Regional Separatism in Russia: Ethnic Mobilisation or Power Grab?

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What role did ethnic revival play in the push for sovereignty among Russia’s ethnic republics during the transition from a communist Soviet Union to a post-communist Russian Federation? Many scholars and politicians believe that the sovereignty drive among former autonomous republics in Russia was orchestrated primarily to preserve the communist-era local élite’s control over their regions and to increase their power vis-à-vis the central government.1 To the extent that issues are said to figure in the parade of sovereignty, they concern economic independence, not ethno-cultural revival. In fact, ethnic self-determination is viewed almost as a front for ‘what is really going on’, rhetoric designed to make the local accretion of power conform to international norms.2

Roeder and Treisman have been the strongest proponents of this point of view. Roeder argues that ‘while the concern with identity politics focuses on the attributes of ethnic groups and their grievances, ... the explanation for these phenomena lies ... in the pursuit of political survival by politicians’.3 Arguing from a rational choice perspective, Roeder believes that minority ethnic politicians in the Russian Federation were concerned almost exclusively with retaining political control over their regions. For this reason, they focused primarily on instrumental concerns such as increasing the wealth and fiscal autonomy of the region. The leaders’ success was determined by their ability to provide selective material incentives to their followers in their republics. The provision of expressive incentives was necessary only in order ‘to give regional leaders an advantage over competitors offering non-ethnic agendas’.4 Because ethnic and cultural benefits were public goods which could not be denied to the followers of political opponents, their actual provision did not benefit the regional leaders. In this situation, ethnic rhetoric was sufficient to convince members of the ethnic community that the regional leader was part of the group and predispose them toward supporting the leader. Material incentives would ensure that a sufficient number of these potential supporters would actually rally to the cause.

Treisman believes that separatism in Russia was often simply a tool to increase regional wealth at the expense of the central government. He writes: ‘Separatist threats may, at times, be bids to increase a region’s financial dependence on the centre. Rather than expressions of primordial cultural aspirations, they may constitute weapons in a competitive struggle to extract a larger share of centrally bestowed benefits’.5 Solnick, in an article focused primarily on federal bargaining, notes that the leaders of the ethnic republics attempted to justify their privileged status in the
Russian Federation by reference to claims of cultural autonomy. The implication in both of these articles is that cultural autonomy was used as a smokescreen for local efforts to maintain power or increase revenues.

In a similar vein, Raviot argues that economic self-government was the essential core of sovereignty for political elites in Tatarstan. In particular, the president of Tatarstan was seen as dedicated to developing a separate programme of economic reform, a goal which required greater sovereignty from Moscow. At the same time, the desire to build a republic-wide consensus led the president to neglect Tatar cultural development in favour of building a common Tatarstani territorial identity that could include both Tatars and Russians.

I believe that the perspective described above needs to be substantially revised. While most scholars believe that cultural autonomy was used to create an aura of legitimacy for what were really efforts to increase economic autonomy and the nomenklatura’s hold on power, I will show that the leaders of the ethnic republics of the Russian Federation have, on the contrary, tended to de-emphasise the ethnic revival aspects of their programme, instead focusing their rhetoric on the economic advantages of sovereignty and on the benefits of federalism and decentralisation. Meanwhile, they have quietly adopted a series of laws and programmes designed to promote the ethnic revival of the republics’ titular nationalities.

This article focuses on four Turkic republics, two of which have been at the forefront of the sovereignty movement, while the other two have been largely out of the spotlight on these issues. These republics are Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Chuvashia and Khakassia. The article begins by surveying the major speeches and interviews dealing with sovereignty issues given by the republics’ leaders during and immediately following the transition period. These texts show that the leaders’ primary focus throughout is on sovereignty as a path to increased self-rule and economic well-being. When ethnic revival is mentioned, it is largely in the context of the multi-ethnic population of the republic and the promotion of inter-ethnic friendship.

In the second half of the article I analyse the laws and programmes adopted by the republics’ governments. Much of this legislation is in fact focused on the main stated goals of the leaders, concerning itself with economic sovereignty and particularly with the development of independent republican institutions such as new constitutions, judicial systems, tax laws and the like. But a significant amount of legislation concerns ethno-cultural aspects such as the promotion of native language use, the development of ethnic culture and the revival of nationality-based schooling. Overall, promoting ethnic revival is a more significant part of the republic governments’ programmes than its leaders’ rhetoric would have us believe.

The status quo ante: the republics

The four cases analysed in this article were originally selected for a larger study of mass ethnic mobilisation in the ethnic republics of the Russian Federation. They cannot be considered representative of all of the federation’s ethnic republics, although there is no selection bias, as I had no evidence on the policies undertaken in these republics prior to their selection. In fact, I believe that the findings of this
article are likely to be applicable to all of Russia’s ethnic republics outside the Caucasus, where different conditions may lead to different outcomes.

Three of the regions discussed in this study are located in the Volga-Ural region of the Russian Federation. The fourth, Khakassia, is in southern Siberia, between Krasnoyarsk and Mongolia. All of the regions are the homelands of Turkic ethnic groups, although only two of these groups are Muslim. Three of the regions have a well-developed industrial base and significant natural resources, while Chuvashia is a primarily agricultural republic dependent on subsidies from the central government. The other three regions have not received any direct grants from the central government, though this does not mean that they are financially completely independent. Like all Russian regions, they have received other forms of financial transfers, including financial support for military-industrial enterprises and for higher education. After taking these payments into account, Chuvashia remains the region most dependent on central subsidies, while Bashkortostan is the least dependent.\textsuperscript{11}

\textit{Tatarstan}

Tatars claim to be the inheritors of a rich political and cultural history. Their ancestors, the Bulgars, established a powerful state that controlled the middle Volga region for over 400 years, until the Mongol-Tatar conquest of the 13th century. In 922 the local leaders converted to Islam, which over time became a key part of the Tatar identity. At present, Tatarstan is known as the northernmost outpost of Islam in the world. The Turkic inhabitants assimilated the Mongol-Tatars, leading to the adoption of their present ethnonym. Following the collapse of the Mongol state, the Tatars established the Kazan Khanate, which was the main political rival of the emerging Muscovite Russian state until the capture of Kazan by Ivan the Terrible in 1552. Despite suffering persecution during four centuries of Russian rule, Tatars were able to maintain a vigorous intellectual and cultural life that made them the most-educated nation in the Russian empire on the eve of the revolution. Under Soviet rule, Tatar leaders repeatedly raised claims to union republic status, but were refused by authorities in Moscow. The ethnic mix of the republic has held steady for several decades, with Tatars slightly outnumbering Russians, but neither group having an absolute majority.\textsuperscript{12} Economically, the region is relatively well-off and self-sufficient, with significant oil deposits and a strong industrial base.\textsuperscript{13}

\textit{Bashkortostan}

Bashkortostan is located between the Volga river and the Ural mountains, immediately south-east of Tatarstan. The Bashkir people are closely related to the Tatars and share the same religion. Also, their languages are mutually intelligible. Bashkortostan’s situation is complicated by its ethnic make-up, where Bashkirs form only 22% of the population, a smaller fraction than Tatars (28%) and Russians (39%). In addition, one-fifth of all Bashkirs speak Tatar as their native language, so that only 16% of the republic’s population actually speaks its titular language. The republic’s economy is based on oil extraction and refining and heavy industry. Coal is also
mined in the east and agriculture is important. These resources have allowed the republic to maintain a positive financial balance with the Russian central government.

Chuvashia

Chuvashia is located on the Volga river, northwest of Tatarstan. The Chuvash people are Turkic but predominantly Christian. They have no history of independent statehood and have been ruled by Moscow since the 1400s. They represent a clear majority of the republic’s population (68%), with Russians comprising only 26%. The republic’s economy is predominantly agricultural, with little industry and no significant natural resources. Furthermore, the republic is heavily subsidised by the central government.¹⁴

Khakassia

Khakassia is located far away from the other three republics in this study, in southern Siberia. Yet despite this distance, it has similar cultural traditions based on a common Turkic heritage and similar language.¹⁵ Islam did not spread to this part of Siberia—most Khakass are shamanists, although a small minority is Orthodox Christian. The Khakass were conquered by Russia in the early 18th century. A Khakass educated élite did not form until the advent of Soviet rule, under which a written language was developed and the Khakass autonomous oblast’ was created within Krasnoyarsk krai in 1930. The discovery of coal in the 1950s led to a rapid increase in Russian in-migration, so that Russians made up 80% of the population by 1989, compared with only 11% for the Khakass. However, the presence of coal, as well as the later discovery of gold and the building of the largest hydro-electric power station in Russia in the 1970s, led to significant economic development and made the republic largely independent of central subsidies throughout the transition period.¹⁶ This new-found wealth in turn allowed republic leaders to press for administrative independence from Krasnoyarsk, a process which began in 1989 and succeeded in 1991.

