively new presidential power follows an (unconstitutional) measure of 13 September 2004 when Putin, at a session of the Government of the Russian Federation, announced that the heads of subjects would be nominated by the president and confirmed in their position (nominally) by the legislature.
- 52 Interview with a representative of the Institute of History of Kazan, Russian Academy of Science of Tatarstan, 9 June 2010, Kazan, Tatarstan.
- 53 Law ‘On the Order of the Formation of the Federal Federation Council’, 5 August 2000, No. 113-FZ.
- 54 Seven districts were established by presidential decree, No. 849, 13 May 2000, ‘On the presidential envoy of the President of the Russian Federation in a federal *okrug*’. Available at <<http://www.rg.ru/2000/05/14/okruga-dok-site-dok.html>>. The number of districts was increased to eight in January 2010, when the North Caucasus federal *okrug* was separated from the Southern federal *okrug*.
- 55 The mergers were: Perm *oblast* and Komi-Permyak autonomous *okrug* to form Perm *krai* (7 December 2003); Krasnoyarsk *krai* and Evenk autonomous *okrug* and Taimyr autonomous *okrug* to form Krasnoyarsk *krai* (17 April 2005); Kamchatka *oblast* and the Koryak autonomous *okrug* to form Kamchatka *krai* (23 October 2005); Irkutsk *oblast* and Ust-Orda Buryat autonomous *okrug* to form Irkutsk *oblast* (16 April 2006); Chita *oblast* and Agin-Buryat autonomous *okrug* to form Zabaikalskii *krai* (11 March 2007).

- 56 Federal Constitutional Law, 17 December 2001, No. 6-FKZ ‘On the procedure of introducing a new subject in the Russian Federation’. Available at <<http://base.garant.ru/184002/>>.
- 57 Russia’s Third Report, *op.cit.* note 1, 98.
- 58 *Ibid.*, 99.
- 59 In the opinion of Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin (cited in Filippov, 2004).
- 60 8 provinces under Peter the Great, 40 under Catherine the Great and 56 at the time of the 1917 revolution.
- 61 Art. 11 of Law No. 6 states that the creation of a new subject has to follow a referendum and consultations with the president of the Russian Federation.
- 62 Russian President Dmitrii Medvedev is one of the patrons of the Institute.
- 63 The statement is from an interview with Alexander (2004: 242).
- 64 Author’s translation.
- 65 Interview with a representative of the Institute of History of Kazan, Russian Academy of Science of Tatarstan, 9 June 2010, Kazan.
- 66 Interview, 25 October 2010, Saint Petersburg.
- 67 In a report presented before the Russian parliament, cited in Saiganova (2001).
- 68 For example, the creation of bilingual regions, with the right to autonomous choices in education, can occur without threat to the majority language. On this point, the ECRML states that education of regional and minority languages should be carried out “without prejudice to the teaching of the official language(s) of the State” (Art. 8(1)).

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