



## REVISITING “SOVEREIGN” TATARSTAN

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### ABSTRACT

*With the recent independence claims in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, it is increasingly important to reconsider “parade of sovereignties” that threatened the territorial integrity of Russia in the final decade of the twentieth century. This article critically reevaluates Tatarstan’s sovereignty campaign that took place in the 1990s. The justification discourses employed by Tatarstan in its drive for sovereignty in the late perestroika and early post-Soviet eras are analyzed. The republic’s campaign is placed within a broader discussion on sovereignty, with the concept being addressed at the sub-state, state, and international scales. It is argued that, although Tatarstan indeed achieved elements of de jure and de facto sovereignty, the republic never really attained sovereignty as it is generally understood. However, although Tatarstan was never sovereign, it did achieve a high degree of territorial autonomy, which permitted the republic an unprecedented amount of independence in political, economic, and cultural spheres.*

**Key Words:** *Sovereignty, Tatarstan, Russia, Autonomy, Territoriality*

The word “sovereignty” occupied a central place in the Republic of Tatarstan’s cultural-political dialog for the duration of the final decade of the twentieth century. In 1990, when the Soviet Union was at its peak of crisis, Tatarstan unilaterally declared its sovereign statehood. This status was supported in a 1992 republic-wide referendum and subsequently codified in its constitution, which stated that Tatarstan “shall be a Sovereign State, subject to international law, associated with the Russian Federation.” That same year, the republic, citing its sovereign status, refused to sign the Federation Treaty with Moscow; it is notable that Chechnya was the only other republic not to sign the treaty.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kaiser, writing in 1994, contended that Tatarstan’s opting out of the treaty with Moscow was tantamount to secession: “The real challenge to the territorial integrity of Russia

In 1994, a very weakened federal center tacitly acknowledged Tatarstan's sovereign status in a bilateral treaty that recognized the republic as a "state united with the Russian Federation." This pact brought to a close an extremely tense period of confrontation between Kazan and Moscow.<sup>2</sup> As Bukharaev asserts, "the bilateral Treaty between Tatarstan and Russia ... saved Tatarstan from eventual bloodshed and all-out civil war."<sup>3</sup>

The 1994 agreement between Tatarstan and Russia, known simply as "the treaty" in official parlance in Kazan, attained a semi-sacred status among Tatar politicians. Tatarstani President Mintimer Shaimiev called the pact "the ideology of our republic,"<sup>4</sup> contending that the treaty cemented Tatarstan's status as a sovereign state. However, although Tatar leaders hailed their republic's sovereignty as a *fait accompli*, Tatarstan formally remained a constituent part of the Russian Federation. This arrangement carried with it an apparent contradiction. Because sovereignty is generally equated with independence and ultimate authority over a discrete territory, the specter of separatism was raised.<sup>5</sup> Many questioned how one sovereign state could exist within another sovereign state. But it was this strategic ambiguity that helped to avert armed conflict between Kazan and Moscow at a time when warfare seemed imminent.<sup>6</sup> Years later this contradiction actually assisted Russia's second democratically elected president, Vladimir Putin, as he dismantled Tatarstan's autonomy, thereby continuing Moscow's long-established tradition

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appears to come from the ASSRs which have declared their independence. Of these, only Tatarstan and Chechenia have announced their intent to secede from Russia; the other eighteen autonomous republics signed the Federation Treaty in March 1992"; Robert Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 356.

<sup>2</sup> In all, 42 units of the Russian Federation signed bilateral treaties with Moscow in the years 1994-98. Tatarstan, the first to sign such an agreement, is credited with introducing this power-sharing mechanism.

<sup>3</sup> Ravil Bukharaev, *The Model of Tatarstan under President Mintimer Shaimiev*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), p. 100.

<sup>4</sup> See; Anonymous, "Dogovor s Rossiei – Ideologia Nashei Respubliki", *Respublika Tatarstan*, 3 February 2000, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> See; Daniel Treisman, "Russia's 'Ethnic Revival': The Separatist Activism of Regional Leaders in a Postcommunist Order", *World Politics*, Vol. 49, No. 2, 1997, pp. 212-249.

<sup>6</sup> See; Farid Mukhametshin & Liubov' Ageeva (Ed.), *Respublika Tatarstan: Noveishaia Istoriia*, (Kazan: Medikoservis, 2000); Lynn Nelson & Irina Kuzes, "Regional Variations in the Implementation of Russia's Federal District Reform", *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2002, pp. 5-18.

of revoking concessions previously granted to the Tatars as well as other minorities.

With Moscow’s recent support of sovereignty declarations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and with its opposition to Kosovo’s independence, the experience of “sovereign” Tatarstan calls for renewed investigation. Understanding the trajectory of latter in the 1990s may provide some insight into potential outcomes in the former instances. In this article, I analyze the justification discourses used by Tatarstan’s leaders in their drive for sovereignty in the late *perestroika* and early post-Soviet eras. I place the Tatars’ campaign for independence within a broader discussion on sovereignty, addressing the concept at the sub-state, state, and international scales. In the process of doing so, it becomes increasingly clear that, although Tatarstan indeed achieved elements of *de jure* and *de facto* sovereignty, the republic never really attained sovereignty as it is generally understood. Although Tatarstan was never sovereign, it did achieve a very high degree of autonomy, which permitted the republic an unprecedented amount of independence in political, economic, and – perhaps most importantly – cultural spheres.