The politicians

Of the four republics I examine, only Chuvashia had a significant turnover of leadership between 1990 and 1996. The local governing élite remained fairly constant in the other three republics. In this section I provide a brief overview of the cast of characters whose statements set the tone for political discourse in each republic and whose actions were primarily responsible for the adoption of most laws and programmes.

Tatarstan

Throughout the 1990s Mintimer Shaimiev has been the dominant force of Tatarstan politics. After ascending to the chairmanship of the Tatarstan Supreme Soviet in 1990, Shaimiev quickly consolidated his power. In 1991 he ran unopposed for president and
was elected on the same day as El’tsin. Since then, the political picture in Tatarstan has been remarkably stable, with the same few people taking turns holding the top positions. The legislature that was elected in 1995 is filled mostly with Shaimiev’s local-level administrative appointees. Shaimiev himself was easily re-elected for a second term in March 1996 after running unopposed. Most of the governing elite throughout this period was Tatar—only former vice-president and parliament speaker Vasilii Likhachev is an ethnic Russian.  

**Bashkortostan**

The current leaders of Bashkortostan came to power in 1990, on the heels of the second purge of the republic’s communist party in four years. The Supreme Soviet elected Murtaza Rakhimov as its new chairman by a single vote. Rakhimov, the director of an Ufa petrochemical plant, had never been a member of the party nomenklatura. After the collapse of the communist party he quickly set about consolidating his authority by removing rivals from powerful positions. Rakhimov’s primacy was made official by his election to the republic presidency in 1993. His hold on power was further strengthened after the election of a compliant legislature in 1995.

**Chuvashia**

Chuvashia’s leadership was the least stable of the four republics. At the same time, the leaders who came and went over time were all of Chuvash ethnicity and fluent in the Chuvash language. A. M. Leontiev, the chairman of the republic’s Supreme Soviet at the end of perestroika, was forced out of office for supporting the August 1991 coup. He was replaced by his deputy, Eduard Kubarev, who was allied with the pro-democracy faction in the soviet. His power was in turn undermined when he was eliminated in the first round of the republic’s 1991 presidential election, but he was able to hold on to power because neither of the remaining candidates received a majority in the second round. A repeat election was not held until December 1993. This contest was won by Nikolai Fedorov, the former Minister of Justice of the Russian Federation and a prominent member of the pro-democracy camp. Since his election, Fedorov has attempted to gain support from Chuvash nationalist groups by inviting some of their leaders into his administration. He also became known as one of the fiercest critics of the war in Chechnya.

**Khakassia**

Unlike the other three republics, Khakassia had to create new governing institutions in the aftermath of its separation from Krasnoyarsk krai. The leaders who emerged included several members of the party leadership from the republic’s last years as an autonomous oblast’ and several members of the new pro-democracy élite that emerged during perestroika. The nomenklatura group was led by Vladimir Shtygashev, who was elected chairman of the republic’s first Supreme Soviet after protests by Khakass nationalist groups caused the initially elected ethnically Russian chairman
to resign. These protests led to a break between Shtygashev and Mikhail Mityukov, one of the leaders of the largely Russian pro-democracy movement, who initially supported the sovereignty drive. Mityukov and Shtygashev thereafter became the main opponents in the dispute over the structure of new government institutions, which was the main political issue in the republic until the summer of 1995. The political situation in the republic was transformed by the surprise defeat of Mityukov by Aleksei Lebed, Aleksandr Lebed’s brother, in the 1995 Duma election. Lebed quickly became the most popular politician in the republic, winning the governorship in a landslide election the following year.

Keeping it quiet: what the leaders said

The main stated goals of republic leaders in pursuing sovereignty varied somewhat over time and among the regions under study. Yet the main focus in all four republics concerned increasing legal independence from Moscow control, especially in matters of economic management and exports.

Before the break-up of the Soviet Union, the most-discussed issues included raising the status of the region, making budgetary and tax policy subject to local decision makers, and transferring industrial enterprise ownership from USSR and Russian control to the immediate control of the republic. In these early stages, ethnic issues were mentioned more frequently than in later periods. When republic leaders discussed ethnic issues, they focused primarily on increasing the status of the titular language or on the congruence of their demands for national self-determination with international norms. These cultural issues were raised because local political leaders felt threatened by local nationalist movements led by members of the titular cultural élite, who sought to displace the nomenklatura in the name of democracy and national self-determination. The nomenklatura attempted (in most cases successfully) to pre-empt this challenge by adopting these movements’ rhetoric and agenda.¹⁸

The second stage of the sovereignty drive began after the break-up of the Soviet Union. By the end of 1991 local élites had largely succeeded in re-establishing firm control of political life in their regions. The local pro-democracy movements had largely disappeared as a political force, while nationalist movements were also beginning to decline, reducing the need to adopt nationalist rhetoric to maintain power. At the same time, the élites became increasingly concerned that if they appeared to pursue nationalist policies they would foment resentment among non-titular inhabitants of the region. A strong anti-titular movement could lead to both inter-ethnic conflict within the region and reprisals against the local government by Moscow. For these reasons, ethnic claims virtually disappeared from political speeches during this period, surfacing only in the context of multi-ethnic development and assurances that sovereignty would not hurt non-titular ethnic groups. At the same time, the leaders continued to focus on the benefits of increasing political and economic autonomy from the Russian Federation, as surveys showed that support for de-centralisation was high among both titular and non-titular inhabitants of the republics.

At various points between 1992 and 1994 each of the republics settled its dispute over power relations with Moscow. Tatarstan and Bashkortostan achieved this
through bilateral treaties, while Chuvashia and Khakassia settled for the relationship defined by the Federative Treaty of 1992. In both situations the post-agreement rhetoric shifted from a focus on centre-periphery relations to an emphasis on the advantages of the sovereignty drive for the economic well-being of the republics’ inhabitants and the advantages of further strengthening of the republic’s state apparatus. By this point, the leaders were primarily concerned with showing how their policies had improved the lives of their constituents. Since ethnic revival policies had only benefited part of the population, ethnic issues were largely avoided during such speeches. They were, however, brought up in ‘acceptable’ venues such as ethnic congresses, where representatives of the titular population were the primary audience and expected to hear how sovereignty had helped the cause of ethnic revival.

Throughout the post-

perestroika

period the leaders of the republics were primarily concerned with establishing their republics’ political and economic autonomy from Moscow. Questions of ethnic revival tended to play a secondary role in their public statements. Having presented a general account of the rhetoric of sovereignty, I now turn to the specifics of this rhetoric in each of the four republics being discussed.

Tatarstan: treaty or bust

Tatarstan’s leaders were most vocal about their desire to be independent of Russia. Their conception of the republic’s development included assuming control of its resources and industries, having the right to be a member of the international community, and fostering equal, treaty-based relations with Russia. These demands were superficially modified over time, but their core remained essentially unchanged.

Stage 1

As early as 1989 the leaders of Tatarstan defined the three points that were to form the core of their ideology throughout the late perestroika period. They wanted union republic status separate from Russia, they wanted Tatarstan laws to be supreme in the republic, and they wanted control over the republic’s most profitable industries.

In early speeches on the subject, Mintimer Shaimiev, at the time still the chairman of the republic Supreme Soviet, called for Tatarstan’s independence (samostoyatel’nost’) in deciding internal questions and blamed autonomous republic status for Tatarstan’s manufacturing imbalance toward heavy industry over the production of consumer goods. Union republic status would not only assist Tatarstan’s political development—it would also help its socio-economic development. Two months after the second speech, Mukhammat Sabirov, the prime minister of Tatarstan, argued that Tatarstan would be better off managing its economic potential on its own through a return to full statehood.

Throughout this period, Shaimiev and Sabirov limited their discussion of Tatar ethnic revival primarily to calls for granting the Tatar language official status. Shaimiev noted that ‘it used to be considered apostasy to speak Tatar’. Sabirov noted that the Tatar language could only be revived if Tatarstan became an equal member of the union. However, these calls were moderated by assurances that a Tatar state would not discriminate against non-Tatars. While calling for making Tatar
the republic’s official language, Shaimiev stated that no one would be required to become bilingual in a set period of time.\textsuperscript{25} He noted that the leaders of Tatarstan had convinced its people to reject a nationalist orientation in their drive for sovereignty.\textsuperscript{26} In the early stage of that drive Tatarstan’s leaders tried to ensure that it was not perceived as motivated by ethno-separatism, stressing instead the economic benefits of self-rule and the irrationality of having questions of local import decided in Moscow.

\textit{Stage 2}

After the collapse of the Soviet Union Tatarstan modified its claim of independence from Russia. Rather than full separation, it began to call for associated membership in the Russian Federation on the basis of a bilateral treaty.\textsuperscript{27} The new chairman of the republic Supreme Soviet, Farid Mukhametshin, described Tatarstan sovereignty as covering virtually all aspects of government, from police to citizenship to transport and communications.\textsuperscript{28} In addition, Tatarstani leaders increasingly began to advocate the development of both political and economic international contacts. For instance, Vice President Vasiliy Likhachev called for the development of a Tatarstan foreign policy, adherence to international treaties, and even the establishment of diplomatic relations with foreign states.\textsuperscript{29} At the same time, questions of economic sovereignty began to narrow to calls for increasing quotas for petroleum exports and for an independent budget, with fixed yearly payments to the central government.\textsuperscript{30}

In order to make sovereignty acceptable to non-Tatars living in Tatarstan, presidential advisers began to develop the concept of a Tatarstan nation, comprising all the inhabitants of the republic. According to adviser Rafael Khakimov, citizenship was to replace ethnicity as the marker of belonging to Tatarstan.\textsuperscript{31} During this entire period, only once did Shaimiev mention the problems of Tatar language use, also making sure to mention the cross-national support for sovereignty expressed in the March 1992 referendum on the issue.\textsuperscript{32}

\textit{Stage 3}

After the signing of the bilateral treaty in February 1994, Tatarstani leaders spoke mostly about the soundness of the policies they had pursued over the past five years. They noted with satisfaction that they had secured significant foreign investment and had advanced international trade, that they had been able to shelter Tatarstan from the worst ravages of shock therapy, and that they had been the leading force opposing the recentralisation of Russia.\textsuperscript{33} Meanwhile, they made almost no mention of the wholesale revival of Tatar culture that had taken place away from the public eye, but still under the banner of sovereignty. In the second part of this article, we shall see how this revival was orchestrated.

\textit{Bashkortostan: oil, statehood and federation}

In Bashkortostan rich natural resources and a strong industrial base permitted a high degree of economic self-sufficiency that could be used to press for sovereignty.
But ethnic Bashkirs were in too weak a position to publicly press claims for self-determination because of their demographic status as only the third largest ethnic group in the republic. These factors led leaders to fashion a campaign that emphasised economic sovereignty while virtually ignoring ethnic matters.

Stage 1

Like Tatarstan, Bashkortostan was one of the first autonomous republics to call for dismantling the Soviet Union’s centralised economic structure. As early as September 1989 the first secretary of the Bashkir communist party, R.Kh. Khabibullin, complained that Bashkiria had become an appendage the USSR exploited for its natural resources. After becoming chairman of the republic Supreme Soviet, Murtaza Rakhimov continued this line, claiming that sovereignty would increase income and help the republic’s poor.

Of the four main goals Rakhimov presented in arguing for the adoption of a sovereignty declaration, three concerned increasing self-government. These included union republic status, treaty-based relations with other republics, and the development of a republican legislative system based on a new republic constitution. The one remaining goal called for the people of Bashkortostan to become the owners of their territory and resources.

Their minority position made Bashkir leaders even more hesitant to use ethnic claims than the leaders of Tatarstan. Unlike Tatar leaders, who called for the development of the Tatar language, Rakhimov stated there was no reason to rush the adoption of a language law. He noted that Bashkortostan was pressing for state sovereignty, not national sovereignty, and that this would benefit all of the populace. Deputy Council of Ministers Chairman Mansur Ayupov emphasised that sovereignty would not lead to advantages for Bashkirs.

Beginning the drive for sovereignty with speeches about its economic advantages, Bashkir leaders quickly realised the possibilities political sovereignty offered and began to include calls for raising republic status and for an independent legislative system in their appeals. Yet they were always careful to avoid ethnic demands.

Stage 2

After the break-up of the Soviet Union, Bashkortostan’s leaders’ demands focused on the same issues as before, but now they discussed detailed demands and proposals. Economic demands focused on increasing oil export quotas and hard currency revenues, and establishing a one-channel budget system. Just two months after the union’s break-up, Rakhimov called for an increase in Bashkortostan’s oil quota from 15% to 30% in order to help pay for food purchases and other necessary goods. Discussions with the central government about hard currency exports concluded with an interim agreement that allowed the republic to keep 70% of its export earnings.

As before, economic questions shared the spotlight with the republic’s ongoing state-building enterprise. Details also became important in this sphere. By the summer of 1993 Rakhimov was calling not simply for the development of a republic legal system but for the passage of specific pieces of legislation that would create a state
finance system, develop foreign trade and regulate the transition to a market economy. The emphasis on legislation was made explicit in Rakhimov’s October 1993 speech on the third anniversary of the republic’s declaration of sovereignty. He stated that a complete set of legislation, including a republic constitution, was the most important precondition for the development of Bashkortostan as a sovereign state. Once the constitution was passed in December 1993 the republic continued to adopt basic laws at a rapid rate. During my fieldwork in the republic in December 1995 an official bragged that Bashkortostan had adopted three times as many basic laws as the Russian Federation and was generally further ahead in its legislative development. As economic disputes with Moscow were gradually settled, state-building questions gradually came to the forefront in the political development of Bashkortostani sovereignty.

Ethnic questions receded even further from the sovereignty discourse during this period. Most speeches did not mention ethnic concerns even in passing. When they were brought up, it was usually in response to an interviewer’s question. Rakhimov responded to a Muscovite interviewer’s question about rumours that Russians were being forced out of positions of authority by stating that discrimination against Russians was out of the question. Former prime minister Mirgazyamov noted that, in order to make sovereignty acceptable to the population, Bashkortostan had to make sure that the republic’s Tatars lived as well as Tatars in Tatarstan and Russians as well as Russians in central Russia. Finally, Rakhimov called for the adoption of a state programme for dealing with ethnic problems that could lead to the formation of a civic identity in the republic.

Stage 3

Bashkortostan signed a bilateral treaty with Moscow six months after Tatarstan. As in Tatarstan, after this event the leaders of the republic spent a lot of time reviewing their achievements. President Rakhimov used the occasion of the fourth anniversary of sovereignty to review the advances the republic had made since 1990. The most important of these included adopting a new constitution, signing the bilateral treaty, avoiding the most negative consequences of economic reform, developing relations with foreign states and preserving inter-ethnic peace. The problems that still needed to be solved included increasing state power, reforming the justice system, completing the creation of a market economy and developing effective means of social assistance for the needy. Once again, ethnic issues were mentioned only in passing. Bashkortostan was declared to be a cultural centre not only for Bashkirs but also for Russians, Tatars and several other ethnic groups.

Yet there was one exception to the general rule prohibiting ethnic issues from official discourse. Bashkir leaders frankly discussed these issues at the Bashkir World Congress held in Ufa in June 1995. In his major address to the Congress, Rakhimov called for expansion of native language education and its use in government, rebuilding of threatened cultural traditions and reversal of the assimilation of Bashkirs by more numerous ethnic groups. He also said the government would train Bashkirs elsewhere in Russia and abroad, help Bashkirs to find employment and education, and reverse the numerical decline of the Bashkir population. Prime Minister Rim Bakiev
noted that Bashkortostan was the only place where Bashkirs’ problems could be addressed and that the state would not shirk its responsibility in this regard. Suddenly, politicians who had for years side-stepped nationalist concerns in public speeches came out sounding like moderate nationalists. These speeches did not represent a policy shift—the leaders went back to the old speeches once the Congress was over. The forum had provided an opportunity to express concerns that Bashkir leaders felt they could not express at events that were not explicitly oriented towards Bashkirs. Yet were these speeches just empty rhetoric meant to appease the gathered nationalists? Or was the situation in fact the opposite? Had the leadership of the republic in fact been quietly pursuing a programme of ethnic revival in addition to its stated goals of state-building and economic reform? I shall explore this question in the second part of this article.

**Chuvashia: following the leaders**

**Stages 1 and 2**

Chuvash politicians tended to support the same ideas as Tatar and Bashkir leaders, but in a more moderate form. As in Bashkortostan, their main goal was economic self-government. In the opening speech of the Supreme Soviet’s sovereignty debate, A. M Leontiev, the body’s chairman, argued that sovereignty meant ‘being the master of one’s fate ... the right to independently decide economic, social and national questions’. Eduard Kubarev, who succeeded Leontiev after the August coup attempt, argued that the privatisation of Soviet and Russian enterprises would form the economic basis of Chuvash sovereignty.