### **The Ethno-Nationalist Discourse: Historical Justifications**

A spate of government-supported publications suggests that Tatarstan’s sovereignty march was marked by political wisdom and cultural sensitivity.<sup>7</sup> As documented in *The Republic of Tatarstan: Most Recent History*, the republic in the early 1990s was divided into “approximately two equal halves – those who demanded Tatarstan’s full independence ... and those who resisted any attempt to cut ourselves off from the Russian Federation.”<sup>8</sup> Both the former – popularly called “nationals” – and the latter – labeled “federals” – organized large public meetings on the streets of Kazan and other cities throughout Tatarstan in which each group presented its opposing vision of republic’s place within Russia. Passions ran high and the potential for conflict was ever-present. Thus, as is recalled in these publications, the 1994 power-sharing treaty between Kazan and Moscow, a document that ostensibly formalized

<sup>7</sup> See; F. Mukhametshin & R. Ismailov (Ed.), *Suverennyi Tatarstan*, (Moscow: Insan, 1997); Ravil Bukharaev, *The Model of Tatarstan under President Mintimer Shaimiev*, A. Afanas’ev (Ed.), *Suverenitet Tatarstana: Pozitsiia Uchionykh*, (Kazan: Fen, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Farid Mukhametshin & Liubov’ Ageeva (Ed.), *Respublika Tatarstan: Noveishaia Istoriia*, p. 17.

Tatarstan's sovereign status within the Russian polity, was the only means of securing interethnic peace while maintaining the country's territorial integrity.

This discourse, however, is challenged by Tatarstan's self-described democratic opposition, which contends that no small degree of opportunism and collusion factored into the republic's campaign for independence. Chernobrovkina points out that until the summer of 1990 there was no mention of sovereignty among Tatarstan's political leadership.<sup>9</sup> Rather, it sought an elevation in status within the USSR, from that of an autonomous republic to that of a union republic, i.e. the same status bestowed upon the three Baltic countries, three states of the Transcaucasus, five Central Asian states, Moldavia, Ukraine, Belorussia, and Russia itself. Kazan's leadership argued that Tatarstan, as the historic homeland to more than 5 million Tatars, deserved at least the same status as Estonia, the homeland to approximately 1 million Estonians. The Tatars thus sought greater recognition and access within the Soviet polity itself.

Demands shifted abruptly following a visit by Boris Yeltsin to Kazan in early August 1990. Then Russia's leading democrat bent on capturing power in Moscow, Yeltsin famously urged the Tatars to "take all the sovereignty you can possibly swallow." He followed this command with a pledge to "welcome whatever independence the Tatar ASSR chooses for itself ... I will say: If you want to govern yourself completely, go ahead."<sup>10</sup> Yeltsin would regret these words after his ascent to the Russian presidency, but at that moment his interests aligned with those of ambitious Tatars.<sup>11</sup>

Armed with this mandate from Yeltsin, the republic proclaimed its sovereignty on August 30, 1990. This declaration of independent statehood was qualitatively different from the earlier demands for increased recognition or access in that any declaration of sovereignty is a territorial claim and therefore challenges the political-geographic status quo.<sup>12</sup> In posting this

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<sup>9</sup> Elena Chernobrovkina (Ed.), *Demokraticeskaja Opozitsiia Tatarstana: 10 Let Puti*, (Kazan: Remark, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Ravil Bukharaev, *The Model of Tatarstan under President Mintimer Shaimiev*, p. 97.

<sup>11</sup> See; Michael McFaul, "The Sovereignty Script: Red Book for Russian Revolutionaries," in Stephen Krasner (Ed.), *Problematic Sovereignty: Contested Rules and Political Possibilities*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 194-223.

<sup>12</sup> See; Marvin Mikesell & Alexander Murphy, "A Framework for Comparative Study of Minority-Group Aspirations", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 81, No. 4, 1991, pp. 581-604.

territorial challenge, the republic assumed the task of constructing what Murphy terms a *regime of territorial legitimation* (RTL), which is comprised of “the institutions, practices, and discourses that are designed to legitimate a particular conception of a state.”<sup>13</sup> In short, an RTL is a justification discourse that is implemented and employed by political elites who presume to speak for a distinct people. Central to RTLs is the construction and cultivation of state nationalism that attracts and consolidates the loyalty of a defined citizenry. This process was evident in the case of Tatarstan, which combined two discourses to justify the republic’s pretence to sovereignty.

The first justification was formed around an ethno-nationalist discourse that invoked historical claims to territory. Like several other cases in which countries justify territorial claims with references to glorified visions of “ancient” state formations, Tatar elites emphasized their ancestral links to the Middle Volga region, thereby concretizing primordial ties to territory. A preliminary draft of the 1990 sovereignty declaration provides illustration:

*The Tatars are the native population of Tataria. Their roots reach back to Ancient Bolgaria, and they had their own independent state from the 9<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries until the expansion of the Tsarist Empire.<sup>14</sup>*

A government-sponsored history book published a decade later shows the continuity of this discourse:

*The Tatar people have the right to consider the land along the banks of the Volga and Kama rivers their historical territory. They remember their ancient state, Volga Bolgaria, and the Kazan Khanate, a great state that was conquered by the Russians in 1552.<sup>15</sup>*

Thus, by invoking the Tatars’ “ancient” statehood that was destroyed by Ivan the Terrible, the republic’s leadership shaped a public discussion of a historically wronged ethno-cultural group. It was held that justice would be served only with the return of Tatar territory to the Tatar nation.