The state-building aspects of sovereignty were less appealing to Chuvash leaders. Unlike leaders in Bashkortostan and Tatarstan, Chuvash leaders never threatened to leave the federation, or to boycott elections or the signing of the Federative Treaty. Leontiev noted that sovereignty would not lead to a ‘divorce’ from Russia and that Chuvashia would continue to recognise the supremacy of both Soviet and Russian laws. Kubarev noted the necessity of preserving Chuvash integration in the Russian Federation, and affirmed that the Federative Treaty gave Chuvashia sufficient room for economic and political development.

In these speeches ethnic revival played only a limited role. Leontiev identified the preservation of ethnic culture alongside self-government and socio-economic development as one of the reasons for raising the republic’s status. Kubarev argued that sovereignty had allowed a renewed emphasis on the development of ethnic culture, which was impossible without emphasising the role of the national language in all spheres of public life. Yet in both cases these were isolated mentions in speeches devoted primarily to extolling the benefits of sovereignty for economic welfare.

As in Bashkortostan, the parliament chairman’s speech at the Chuvash National Congress was the one speech made by a Chuvash leader in which ethnic revival received serious attention. Kubarev called for measures to enforce the republic’s language law, to develop Chuvash culture and to foster national consciousness. He even contemplated administrative adjustments, including the resurrection of ethnic village administration that had existed in the 1920s. In analysing this speech, we
should take into account that it was delivered at an event designed to promote ethnic culture, allowing the leadership to call for increased attention to ethnic concerns without the danger of being labelled anti-Russian. Nor did the venue prevent Kubarev from spending a significant part of his time talking about the familiar themes of political and economic self-sufficiency. Still, this speech can be viewed as an exception in the general trend of Chuvash political life.

Stage 3

The election of former Russian Federation justice minister Nikolai Fedorov as the first president of the Chuvash Republic in December 1993 amplified already existing trends in Chuvash politics. Whereas previous leaders supported self-rule as long as it did not cause conflict with the government in Moscow, in his campaign Fedorov declared that Chuvashia would make no claims ‘for asserting independent policies’. After his election Fedorov declared his primary goals to be creating new markets, combating drunkenness, promoting physical fitness, maintaining law and order, and promoting tourism. In the obligatory statement on ethnic culture, Fedorov declared that he would defend Chuvash culture but noted that, given Chuvashia’s multi-ethnic nature, it was more important to promote ethnic stability. Once his term in office was well under way, Fedorov eliminated anti-sovereignty rhetoric and returned to the standard calls for increasing the republic’s socio-economic self-sufficiency and strengthening republic-level state institutions. As he stated at a session of the Chuvash legislature, ‘You cannot build Chuvashia from Moscow’. Fedorov’s sudden support for greater sovereignty can be attributed partially to the realities of working in his position, but partially to Moscow’s war on Chechnya. Fedorov was one of the strongest opponents of the war, calling for resistance against immoral Moscow policies that amounted to genocide. Despite these modifications, Fedorov continued to eschew strong appeals for political sovereignty, preferring to bargain for concrete programmes instead.

Despite Chuvash numerical dominance in the republic, its leaders largely avoided confrontation with the Moscow government, allowing neighbouring republics to blaze the trail in defining centre–periphery relations. Despite moderate rhetoric, they were able to achieve many of the same advantages as these ‘louder’ neighbours, while maintaining good relations with Russia, avoiding significant internal polarisation, and taking concrete steps to promote Chuvash ethnic interests.

Khakassia: a republic is born

Unlike the three republics already discussed, Khakassia was not an autonomous republic before the Gorbachev reforms began. As an autonomous oblast’ within Krasnoyarsk krai it was subordinate to the krai administration. Most of the oblast’ leaders’ energies during the early stages of sovereignisation were focused on separating from the krai and becoming an autonomous republic within the Russian Federation. The requirements for such a separation under Soviet regulations strongly influenced the oblast’ leaders’ discourse on sovereignty. Once republic status was
achieved in 1992, these leaders abandoned the discourse of sovereignty and plunged into the difficult task of creating new governing institutions, often from scratch.

Khakassia’s demographic situation was even less favourable for the titular nationality than Bashkortostan’s. However, the leadership’s response to this situation was almost exactly the opposite of the actions taken by Bashkir leaders. Whereas in Bashkortostan leaders avoided speaking about ethnic issues, Khakass leaders were the most vocal of the four groups being studied in their calls for state participation in their ethnic revival.

Stage 1

By the summer of 1989 Khakass leaders were focused on raising their region’s status to that of an autonomous republic. If that proved impossible, they were prepared to remain an autonomous oblast’ as long as they could separate from Krasnoyarsk and be subject directly to the RSFSR. Vladimir Shtygashev, a deputy to the Russian Congress of People’s Deputies from Khakassia and the future chairman of the Khakass parliament, described the problems caused by being subject to the krai administration. He argued that an autonomous oblast’ was no better than a district (raion) of the krai, as it had no right to supervise its own territory or develop its own legislation. The krai was blamed for treating Khakassia like a colony, taking away its agricultural produce, construction materials and natural resources without paying for them.61

Independence from the krai would allow Khakassia to realise its full economic potential, which was greater than many oblasti and autonomous republics, argued Supreme Soviet executive committee chairwoman Galina Troshkina.62 Russian Supreme Soviet deputy Mikhail Mityukov argued that the republic should have exclusive rights to hunting, fishing, pastures, water and forests; that enterprises owned by the Union or RSFSR administrations should pay some taxes to the local administration; and that no industry should be built in the region without the approval of the local administration.63 Economic development thus seemed to be the primary rationale for increasing sovereignty and separating from the krai.

During this period state-building aspects of sovereignty were not discussed, most probably on the assumption that until the oblast’ became a republic such talk was pointless. Once separation seemed fairly likely, Shtygashev made the standard argument that republic status would allow Khakassia to have its own constitution, which would guarantee that the territory would be able to develop its scientific, cultural and social spheres.64

The promotion of ethnic interests, on the other hand, received a great deal of attention from local leaders of both Khakass and Russian ethnicity. Shtygashev argued that republic status would assist in preserving Khakass culture and language, knowledge of which was rapidly disappearing.65 Troshkina complained that the krai did not assist the autonomous oblast’ with its ethnic and cultural problems.66 Finally, Shtygashev focused attention on the large number of recent migrants of non-Khakass ethnicity who ignored international and Soviet standards on ethnic relations and were hostile to indigenous groups.67

The policies these authors suggested for solving these problems were more radical
than anything suggested by the leaders of the republics already discussed. While Mityukov, who is of Russian ethnicity, called for standard measures such as opening ethnic schools and increasing native language publishing, ethnic Khakass leaders went much further. Shtygashev, for example, in 1989 called for a two-chamber parliament, with one chamber having 50% Khakass representation. Two years later he reiterated the call for significant Khakass representation in government. Arguing that quotas were necessary because of the Russian majority’s chauvinist attitude towards indigenous groups, Shtygashev insisted that the Khakass people were not looking for special privileges but wanted to be equal among equals and to preserve their language and culture. Regardless of the mechanisms involved, Shtygashev spoke for all members of the Khakass administrative élite when he argued that autonomous republic status would allow Khakassia more opportunities for developing its indigenous culture.

Stages 2 and 3

After the break-up of the Soviet Union, Khakassia, now a republic, belatedly began to consider adopting a declaration of sovereignty. The radical statements of ethnic Khakass leaders had had their effect, causing former supporters of sovereignty among the Russian population to turn against the idea. Writing on the eve of the sovereignty debate, Mityukov claimed that the majority of the republic’s population viewed such a declaration as a move toward separation from Russia. He also spoke sharply against quotas, stating that selecting people for positions by ethnicity would lead to an ethnic minority dictatorship.

Supporters of sovereignty, such as Shtygashev, argued that a declaration was necessary in order to define the republic’s rights and obligations within the Russian Federation. The legal vacuum caused by the lack of a declaration would lead to social and ethnic conflicts. At the same time, Shtygashev vehemently denied any possibility of secession. The anti-sovereignty forces won this battle, ending the sovereignty debate and foreclosing reference to sovereignty in future statements by republic leaders.

Why were the Khakass leaders so outspoken in their defence of ethnic interests? I would argue that they spoke primarily out of weakness. As we shall see in the next section, Bashkir leaders did not need to call for ethnic programmes because they had the ability to implement ethnically oriented programmes without forging a multi-ethnic consensus on them, whereas the Khakass lacked this ability and were therefore forced to publicise their plight in an effort to gain the sympathy of the majority.

As we have seen, ethnic revival played a secondary role in sovereignty supporters’ rhetoric. The leaders of most of the republics preferred to focus on economic and state-building aspects of sovereignisation. This allowed them to maintain their support among non-titular ethnic groups, preserve peace in the republic, and avoid excessively alienating the central government in Moscow. Ethnic claims were limited to language issues or brought out on special occasions. So does this mean that the critics are right and that sovereignty was only a tool for increasing local control over politics or for
Avoiding the effects of economic reform? I shall argue that while both of those issues were important to the republics’ political élites, the élites were also strongly concerned about reviving the ethnic culture of the titular nationalities. The evidence for this lies in the laws they passed and the policies they adopted.