Underpinning this discourse were concerns for national culture. Linguistic russification policies had resulted in the near decimation of the Tatar language

<sup>13</sup> Alexander Murphy, “Territorial Ideology and Interstate Conflict”, in Colin Flint (Ed.), *The Geography of War and Peace: From Death Camps to Diplomats*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 281.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Elena Chernobrokina, *Demokraticheskaia Oppozitsiia Tatarstana: 10 Let Puti*, 2001, p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> Farid Mukhametshin & Liubov’ Ageeva (Ed.), *Respublika Tatarstan: Noveishaia Istoriia*, p. 16.

in public urban life. By the *perestroika* era, the titular tongue was no longer used in governmental environs, virtually untaught in the republic's cities, and trumped by Russian on city streets.<sup>16</sup> Citing the declining use of their native language, national leaders voiced fears of "ethnic disappearance" within the Russian polity.<sup>17</sup> They insisted that the Tatar nation could survive only with the protection of its own state and therefore urged the construction of a nation-state in the classical sense. As Amirkhanov, in an article titled "The Tatar National Ideology," claims,

*there is no other path to flourishing and progress than the realization ... of the re-establishment of a sovereign state. For only a sovereign state provides the condition and reliable guarantee for full-blooded national development.*<sup>18</sup>

Demographics, however, placed constraints on the exclusive employment of an ethno-nationalist discourse. First, less than one-third of all Tatars actually live within Tatarstan's borders (although about two-thirds of all Tatars live within the Middle Volga region, most notably in neighboring Bashkortostan). Therefore, presenting the republic as a discrete nation-state effectively would have excluded the majority of the titular nation. In response to this quasi-diasporic condition within the Russian Federation, the national leadership presented the republic as the Tatar *Vatan* – "motherland" – and urged the return of Tatars to their historic homeland. Also, semi-official voices encouraged increased numbers of ethnic Tatars through higher birth rates in an unofficial policy to tatarize the state demographically.<sup>19</sup> Tatarstan's large ethnic Russian population presented a second constraint on the deployment of a strict ethno-nationalist discourse. Overtly formulating sovereign statehood on narrow nationalist assumptions and implementing discriminatory policies likely would have resulted in local interethnic strife and perhaps would have brought Tatarstan into armed conflict with the federal center. Moreover, because the political leadership hoped to be recognized by the international sovereignty

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<sup>16</sup> See; Rozalinda Musina, "Ethnosocial Development and Identity of Contemporary Tatars", *Anthropology and Archeology of Eurasia*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 2004, pp. 77-93.

<sup>17</sup> M. Khasanov, "Tatarstan na Puti Suvereniteta: Dvizhenie ot Proshlogo k Budushemu", in Afanas'ev (Ed.), p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> Rashad Amirkhanov, "The Tatar National Ideology", *Anthropology and Archeology of Eurasia*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 1998, p. 44.

<sup>19</sup> See; Rashat Safin, "Tatar Ideyase", *Tatarstan*, No. 6, 1996, pp. 12-13; Rashat Safin, "Tatar Problemasi", *Tatarstan*, No. 1, 1996, p. 13.

regime, they understood that any deviation from human rights conventions could attract international censure.<sup>20</sup>

### The Pluralist Discourse: Economic Justifications

Faced with these demographic constraints, Tatarstan’s political leadership implemented a secondary justification discourse that accentuated the republic’s dedication to civic multiculturalism. For example, article one of the republic’s 1992 constitution stated, “The Republic of Tatarstan is a sovereign democratic state that expresses the will and interests of the entire multiethnic people of the republic.” And in his public speeches, Shaimiev invariably addressed the “multinational Tatarstani people” (*mnogonatsional’nyi tatarstanskii narod*), thereby propagating a vision of interethnic unity and aiming to foster a supranational identity.<sup>21</sup> The hoped-for result was increased loyalty to republic, i.e. state nationalism.

Instrumental to this discourse was cultivating a sense of place among Tatarstan’s Russians that stressed their closeness – a psychological similarity based on a centuries-long physical proximity – to the Tatar people. A government-sponsored publication, for example, asserts that the republic’s two largest ethnic groups, united by a common territory, shared a common “social culture” (*bytovaia kul’tura*):

*Tataria is our common home, our common care. For the Tatars, who have lived here from time immemorial, this land is their mother’s bosom where they formed as a nation. For the duration of seven centuries they had their own statehood, which they have now regained. ... For Russians, who also have lived here for centuries, Tataria has also become their native land. The Volga Russians [volzhane-russkie] have formed a way of life that is clearly different from that of other Russians.*<sup>22</sup>

Thus, by emphasizing the regional aspect of identity – by addressing the “Volga Russians” – Kazan attempted to divert a meaningful degree of loyalty from Moscow and in turn forge stronger emotional and psychological bonds with Tatarstan. Note, however, that the Tatar nation, which has inhabited the Middle Volga basin since “time immemorial,” maintained a more ancient claim

<sup>20</sup> See; Katherine Graney, “Projecting Sovereignty in Post-Soviet Russia: Tatarstan in the International Arena”, in Michael Keating & John McGarry (Ed.), *Minority Nationalism and the Changing International Order*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 264-94.