_Helping their own: policies of ethnic revival_

We have seen that the leaders of Russia’s newly sovereign republics largely avoided calling for ethnic revival in their speeches and interviews. Despite playing the issue down in public, leaders were able to enact and implement policies and programmes that promoted both the culture and political power of the republics’ titular ethnic groups.

Of course, the leaders’ concern with their stated goals, increasing political and economic independence from the Russian Federation, was not mere artifice. The majority of the laws enacted by republic legislatures concerned these topics. Nonetheless, ethnic revival was an important part of government policy and, significantly, one that was largely hidden from the public eye.

The ethnic revival policies in the republics can be divided into five groups. They include:

- privileges in basic laws,
- promotion of ethnic culture and language,
- expansion of native-language schooling,
- promotion of ethnic symbols, and
- preferences for members of the titular ethnic group in top administrative positions.

Table 1 presents a summary of the main aspects of ethnic revival programmes in the four republics. These policies were not promoted with equal vigour in all of the republics. Some of the republics, most notably Khakassia, avoided giving ethnic groups privileges in basic laws and did not give preferences to ethnic candidates for government jobs. All republics enacted programmes for cultural and/or linguistic revival and expansion of native-language schooling, although the extent of implementation of these programmes varied by region. Finally, all of the republics adopted and promoted symbols of the titular ethnic group.

_Tatarstan: Tatar for all_

_Laws and symbols_

In Tatarstan, despite the effort on the part of the republic’s leaders to create a civic Tatarstani identity, ethnic considerations were embedded in some of the state’s basic laws. The Tatarstan Declaration of Sovereignty, for example, stated that sovereignty was being declared in order to ‘realise the inalienable right of the Tatar nation, and all of the people of the republic, to self-determination’. Although all of the people of the republic are mentioned, the priority given to Tatars is obvious.

The continuing priority of Tatar claims to statehood can be seen in Tatarstan’s choice of state symbols. In the centre of the newly created state seal, for example,
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language or Cultural Development Programme</th>
<th>Tatarstan</th>
<th>Bashkortostan</th>
<th>Chuvashia</th>
<th>Khakassia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Salary bonus</td>
<td>(1) Quotas</td>
<td>(1) Professions list</td>
<td>December 1995 (culture)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Publishing</td>
<td>(2) Economic development</td>
<td>(2) Chuvash courses</td>
<td>(1) Promote traditions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Professions list</td>
<td>(3) Publishing</td>
<td>(3) Publishing</td>
<td>(2) Publishing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) University</td>
<td>(4) Education quotas</td>
<td>(4) Education quotas</td>
<td>(3) Education stipends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indigenous Preferences</th>
<th>Medium Administration only</th>
<th>High (1) Administration (2) Education (3) Industry</th>
<th>Low (1) Administration (2) Education</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language of Education</th>
<th>(1) Tatar required subject in all schools (2) Tatars study in Tatar</th>
<th>(1) Attempt to require Bashkir in all schools failed (2) Bashkir schools switching to Bashkir instruction</th>
<th>(1) Chuvash required subject in all schools (2) Chuvash study in Chuvash</th>
<th>(1) No attempt at mandatory language requirement (2) Khakass study language as subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

stands a winged white panther, a symbol of the Tatar state since the 15th century. The flag consists of two large fields of green and red. The green colour symbolises the Tatar connection to the rest of the Turkic and Muslim world. All of these symbols are meant to subtly accentuate the image of Tatarstan as a Tatar state, without alienating the large non-Tatar population.
Promoting Tatar culture

The republic’s leaders have taken concrete measures to spur the revival of Tatar culture. These measures fall primarily into three categories: (1) the promotion of Tatar language use in the public sphere, (2) the expansion of Tatar education and (3) direct propaganda of Tatar culture.

The promotion of the Tatar language began with the adoption of a language law in July 1992. After heated argument, the parliament rejected the idea of making Tatar the republic’s sole state language, instead giving it and Russian equal rights. Nonetheless, the law significantly increased the status of the Tatar language, requiring that the government conduct its business and publish its laws in Tatar as well as Russian (Articles 11, 12, 14, 15). The courts, media, industrial enterprises, public transport and scientific and cultural institutions were also required to use both languages in conducting their affairs and in interacting with the public (Articles 16–22). The law also established a language preservation programme whose goals included opening Tatar-language kindergartens, broadening Tatar-language education, and expanding Tatar publishing and broadcasting (Articles 7, 23).  

The implementation of this law began slowly, particularly in the industrial and commercial spheres. To speed up implementation, in the summer of 1994 the Supreme Soviet adopted the ‘State programme for the preservation, study and development of the languages of the peoples of the Tatarstan Republic’. Despite its name, this programme is almost entirely devoted to the preservation, study and development of a single language, Tatar. Of the 126 points in the programme, 67 are devoted explicitly to Tatar. Another 26 do not mention Tatar but in light of existing conditions can be assumed to address it primarily. Only 33 points address all of the languages spoken in Tatarstan in equal measure and none addresses Russian exclusively.

The programme’s recommendations include the creation of a list of professions which will require a knowledge of both state languages (I.9), a 15% salary bonus for workers in these professions who know both languages (XI.9), and the expansion of Tatar-language education and media (III, IV, VII, IX).

This programme has led to the spread of Tatar throughout public life. Participation in Tatar language classes for adults increased, with the Russian vice-president of the republic the most visible student early on. Synchronous translation became available for parliamentary debates. Bilingual street signs are now ubiquitous and public transport drivers frequently make announcements in both languages. Beginning in September 1998, all consumer goods sold in the republic are required to have labels in both Russian and Tatar. Several new Tatar-language journals and newspapers are now available, including children’s periodicals. Radio and television broadcasting in Tatar has increased by several hours per week. Traditional Tatar place names are replacing Russian and Soviet ones throughout the republic. The results of this campaign for Tatar revival can be seen in an increase in Tatar use outside the home, both on the street in private conversation and at school and work.

Other than the expansion of Tatar’s official functions, the most significant factor causing this revival has been the expansion of Tatar education. The expansion includes both the increase in Tatar-language education for Tatar children and the
introduction of the Tatar language and history as required subjects for non-Tatar schoolchildren. Between 1991 and 1995 the proportion of Tatar students who study all subjects in their native language has increased from 28% to 43% and continues to rise. The increase in urban areas, from 4% in 1991 to 28% in 1995, is particularly noteworthy.\textsuperscript{84} Whereas prior to 1993 virtually no non-Tatar schoolchildren studied the Tatar language, Tatar is now being taught as a required subject in all of the republic’s schools.\textsuperscript{85} Universities are expanding Tatar language departments and creating new ones where they previously did not exist.\textsuperscript{86}

All of these innovations are based on principles that were first developed in the ‘Plan for the development of Tatar education’ and then enshrined in the republic’s language and education laws. The formulation of this plan began as early as 1989 and was approved by the Education Ministry in 1991. Its basic principle states that the educational process must be based on the idea of Tatar national rebirth (I.4). The plan calls for the creation of a special state fund for the development of Tatar schools, which should receive priority in government funding (VI.8). The plan also provides for mandatory Tatar language instruction for Russian children (XII).\textsuperscript{87} This provision was codified in article 10 of the language law and article 6 of the education law, which require that Russian and Tatar be studied in equal measure in all schools and kindergartens in Tatarstan.\textsuperscript{88}

Direct promotion of Tatar culture, the third measure, has had less of an impact on non-Tatars than language and education policy. Tatars, on the other hand, have been strongly affected by a constant bombardment of Tatar culture. By 1995, 1645 Tatar clubs, over 100 folklore ensembles and 1063 Tatar libraries existed throughout the republic. Over 240 mosques have been opened. The media have also played a prominent role in the promotion of Tatar culture. The government has created state centres for the collection and dissemination of Tatar folklore and for the promotion of Tatar culture.\textsuperscript{89} Articles describing Tatar history, art and music appear constantly in Tatar and Russian-language newspapers. Television and radio also have been filled with cultural programming.

\textit{Expanding opportunities}

The expansion of cultural programmes had one often neglected side effect. All of these new centres and programmes required workers to staff and implement them. In the education ministry alone, the ethnic schools department was expanded, the position of assistant department head in charge of ethnic education was created in each county and city education department, and there was a vast increase in the number of openings for Tatar language teachers.\textsuperscript{90} The expansion of opportunities extended into the private sector as well. By law, each enterprise needed to employ a Tatar speaker to deal with Tatar-speaking customers.