<sup>21</sup> See; Mintimer Shaimiev, *Tatarstan: Progress Cherez Stabil’nost’*, (Kazan: Idel Press, 2001).

<sup>22</sup> Rashit Akhmetov, “O Nashem Patriotizme”, in Farid Mukhametshin and Liubov Ageeva, *Respublika Tatarstan: Noveishaia Istoriiia*, 2000, p. 51.

to the territory and therefore retained its primacy. Hence, this secondary discourse was subservient to the ethno-nationalist one.

The republic's stated devotion to civic multiculturalism was reflected in a constitution that promised equal protection of all national cultures and embodied in a law that established both Tatar and Russian as official state languages. However, as has been noted, there existed "an in-built contradiction in the idea of Tatarstan as both a Tatar republic and a multiethnic one."<sup>23</sup> The question was posed, how can the state claim first and foremost to represent the Tatar nation (*tatarskaia natsiia*) and to defend and develop its culture, while at the same time ensuring the equal rights of the all the Tatarstani people (*tatarstanskii narod*)? This question revealed a certain tension between the *tatarskii* and *tatarstanskii* conceptions of statehood.

Economic enticements, however, served to smooth over this apparent contradiction. The political leadership reported that during the Soviet era 2.5 billion tons of oil were extracted from Tatarstan, which Moscow sold abroad for an estimated \$257 billion,<sup>24</sup> yet out of that sum only 2 percent of the wealth was returned to the republic.<sup>25</sup> Leading Tatar politicians, including Shaimiev, promised that an independent Tatarstan would retain its oil dollars, rebuild the republic's infrastructure, maintain maximum employment, and generally create a prosperous society. From this equation arrived the refrain, "We'll build our own Kuwait."<sup>26</sup> Thus, as Stepanov asserts, the "classical ... accusation that the centre is responsible for socioeconomic problems" proved a powerful incentive to persuade Tatarstan's Russians to join the Tatars in support of the republic's independence.<sup>27</sup> These material considerations have been cited as the deciding factor in the passage of the 1992 referendum in which more than 60 percent of the voting republic – a figure that indicates support from both ethnic groups – agreed that Tatarstan must be a sovereign state.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Howard Davis, Philip Hammond and Lilia Nizamova. "Media, Language Policy and Cultural Change in Tatarstan: Historic vs. Pragmatic Claims to Nationhood", *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2000, p. 219.

<sup>24</sup> Elena Chernobrovkina, *Demokraticheskaia Oppozitsiia Tatarstana: 10 Let Puti*, 2001, 2001, p. 23.

<sup>25</sup> Venera Yakupova, *100 Istoriï o Suverenitete*, (Kazan: Idel-Press, 2001), p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Farid Mukhametshin & Liubov' Ageeva (Ed.), *Respublika Tatarstan: Noveishaia Istoriia*, p. 228.

<sup>27</sup> Valery Stepanov, "Ethnic Tensions and Separatism in Russia", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2000, p. 323.

<sup>28</sup> See; Dmitry Gorenburg, "Nationalism for the Masses: Popular Support for Nationalism in Russia's Ethnic Republics", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 1, 2001, pp. 73-104.



Equally important to the early success of the Tatars' bid for independence was the fact that the political leadership stated that they did not equate sovereignty with separatism. The 1992 referendum promised that a sovereign Tatarstan would remain within the structure of the Russian Federation. Following the referendum's passage, Shaimiev underlined his commitment to remaining part of the country:

*We do not intend to split up with Russia. ... Let's remember the geopolitical place of Tatarstan and the economic ties with Russia. And because we have lived together for centuries, we are connected by spiritual bonds.<sup>29</sup>*

Addressing pragmatic concerns of geographic location and important questions of identity, such statements had a reassuring effect on the republic's Russians and Tatars, both of whom feared being cut off from their ethnic brethren beyond Tatarstani borders. The republic's place within the federal structure was solidified in the preamble of 1994 treaty. Although recognizing Tatarstan's statehood, it also guaranteed the "preservation of the territorial integrity and unity" of the Russian Federation.

While it appears that the Tatar elite was successful in weaving together disparate justification discourses to legitimate the republic's territorial claim, it is unclear exactly what was meant by "sovereignty" in this case. Because sovereignty denotes juridical independence within a separate state, how can an ostensibly sovereign entity be within the jurisdiction and boundaries of another sovereign state? There seemed to be a logical disjunction between Tatarstan's pretensions to sovereignty and its commitment to remaining a constituent part of the Russian Federation. This disconnect could be explained in one of two ways: 1) Either the republic's elites never really aspired to juridical independence; or 2) their assurances of maintaining the territorial integrity of Russia were disingenuous. Most likely, the articulation of the sovereignty script was a confused endeavor, subject to the exigencies of the moment and obfuscated by changing international norms. Indeed, such confusion is not limited to the Tatarstani case, but is endemic to the international sovereignty regime.<sup>30</sup> In the following sections, I investigate this confusion while further exploring Tatarstan's projection of sovereignty.

### **Projecting Sovereignty: Fulfilling Basic Criteria**

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<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Farid Mukhametshin & Liubov' Ageeva (Ed.), *Respublika Tatarstan: Noveishaia Istorii*, p. 337.

<sup>30</sup> See; John Hoffman, *Sovereignty*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

A growing body of literature on sovereignty generally agrees that arriving at a single, all-encompassing definition of the term is a quixotic venture.<sup>31</sup> Rather than attempting to present a comprehensive definition, a more productive endeavor would be to enumerate the basic characteristics of a sovereign state. The Montevideo Convention of 1933 set down the classic definition of a sovereign state. To qualify for sovereign statehood, according to the decree, “an entity must have (1) a permanent population; (2) a defined territory; (3) a government; and (4) the capacity to enter into relations with other states.”<sup>32</sup> The first criterion is important because it establishes that a sovereign state represents a defined people; in the modern sense, a people is understood as a *nation*. The second recognizes the spatially discrete aspect of sovereignty. The third is the political-organizational. The fourth is crucial because it establishes the principle of *recognition*; thus, for a state to be a sovereign actor, it must be acknowledged as such by other sovereign states, i.e. it must be able to “play the international game.”

The Tatars clearly calibrated their sovereignty campaign to meet these criteria. Items two and three were fulfilled prior to the fall of Russia’s communist regime. By the 1990s, Tatarstan had maintained stable borders within the USSR for seven decades, and as a result of Soviet “ethnofederalism” the Tatar Republic already had in place its own quasi-governmental structure. It appeared that item four was fulfilled with the signing of the 1994 treaty in which Moscow recognized Tatarstan as a “state” and acknowledged the republic’s right to enter relations with foreign states and “conduct foreign economic activity independently.” This freedom was written into Tatarstan’s constitution, which stated that the republic had the right to “independently participate in international and foreign economic relations.” However, Moscow’s recognition was not unequivocal because the treaty contained the caveat that Tatarstan remained “united” with the Russian Federation. This pact nonetheless provided a semblance of legality that permitted Tatarstan to establish contacts with international organizations such as the UN, UNESCO,

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<sup>31</sup> See; Thomas Biersteker & Cynthia Weber (Ed.), *State Sovereignty as Social Construct*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); John Agnew, “Sovereignty Regimes: Territoriality and State Authority in Contemporary World Politics”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 95, No. 2, 2005, pp. 437-61.

<sup>32</sup> Dov Lynch, “Separatist States and Post-Soviet Conflicts”, *International Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 4, 2002, p. 835.

and the League of Arab States.<sup>33</sup> The republic also secured direct economic ties with states in North America, Europe, and the Middle East. Perhaps most important were links with Turkey, which sent advisors to Kazan to assist Tatarstan in political, economic, and cultural spheres.

While the latter three criteria set forth in the Montevideo Convention apparently were met by the mid-1990s, the first item went unmet – the Tatar elite was unable to meld a nation-state, an ideal that, along with sovereignty, underpins the modern state system.<sup>34</sup> In spite of efforts to create favorable conditions for the nationalization of Tatarstan, there proceeded only a small and insignificant demographic tatarization of the republic. There was neither a positive (i.e. a massive influx of Tatars) nor a negative (i.e. a significant out-migration of non-Tatars) change in the ethnic makeup of Tatarstan after its declaration of independence. Census counts show that the Tatars' share of the population increased from 49 percent in 1989 to 53 percent in 2002, while the Russians' share dropped from 43 to 40 percent – a 7 percent differential change. In hard figures, the number of Tatars in the republic increased by 235,000 to a total of approximately 2 million, while the number of Russians shrank by 84,000 to about 1.5 million.<sup>35</sup> Although the number of Tatars surpassed the psychologically important 50-percent mark, these are modest figures at best, indicating neither a mass return of Tatars to their ancestral land nor a mass exodus of Russians from Tatarstan, as happened in Chechnya over the same period.

The Tatar gains are even more unspectacular when it is realized that their higher numbers were derived almost exclusively from an influx of refugees from former Soviet republics – mostly from Central Asia – not from other regions within Russia. Tatars living in the Soviet successor states, much like the Russians dwelling in those lands, were targets of nativization policies that gave preferential treatment to the titular peoples in the newly independent countries. Tatars and Russians alike were viewed by the titular populations as colonizers who did Moscow's bidding. The Tatars, whose ancestors settled in

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<sup>33</sup> See John Slocum, "A Sovereign State within Russia? The External Relations of the Republic of Tatarstan", *Global Society*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1999, pp. 49-75.

<sup>34</sup> See Alexander Murphy, "The Sovereign State System as a Political-Territorial Ideal: Historical and Contemporary Considerations", In Biersteker and Weber, *State Sovereignty as Social Construct*, 1996, pp. 80-120.

<sup>35</sup> Olga Kondreva, "Respublika v Razreze: V Triokh Gorodakh Tatarstana Russkie i Tatary Raspredelilis' Fifti-Fifti", *Rossiiskiiia Gazeta*, 24 November 2004, ([www.rg.ru/2004/11/24/perepis.html](http://www.rg.ru/2004/11/24/perepis.html)).

Central Asia in the eighteenth century as economic migrants sponsored by Catherine the Great, were associated with and furthermore identified with the Russian state. But most of these Tatars had never lived in Russia proper, and those who “returned” to Tatarstan from the near abroad resettled in a land they knew only as their parents’ or grandparents’ historic homeland.