But the most politically significant expansion of opportunity occurred at the top. The constitution was written to require the President of Tatarstan to know both Tatar and Russian, virtually ensuring that only Tatars would hold that office in the foreseeable future (article 108).\textsuperscript{91} Furthermore, although documentation is hard to come by, most sources agree that the leadership of the republic is much more Tatar-dominated now than it has ever been. One writer argues that between 1990 and
1995 the élite structure changed from rough parity between Tatars and Russians to an 80:20 dominance in favour of Tatars.\textsuperscript{92} While most sources argue that this dominance is counterbalanced by Russian dominance in local industry, one Moscow observer believes that the economic elite has also undergone Tatarisation.\textsuperscript{93} Overall, it seems unquestionable that Tatars have a greater role in running the republic than they did five years ago, although the extent of this change is difficult to document.

I have tried to show that the promotion of ethnic revival in Tatarstan has been a strong part of its sovereignisation programme. While it was not advertised by republic leaders, it was enshrined in the republic’s laws and programmes. Its implementation was accompanied by an expansion of the cultural bureaucracy, which was filled by Tatars, and by the partial Tatarisation of the governing élite. As we shall see, this process was similar to what occurred in other republics. Furthermore, it contradicts the thesis that the sovereignty campaign paid little attention to ethnic issues, using them merely as a smokescreen.

\textit{Bashkortostan: overcoming demographics}

Demographics was the key factor shaping the politics of ethnic revival in Bashkortostan. With only 22\% of the republic’s population composed of ethnic Bashkirs, and only three-quarters of them speaking Bashkir as their native language, Bashkir leaders had to be especially cautious in promoting sovereignisation without alienating the Russian and Tatar majority.\textsuperscript{94} As we have seen, this meant that ethnic revival was not discussed publicly by senior government figures. Yet because ethnic Bashkirs held the most important government institutions in firm control, they were able to implement a far-reaching programme of ethnic revival. This programme was similar to that conducted in Tatarstan, with emphasis on expanding Bashkir language use and education, increasing employment opportunities for Bashkirs, and making Bashkir culture more visible in the public sphere.

\textit{Laws}

Bashkortostan’s sovereignty drive was unusual in its emphasis on legislation as the basis of sovereignty. Because of the need to reassure the non-Bashkir majority, few references to ethnic revival were made in the republic’s basic laws. Those that were, however, would become the backbone of the broad ethnic revival programme that commenced after the Bashkir politician Murtaza Rakhimov was elected president in 1993.

Although the republic’s sovereignty declaration guaranteed equal rights to all ethnic groups and noted that the multi-ethnic people of Bashkortostan were sovereign, it focused on ‘realising the inalienable right of the Bashkir nation to self-determination’.\textsuperscript{95} The constitution again noted that the republic’s existence was a result of the Bashkir ethnic group exercising its right to self-determination (article 69) and emphasised that the republic was responsible for the preservation and development of Bashkir culture\textsuperscript{96} (article 53). The education law gave all citizens the right to obtain native-language education and to take university entrance exams in their own language and stated that ethnic schools were responsible for developing ethnic
consciousness, ethnic culture and ethnic traditions while teaching in the native language. These articles, especially those giving priority to Bashkir cultural development, would later be used to justify the Bashkir programme of ethnic revival.

The language law has been the most controversial aspect of sovereignty legislation in Bashkortostan. The first proposal, made in 1992, called for Bashkir to be declared the sole state language. Later versions accorded Bashkir and Russian equal status but divided on the question of whether Tatar should also be an official language. Controversy over this question led to the suspension of efforts to pass a language law. Government officials thought that the legislature would instead pass a law on the preservation and revival of Bashkir and other languages. In other words, Bashkir leaders planned to avoid what has become a highly charged political issue by using a different means of legislating official safeguards for their language.

**Implementation**

Initial measures to revitalise Bashkir culture were similar to those undertaken in Tatarstan. The current government has concentrated on converting Russian-language schools with predominantly Bashkir students into Bashkir-language schools, with a resulting increase of 20,000 students studying in Bashkir between 1988 and 1995, a rise of approximately 6%. Overall, approximately 52% of Bashkir-speaking Bashkir schoolchildren now study in their own language, while another 43% study Bashkir as a subject.

Following the example of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan’s Ministry of Education decided to require all schoolchildren in the republic to study Bashkir for 2 hours per week starting in the 1994 school year. After protests from local Russian organisations, this plan was suspended, with Bashkir-language instruction being made available on a voluntary basis. This initiative has proven relatively successful, with the number of non-Bashkirs studying Bashkir doubling to over 50,000 since the plan was implemented.

Bashkortostan has perhaps gone the furthest in favouring members of the titular ethnic group for top government positions. Like other republics, Bashkortostan now requires candidates for president to know the Bashkir language. Many sources provide evidence that between half and two-thirds of top offices are held by Bashkirs. Perhaps most significantly, government officials themselves do not deny that Bashkirisation is occurring. Sergeĭ Kabashov, assistant director of the sociological department of the Bashkortostan Cabinet of Ministers, argued that Bashkirisation was acceptable because it was natural for a leader to want to have supporters from his own group. He noted that 16 out of 33 government ministers were Bashkir.

Ildar Yulbarisov, who is responsible for ethnic issues in the presidential administration, noted that the president believed in setting ethnic quotas for top government positions. A recent study argues that Bashkirisation has gone beyond the heads of ministries to include ‘appointing Bashkirs to all even slightly powerful positions’.

One unique aspect of Bashkortostan’s ethnic revival has been the concentration of economic development in predominantly Bashkir regions. The southeastern regions of the republic, where the Bashkir population is concentrated, have received development credits, and the bulk of foreign investment projects have been located there.
Cultural and educational facilities, including theatres, an art institute and a Bashkir national university, are also being established in this region.\textsuperscript{110}

After a cautious start, Bashkir leaders have started to pursue an increasingly broad programme of Bashkir ethnic revival. This boldness is due in large part to an increasing sense of security among Bashkir leaders since the election of Murtaza Rakhimov as president and the ensuing replacement of many non-Bashkir officials with Bashkirs.\textsuperscript{111} The most ambitious plan to date has been the programme for Bashkir development, which calls for expanding the socio-economic infrastructure of Bashkir-populated regions (2.1.1), giving preferences to Bashkirs in employment (2.1.5), establishing quotas for Bashkirs applying to universities (2.3.6), and establishing mandatory quotas for Bashkirs in all spheres of employment within five years (3.1). Financing for this programme, which also includes articles on expanding publishing and promoting culture, is to come from a special fund dedicated to Bashkir cultural development.

Despite their silence on the issue when discussing the republic’s sovereignty drive, Bashkir leaders are in the midst of implementing the most far-reaching ethnic revival programme of the four republics in this study. I believe that this discontinuity is due to the Bashkirs’ precarious demographic position, which has made them reluctant to discuss ethnic revival in public, while at the same time making them eager to assert control over state institutions in order to avert the assimilation of their people by the numerically dominant Russian and Tatar ethnic groups.

\textit{Chuvashia: majority rules}

The numerical dominance of the Chuvash ethnic group in their republic made legitimization of ethnic revival policies much simpler. Policies that caused controversy in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan seemed perfectly natural in Chuvashia and were introduced with little resistance. In particular, the republic’s basic laws emphasised Chuvash rights and privileges more than the laws of the other republics. Chuvashia pursued a familiar course in implementing these laws, focusing on teaching Chuvash in schools and promoting cultural revival.

\textit{Laws and symbols}

The Chuvash Supreme Soviet declared the republic’s sovereignty primarily in the name of and for the sake of the Chuvash nation. Although the sovereignty declaration begins by stating that it is expressing the interests of all citizens of the republic regardless of ethnicity, it quickly goes on to state that it is ‘taking responsibility for the fate of the Chuvash nation’ and ‘proceeding from the necessity of preserving and developing the culture, language, traditions and way of life of the Chuvash nation’ (preamble).\textsuperscript{112} The republic’s proposed constitution affirms Chuvash precedence, stating that the republic is responsible for the preservation and development of Chuvash culture, while merely assisting the development of other ethnic cultures (article 6.1).\textsuperscript{113} These statements belie the emphasis which Supreme Soviet chairman Leontiev placed on economic self-determination as the reason for sovereignty in his speech opening the parliamentary debate on the declaration.
The emphasis on ethnic features in republic symbols was made explicit in the ‘Plan for national state symbols of the Chuvash Republic’, published in December 1990. This document stated that state symbols needed to embody the history of the Chuvash people, its opportunity for national revival, and its right to self-determination. The adopted state seal and flag use purple and yellow, both traditional Chuvash colours. They both use the ‘Tree of Life’, a symbol of rebirth. The flag also includes the ancient Chuvash ‘Three Suns’ emblem.