What is interesting, though, is that only one in four Tatars who moved from the Soviet successor states to Russia settled in Tatarstan.<sup>36</sup> The overwhelming majority of Tatars followed the patterns of Russian refugees and settled throughout the federation. On the other hand, the internal Tatar diaspora in Russia itself showed no inclination to move to their namesake republic either; they apparently were comfortable as Russian citizens dispersed throughout the federation. The modest Tatarization of Tatarstan that took place in the 1990s, arrived at mainly by an influx of refugees, was most likely a one-time phenomenon. Because both Tatars and Russians post similarly negative birth rates, the ethnic distribution of Tatarstan likely will remain static for the foreseeable future, thereby prohibiting further demographic nationalization of the republic.

#### **Aspects of Sovereignty: External and Internal Considerations**

While the Tatars’ diasporic condition within Russia weakened their claims to statehood, pragmatic questions of juridical authority presented an even stronger constraint. Agnew summarizes the problem Tatarstan faced: “To permit more than one sovereign to function within one territory would create *imperium in imperio*, a dispute over jurisdiction.”<sup>37</sup> A typology developed by Krasner helps to elucidate this problem. Krasner identifies four different aspects of sovereign statehood: international legal sovereignty, Westphalian sovereignty,<sup>38</sup> interdependence sovereignty, and domestic sovereignty. He explains these approaches to the concept:

*International legal sovereignty refers to the practices associated with mutual recognition, usually between territorial entities that have formal juridical independence. Westphalian sovereignty refers to political organization based on the exclusion of external actors from authority structures with a given territory.*

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<sup>36</sup> Rozalinda Musina, “Ethnosocial Development and Identity of Contemporary Tatars”, 2004, p. 78.

<sup>37</sup> John Agnew, “The Territorial Trap”, in John Agnew & Stuart Corbridge (Ed.), *Mastering Space: Hegemony, Territory, and International Political Economy*, (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 87.

<sup>38</sup> It is commonly acknowledged that the Peace of Westphalia, which put an end the Thirty Years’ War in 1648, formalized the principle of noninterference in a state’s internal affairs and thereby marked the beginning of the modern sovereign state system. This principle of noninterference was embodied in the phrase *cuius regio, eius religio* – “he who rules decides the religion” – that was formulated nearly a century earlier at the 1555 Treaty of Augsburg that ended the Hundred Years’ War.

*Domestic sovereignty refers to the formal organization of political authority within the state and the ability of public authorities to exercise effective control of their own polity. Finally, interdependence sovereignty refers to the ability of public authorities to regulate the flow of information, ideas, goods, people, pollutants, or capital across the borders of their state.*<sup>39</sup>

Of these four aspects, Krasner focuses on Westphalian sovereignty and international legal sovereignty, thereby acknowledging their primacy in any discussion of independent statehood. These two aspects correspond to common delineations of *internal sovereignty* and *external sovereignty*. Internal sovereignty, as Lynch writes, "refers to the supreme authority of a body within a given territory."<sup>40</sup> Thus, internal sovereignty is understood as "authority" or "supremacy" – the authority to create and enact laws, the supremacy to monopolize organized violence, etc. External sovereignty, as James asserts, is a condition of "being constitutionally apart, of not being contained, however loosely, within a wider constitutional scheme."<sup>41</sup> In this understanding, sovereignty is equated with "independence."

When analyzing the internal and external aspects of sovereignty, it is important to acknowledge that there exists both *de jure* and *de facto* sovereignty.<sup>42</sup> A state may have its Westphalian sovereignty *de jure* recognized within the international system, but be so penetrated by another actor that it is *de facto* dependent. For instance, Ukraine and Belarus during the Cold War era occupied seats in the United Nations, i.e. they were recognized as *de jure* sovereign states. Yet it was never doubted that these two entities were anything but vassals of Moscow and therefore never possessed *de facto* sovereignty. In the post-Cold War era, a proliferation of international treaties has prompted many to question the *de facto* sovereignty of virtually any state. These pacts, it is reasoned, represent palpable outside constraints on a state's independence. What is important, however, is that a state is not coerced into entering these agreements, but rather does so willingly. If a state is forced into a constraining pact, it can be said that the state's *de facto* sovereignty has been violated. But if a state enters a treaty without coercion, its *de facto* sovereignty

<sup>39</sup> Stephen Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> Dov Lynch, "Separatist States and Post-Soviet Conflicts", 2002, p. 835.

<sup>41</sup> Alan James, "Sovereignty: Ground Rule or Gibberish?", *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 10, 1984, p. 11.

<sup>42</sup> See Alexander Murphy, "The Sovereign State System as a Political-Territorial Ideal: Historical and Contemporary Considerations", 1996.

has not been transgressed. In addition to treaties, a second force gaining power at the international scale presents an even stronger challenge to claims of de facto sovereignty – globalization. States and nations today are linked by ever-higher capital flows, potentially threatening ecological problems do not recognize territorial demarcations, and concerns for human rights transcend frontiers.<sup>43</sup> In a world in which capital, pollution, and violence ignore established state borders, it is questioned, how can any state persist in its pretensions to sovereignty?

No state, even the most powerful, can perfectly fulfill the ideal of internal supremacy and external independence. Rather than taking a Manichean view of sovereignty, however, it would be more productive to look at the concept as a question of degree. All states possess differing degrees of the various components of sovereignty, and to be recognized as a legitimate actor in the modern state system an entity must pass over an ambiguous threshold of external and internal sovereignty. In the case of Tatarstan, it is clear that the republic, although it definitely attained elements of de jure and de facto sovereignty, never passed over this ambiguous threshold. In spite of the republic's efforts to project itself as an independent political actor and build its case for internal supremacy and external independence, Tatarstan was never constitutionally separate from the Russian Federation; the two were always "united" or at least "associated." All citizens of Tatarstan possessed Russian passports, and Tatarstan was never able to regulate effectively its borders, i.e. seal itself off from Russia, as other international actors do. And, although foreign entities were willing to enter direct agreements with Tatarstan, no important actor – most notably the UN – recognized the republic as separate from Russia.<sup>44</sup> In fact, it was Tatarstan's status as part of the Russian Federation that made it attractive for international political entities, such as the EU, which hoped that ties with Tatarstan would facilitate democratization in Russia as a whole, and foreign investors, who sought access to Russia's vast, developing market.

In the final analysis, as Treisman asserts, the federal center acceded to the republic's status as a state only in a moment of extreme weakness and did so only as a momentary tactic to maintain Russia's territorial integrity. It has been

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<sup>43</sup> See, John Agnew, "Sovereignty Regimes: Territoriality and State Authority in Contemporary World Politics", 2005.

<sup>44</sup> See John Slocum, "A Sovereign State within Russia? The External Relations of the Republic of Tatarstan", 1999.

said that the federal center was coerced into signing the 1994 treaty with Kazan, which threatened the Moscow Kremlin with separatism.<sup>45</sup> This coercion represented a transgression of Russia's sovereignty. Once Moscow regained its relative strength, the strategic ambiguity that earlier helped to avert conflict permitted the federal center to reassert its supremacy and thereby regain its de facto sovereignty. The ferocity with which Moscow has fought to retain Chechnya as part of the Russian state serves as a reminder of just how far the federal center will go to maintain the country's territorial integrity. Tatarstan, unlike Chechnya, has been an integral part of Russia's interior for centuries. Therefore, it is doubtful that either Moscow or Kazan ever truly expected Tatarstan to separate from the country, as is implied by sovereign statehood. But, as seen in the next section, not only Moscow was set against the Tatars' ultimate attainment of sovereignty – shifting international attitudes toward sub-state sovereignty claims also worked against the republic's aspirations.

#### **Between Realism and Recognition: Tatarstan and the State System**

The modern state system seemingly was settled at the close of World War I, when Europe's moribund empires collapsed and on their ashes were established a number of nation-states, each with its own claim to sovereignty. It was at this point that the international system was closed, since the world – at least the West – was broken down into a series of discrete political units.<sup>46</sup> Two concepts provided a foundation for this political order: sovereignty, a realist notion that can be traced back to the Westphalian order established in 1648, and the nation-state, a romantic ideal that took root at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>47</sup> These concepts were written into the charter of the UN, which expressed both a systemic devotion to the territorial integrity of its member states and a commitment to national self-determination. These forces clearly were at odds with one another and, because the state borders drawn by the victorious powers did not correspond to the national ones, contributed to

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<sup>45</sup> See; Peter Söderlund, "The Significance of Structural Power Resources in the Russian Bilateral Treaty Process 1994-1998", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 36, 1998, pp. 311-324.

<sup>46</sup> See; Peter Taylor, "The State as Container: Territoriality in the Modern World-System", *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 1994, pp. 151-162; Peter Taylor, "Beyond Containers: Internationality, Interstateness, Interterritoriality", *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1995, pp. 1-15.

<sup>47</sup> See; Alexander Murphy, "National Claims to Territory in the Modern State System: Geographical Considerations", *Geopolitics*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2002, pp. 193-214.

the next European conflagration. At the conclusion of World War II, the international order, shaken to its very core by the violence that occurred at an unprecedented scale, recommitted itself to maintaining the status quo, thus firmly siding with the realist vision of defending states' territorial integrity over Wilsonian ideals.

Aside from the de-colonization of Africa and Asia in the 1950s and '60s, the world's political map remained relatively static until the final decade of the twentieth century. This decades-long commitment to systemic sovereignty contributed to what Gaddis tabs the "long peace" that followed the Second World War.<sup>48</sup> With the unexpected collapse of communist regimes in the century's waning years, however, the romance of national self-determination regained currency in the world system as, first, East European satellite states asserted their independence from Moscow and then all fifteen Soviet Union republics declared their sovereignty. It was amid this "parade of sovereignties"—a period when it appeared the world system was more amenable to accommodating sub-state nationalism—that Tatarstan's claim to statehood was posted. But the same forces that reunited Germany, returned independence to the Baltic countries, and peacefully split up Czechoslovakia also unleashed internecine conflict in Bosnia, Chechnya, and Kosovo.

Facing the chaos and concomitant bloodshed of literally hundreds of potential sub-state sovereignty claims,<sup>49</sup> the international community by the end of the 1990s grew wary of aspirations to national self-determination and decisively reasserted its commitment to preserving the status quo. Thus, although ethnic Albanians constitute more than 90 percent of Kosovo's total population, the UN is hesitant to recognize its separation from Serbia. And although the violence in Chechnya has been characterized as genocidal,<sup>50</sup> powerful international actors such as the European Council are hesitant to take

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<sup>48</sup> John Gaddis, *The Long Peace*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>49</sup> See; Richard Falk, *Explorations at the Edge of Time*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); James Minahan, *Nations without States: A Historical Dictionary of Contemporary National Movements*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996). Falk (p. 202) writes that more than 800 ethnic groups worldwide could reasonably post claims to sovereignty. Considering that 200-odd states currently are recognized by the United Nations, the demands of even a fraction of those groups could throw the international system into chaos. Minahan, however, paints an even direr scenario: "Estimates of stateless nations in the world run as high as 9,000" (p. xvi).