Language and education

The Chuvash language law makes the republic government responsible for preserving and developing the Chuvash language, while declaring both Chuvash and Russian to be state languages. Like the Tatar law, it requires government workers dealing with the public to know both state languages, allowing for a 10-year transition period during which translators would be required to be present in all government agencies. It also calls for unspecified financial bonuses to be given to those workers who are able to communicate in both languages (articles 3, 3a).

The Chuvash government did not delay in beginning to implement the language law, setting up a commission for this purpose in April 1991. In 1992, concerned about lagging implementation, the government decided to create a fund for the revival of Chuvash schools. This effort culminated in May 1993 with the adoption of an implementation programme for the language law. This programme explicitly gives priority to expanding the functions of the Chuvash language as the language of the indigenous people (I.1), including compiling a list of professions and positions which would require Chuvash language knowledge (I. la), establishing a short-wave Chuvash radio programme (III.1), giving priority to Chuvash-language publishing (VI.1), and expanding Chuvash-language library collections (VI.4). In the educational sphere, the law requires the introduction of Chuvash language as a subject in all republic schools and universities (IV.4,6) and the establishment of quotas for Chuvash applicants to arts and music departments of major universities (V.1).

These initiatives were not just on paper. As early as February 1992 the number of hours devoted to Chuvash language study was increased, as was the number of schools where the language was taught. The number of hours of Chuvash language programming on radio and television was increased by 1993. Within another year, several specialised Chuvash schools had been opened and Chuvash language and history textbooks were being published with the assistance of George Soros’ Cultural Initiative Foundation. The number of students studying Chuvash as a subject rose from 45 000 to 80 000 between 1990 and 1995. The number of students studying all subjects in Chuvash had doubled (from 32 000 to 64 000) by 1995. The expansion of Chuvash language use thus included both an increase in its functions in public life and an increase in the number of potential language speakers.

Expanding opportunities

The Chuvash korenizatsiya programme appears to be less extensive than its Tatar and Bashkir counterparts. This is partially because there has been less need and partially
because it is less noticeable. With 67% of the republic’s population being Chuvash, it seems quite normal that the majority of government officials is Chuvash. This does not mean that Chuvash have not been given privileges. As in the two republics we have already looked at, the constitution requires that the president speak both government languages.\(^\text{124}\) After 1990 Russians were to some extent squeezed out of top administrative posts, especially in the areas of cultural, educational and media administration.\(^\text{125}\) When combined with the creation of new positions in Chuvash education and culture and their administration, these policies led to a substantial increase in employment opportunities in the government sphere for ethnic Chuvash. The new administration of Nikolai Fedorov, despite its public rejection of ethnic revival, included only two non-Chuvash in its 13 person Cabinet of Ministers.\(^\text{126}\)

Although there were minor differences in focus, the situation in Chuvashia was similar to that in the other republics. Despite a lack of emphasis on ethnic revival in public addresses, the leaders of Chuvashia took steps to introduce the Chuvash language into schools, government offices and public spaces. They also promoted Chuvash culture and history. Members of the Chuvash ethnic group gained from the employment and advancement opportunities that resulted from this emphasis on Chuvash language and culture.

\textit{Khakassia: cultural revival, political setbacks}

As I showed in the first part of this article, Khakass leaders differed from the leaders of other republics in the amount of attention they paid to ethnic concerns in their public addresses. One possible explanation for this situation is that, unlike leaders in the other republics, Khakass leaders did not have the strength in parliament or in the government to enact ethnic revival policies without support from the non-Khakass majority and therefore tried to appeal to them to support ethnic revival initiatives. For the most part, non-Khakass leaders remained relatively unconcerned with policies that promoted Khakass ethnic revival, as long as these policies did not limit the rights and opportunities of non-Khakass.

\textit{Laws and opportunities}

The ethnic Khakass leaders of Khakassia were first thwarted in their sovereignisation efforts by the Russian-dominated parliament’s refusal to adopt a sovereignty declaration. The compromise document that was fashioned instead was titled ‘The declaration on the main rights, powers and responsibilities of the Khakass Republic as a member of the Russian Federation’.\(^\text{127}\) Having prevented sovereignty from being mentioned in the document, the parliament majority was willing to declare that the republic was based on the ‘right of the Khakass nation and the society that had formed on this territory to self-determination’ (article 1). The republic’s constitution, adopted in June 1995, similarly states that it is based on the will of the multi-ethnic people of Khakassia (preamble, article 3). The constitution says nothing about Khakass cultural revival, requiring only that the government assist the cultural development of all of the republic’s ethnic groups (article 12). Unlike the constitutions of the other republics, the Khakass constitution does not require the head of
government to know both state languages. Proposals to increase Khakass representation in parliament were also rejected.

Still, not all of the Khakass leaders’ initiatives to create a legal basis for Khakass ethnic revival were defeated. Those initiatives that dealt with cultural revival, rather than ethnic favouritism in politics, were more likely to be successful. The language law, adopted on 20 October 1992, declared both Russian and Khakass to be state languages with equal rights (article 3.1). The law on the Khakass Congress gave official sanction to an unofficial representative body for the Khakass people. The congress was designed as a body for Khakass self-government that could make declarations in the name of the Khakass people on political, cultural and economic issues (articles 1 and 2). Decisions made by the Congress were to act as recommendations to the republic’s Supreme Soviet and it could directly offer legislation for that body’s consideration (articles 5 and 9). Despite the rejection of ethnic favouritism in the republic’s declaration of rights and constitution, the language and congress laws, along with the law on culture, created the legal framework for a possible revival of Khakass culture.

Implementing the laws

The Khakass government adopted three programmes to promote Khakass cultural revival. These were for language development, cultural development, and the development of the Khakass ethnic group. The programmes contained a wide variety of measures, including proposals to develop Khakass education in schools and universities, conduct Khakass festivals and holiday celebrations, improve the health of the indigenous population, and give stipends to gifted Khakass children.

The republic government has begun to carry out many of these provisions. Recent fieldwork has shown that Khakass publishing has increased over the last several years, state-sponsored ethnic festivals are thriving, and a centre for traditional arts and handicrafts has been established. At the same time progress has been limited by lack of funds and the precedence of more general needs such as social programmes and economic restructuring.

Khakass-language education presents a mixed story. On the one hand, 28 new ethnic schools have been established since 1989 and 70% of Khakass children study their language in schools. On the other hand, this is only a 2% increase over 1989 and only 7% of Khakass children study in Khakass-language schools. Khakass leaders have so far failed in establishing a Khakass school in the capital city or in expanding Khakass-language schooling outside one élite boarding school and a few village schools in the most mono-ethnic southern regions of the republic.

Khakass leaders have also failed in implementing those aspects of their revival programmes that deal with the state bureaucracy. Provisions that have not been implemented include taking measures to introduce Khakass language use in government, creating a foundation dedicated to Khakass ethnic development, and expanding the number of government workers dealing with ethnic issues. The possibility of teaching Khakass language or history to non-Khakass has not even been raised.

Their weakness forced Khakass leaders to go against the general trend and appeal publicly for measures to help revive their culture. These appeals can be deemed
partially successful. Non-Khakass deputies were willing to approve measures to assist Khakass cultural revival as long as these measures did not interfere in the affairs of non-Khakass inhabitants of the republic or give Khakass people privileges in public life or employment. But guarantees of representation in government were rejected. The election of Aleksei Lebed to the post of governor in 1996 has further decreased the ability of ethnic Khakass politicians to enact policies that favour their ethnic group. The current situation in Khakassia thus sees a kind of parallel development, with Khakass busily expanding ethnic schools, conducting traditional festivals, and increasingly reading books in their own language, while the rest of the population ignores them and their culture.

**Conclusions**

I have attempted to show that, contrary to the commonly held belief that the promotion of ethnic interests by republic officials was merely a smokescreen for their real interests, which consisted of strengthening their hold on power and increasing their republics’ independence, republic leaders were concerned enough about the interests of their ethnic group to implement ethnic revival programmes despite the danger of alienating non-titulars. I believe that these programmes were implemented because titular governing élites were conditioned by Soviet nationalities policy to believe in the importance of ethno-cultural development. Soviet policy was based on a primordialist reification of ethnic groups, describing such groups as essentially permanent and unchangeable. In this context, an increase in assimilation of members of minority groups by the dominant Russian population during the post-war era was portrayed by titular group historians and public figures as the beginning of the group’s ‘extinction’. In this context of the ethnic group as an organic unit, politicians sought to implement cultural revival policies in order to ensure the group’s collective survival. Soviet policy also declared that each ethnic region ‘belonged’ to the ethnic group for which it was named. In line with the expectations created by this policy, members of the titular political élite in each region sought to enact laws and adopt employment practices that would ensure that political power rested with members of their ethnic group.¹³⁴

Although these élites wanted to promote ethnic revival in order to ensure the cultural and political survival of their ethnic group, they did not want to alienate Russian inhabitants of their region and the central government in Moscow. For this reason, they argued that their fight for sovereignty was aimed at increasing local self-government and economic well-being, which would benefit all inhabitants of their region, regardless of ethnicity. As a result, in most republics ethnic revival was implemented but was not discussed in the speeches and interviews given by local leaders.

A thorough analysis of the variation in ethnic revival policies would require a study of as many of the 21 republics as possible. The four republics described here suggest certain preliminary hypotheses. It seems that the amount of publicity given to ethnic revival programmes depended on the numerical dominance of the ethnic group in the republic and on the extent to which it controlled the government. Numerical dominance allowed leaders to be more public about ethnic revival programmes, as
shown by the situation in Chuvashia. Incomplete control of state institutions also led to public calls for ethnic revival, as ethnic leaders could not push through their policies without non-ethnic support and therefore needed to campaign to have the policies enacted. In republics where the titular ethnic group did not comprise a dominant majority of the population but did control the government, leaders were more cautious. In order to ensure their continued dominance without antagonising the Russian population, they preferred to implement policies of ethnic revival with a minimum of discussion on ethnic issues. The nature of these policies depended on similar factors. The most radical revival programmes were proposed in Bashkortostan and Khakassia, the regions where the titular group made up the smallest proportion of the population, while the most moderate was proposed in Chuvashia, where the demographic balance ensured that titular political and cultural dominance would not be threatened. But the élites’ ability to implement these proposals depended on how thoroughly ethnic leaders exercised control over state institutions. Thus the Khakass élite’s radical proposals were mostly defeated by the Russian-controlled legislature, while similarly radical proposals in Bashkortostan were largely adopted.

These hypotheses are a preliminary effort to explain the differences between republics in their pursuit of ethnic revival as part of their sovereignty drive. However, these differences only serve to underscore the basic similarity—in all of the republics, ethnic leaders took ethnic revival seriously and developed strategies designed to maximise the extent of ethnic revival that could be achieved without alienating members of non-titular ethnic groups or frightening the central government.

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2 In addition to the scholars discussed below, the view that ethnic mobilisation was primarily a tool for increasing the power of local élites has recently been endorsed by Valery Tishkov, the director of Russia’s leading institute concerned with the study of ethnic politics, in Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and After the Soviet Union (London, 1997).
3 Roeder, p. 18
4 Ibid., p. 17.
8 Raviot, ‘Tipy …’, p. 49.
9 I view the transition period as beginning in 1988, when glasnost first spread to Russia’s ethnic regions, and ending in 1993–94, with the adoption of the Russian Constitution and the signing of the first bilateral treaties between Russia and its constituent ethnic republics.
10 For more detailed descriptions, see the articles by Gail Fondahl and Allen Frank and Ronald

11 Discussion of subsidies throughout this article is based on 1992 data found in Christine Wallich, *Russia and the Challenge of Fiscal Federalism* (Washington, DC, 1992). For 1995 data that show a similar picture, see Alastair McAuley, ‘The Determinants of Russian Federal-Regional Fiscal Relations: Equity or Political Influence?’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 49, 3, 1997, pp. 431–444. See also Treisman. I am grateful to Daniel Treisman for providing me with unpublished data on total financial transfers to the regions.

12 The most recent census figures show Russians with 43% of the population and Tatars with 49%.

13 For more on Tatar history, see Azade-Ayse Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars* (Stanford, CA, 1986).

14 In 1992 subventions formed 30% of the republic’s budget (Wallich, p. 277). By 1995, Chuvashia’s dependence on central subsidies had decreased—only 20% of the republic budget came from receipts from the federal budget (McAuley, p. 442).

15 The territory of Khakassia is in fact the place of origin for all Turkic peoples.

16 By 1995 Khakassia had lost some of this financial independence, depending on subsidies for 13% of its budget (McAuley, p. 442).

17 Likhachev served as vice-president in 1991–95, parliament speaker in 1995–98, and was appointed Russia’s representative to the European Union in May 1998.

18 For a discussion of the impact of a strong nationalist movement on local government policies, see Mary McAuley, *Russia’s Politics of Uncertainty* (New York, 1997).

19 Although Chuvashia signed a bilateral treaty with the central government in May 1996, its relations with Moscow were settled much earlier and the treaty was merely a product of Moscow’s policy of separating powers between centre and periphery by treaty. For more on bilateral treaties, see Solnich.


22 ‘Shaimiev, O suverenitete ... ’; Sabinov, ‘Suverenizatsiya ... ’.

23 Shaimiev ‘Nasha pozitsiya ... ’.

24 Sabirov, ‘Suverenizatsiya ... ’.

25 Shaimiev, ‘Nasha pozitsiya ... ’.


32 Khasanov & Gagua, ‘My nanizany ... ’.


37 Ibid.

38 ‘Rakhimov ... ’.


Interview with Ildar Yulbarisov, 8 December 1995.


‘Neterzayas nasiliem sud’by’, Vechernyaya Ufa, 4 December 1993.


Leontiev.


‘Vozrozhdenie Chuvashskoi natsii — pervaya neobkhodimost’’, ibid.

This statement was made in a pre-election interview meant to define the candidate’s most important policy goals. ‘Na budushchee smotryu s optimizmom’, Chavashen, 1993, 52.


Ibid.


‘Za konsolidatsiyu ...’.


‘Avtonomii Khakassii ...’.

‘Doverie, iskrennost’ ...’.

‘Obretenie samostoyatel’nosti ...’.

‘Ya veryu ...’.


Mukhametshin, in Respublika ..., pp. 144–145.

Republic of Tatarstan Constitution, articles 160–162.


This salary bonus was implemented in 1997 for workers in the education and culture sectors.

Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Soveta Tatarstana, 1994, 8–9, pp. 3–19.

Jamestown Monitor, 1 July 1998.

Interviews and personal observation during research trips in November 1995 and April 1996.


Republic of Tatarstan Ministry of Education data; see also Vasil Gaifullin, Tatarstan, 1995, 7–8, p. 15.
REGIONAL SEPARATISM IN RUSSIA


86 Vasil Gaifullin, ‘Natsional’noe obrazovanie v respublike Tatarstan’, conference speech, text in author’s possession.


89 See Mezhetnicheskie i mezkonfessional’nye ..., sections 1 and 2.

90 ‘Natsional’noe obrazovanie’; ‘Plan for the development of Tatar education’ (section XII); ‘Language development programme’.

91 The Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation has recently suspended a similar language provision in Bashkortostan, on the grounds that Bashkortostan has no legislation specifying the required level of language proficiency. However, it refused to issue a general ruling against such provisions. See RFE/RL Newswire, 29 April 1998.


94 Who made up respectively 40% and 28% of the population.


96 Konstitutsiya Respubliki Bashkortostan (Ufa, 1995). The constitution was adopted on 24 December 1993.


99 Ildar Yulbarisov, interview, 8 December 1995.

100 Approximately 75% of Bashkirs are considered Bashkir-speaking. The rest are predominantly Tatar-speaking. For 1989 data see Fai Safin, Printsy Evropoliticheskogo Razvitiya Bashkortostana, (Moscow, 1997); 1995 data from Ministry of Education; data up to 1994 have been published in Bashkortostan i Bashkiry v zerkale statistiki (Ufa, 1995).


104 Bashkortostan Constitution, article 92.

105 Safin: 16 of 26 ministers, 18 of 30 members of presidential advisory council; interview with Sergei Fufaev, local freelance journalist, 1 December 1995: 30 of 38 government leaders.

106 Interview, 8 December 1995.

107 Interview, 8 December 1995.


111 The extent to which Rakhimov controls political life in the republic was demonstrated in the June 1998 presidential election, in which all serious challengers to the president were refused registration as candidates by a Rakhimov-controlled electoral commission. IEWS Russian Regional Report, 25 June 1998.

112 The declaration was adopted on 24 October 1990. Text in author’s possession.

113 Sovetskaya Chuvashiya, 12 April 1995.

114 Sovetskaya Chuvashiya, 26 December 1990.

115 See Express Inform, 14 January 1992 and Chavash En-Express Vypusk, 3 June 1992, for representations and descriptions of these symbols.


118 Ibid., pp. 40–41.

119 Ibid., pp. 58–73.


123 Article 109.2 of the current constitution, and article 34 of the proposed one.


128 Khakass Language Law. Text in author’s possession.


131 These observations come from field work carried out in Khakassia in June 1996.

132 Data provided by the Khakass Ministry of Education.