<sup>50</sup> See; Human Rights Watch, *Swept under: Torture, Forced Disappearances, and Extrajudicial Killings during Sweep Operations in Chechnya*, (New York: Human Rights, 2002).



a stance in favor of the republic's independence and instead dedicate themselves to preserving Russia's territorial integrity. The devotion to systemic stability was exemplified by Colin Powell in 2005, then US Secretary of State, who addressed Russia's decade-long civil war:

*Our position is clear: This tragic conflict can be ended only through a political solution that respects both the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation and the legitimate aspirations of the Chechen people.*<sup>51</sup>

Powell, in urging a "political solution" to the quagmire in Chechnya, took a stance against the brutality carried out by Moscow. Nonetheless, it is obvious that concerns for Russia's sovereignty overrode cares for the Chechen people – state stability superseded national aspirations. It is clear that an international state system unwilling to recognize unequivocally the sovereignty of Kosovar Albanians or the independence of a nation facing annihilation and whose republic rests at the very southern edge of Russia by the close of the twentieth century was unambiguously disposed against the Tatars' claims.

#### **Territorial Autonomy as Compromise**

Important analyses of post-Soviet Tatarstan by Rorlich and Graney fail to problematize the republic's sovereignty claim and therefore, perhaps unwittingly, collude in bolstering the Tatars' regime of territorial legitimacy.<sup>52</sup> In the very title of her article, Rorlich addresses the "Tatars of *sovereign Tatarstan*" (my italics) and in doing so reifies the republic's pretensions to independent statehood. Graney, on the other hand, contends that the outcome of the republic's "sovereignty project is a situation of sovereignty-sharing between Tatarstan and Russia."<sup>53</sup> In promulgating this vision of "sovereignty-sharing," Graney ignores the norms of the international sovereignty regime, which dictate that ultimate territorial authority must reside in a single entity – in the end, sovereignty cannot be split. Rorlich's and Graney's mischaracterizations of sovereignty norms are potentially dangerous, in that emboldening the Tatars' pretensions to independent statehood could carry with it the unintended consequence of bringing the republic into conflict with the

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Matthew Brzezinski, "Surrealpolitik: How a Chechen Terror Suspect Wound up Living on Taxpayers' Dollars near the National Zoo", *Washington Post*, 20 March 2005.

<sup>52</sup> See; Azade-Ayse Rorlich, "History, Collective Memory and Identity: The Tatars of Sovereign Tatarstan", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 4, 1999, pp. 379-396.

<sup>53</sup> Katherine Graney, "Projecting Sovereignty in Post-Soviet Russia: Tatarstan in the International Arena" 2001, p. 268.

federal center. As illustrated above, due to demographic issues at the sub-state scale, pragmatic juridical concerns at the state scale, and shifting attitudes at the international scale, Tatarstan was never sovereign, despite claims to the otherwise. I make this statement not intending to denigrate the Tatars' aspirations or achievements, but do so in order to bring a much-needed conceptual clarity to this important discussion.

Rather than speaking of sovereignty, it would be more accurate and more productive in this case to speak of territorial autonomy. An autonomous unit has been defined as "a self-governing intra-state region."<sup>54</sup> In an autonomous arrangement, it is understood that "parts of the state's territory are authorized to govern themselves in certain matters by enacting laws and statutes, but without constituting a state of their own."<sup>55</sup> Unlike sovereignty, which, because it involves the principle of recognition, is ultimately negotiated at the international scale, autonomy can be worked out between central and regional actors. Thus, territorial autonomy devolves varying degrees of governance from the center to regions, but avoids the question of who possesses ultimate juridical authority; a quasi-state is permitted to exist within a host state. As Cornell writes, autonomy is "one of the few conceivable compromise solutions in conflicts over administrative control of a specific territory" and further asserts that "autonomy represents a compromise on the issue of state sovereignty itself."<sup>56</sup> In making such a compromise, "autonomy has proved to be an effective antidote for ethnopolitical wars of secession."<sup>57</sup> For example, the Basques in Spain, the Québécois in Canada, the Miskitos in Nicaragua, and the Nagas in India all have secured autonomous arrangements that have muted separatist compulsions and consequently reduced the potential for ethnic-based violence.

Territorial autonomy, due to its inherent flexibility, is expected to gain popularity worldwide. Cornell holds that autonomy provides a needed middle ground between the realist protection of the status quo and the romantic recognition of national self-determination:

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<sup>54</sup> Kjell-Åke Nordquist, "Autonomy as a Conflict-Solving Mechanism: An Overview", In Markku Suksi (Ed.), *Autonomy: Applications and Implications*, (The Hague: Kluwer, 1998), p. 59.

<sup>55</sup> Hans-Joachim Heintze, "On the Legal Understanding of Autonomy", in Suksi, 1998, p. 7.

<sup>56</sup> Svante Cornell, "Autonomy as a Source of Conflict: Caucasian Conflicts in Theoretical Perspective", *World Politics*, Vol. 54, 2002, p. 247.

<sup>57</sup> Ted Gurr, "Peoples against States: Ethnopolitical Conflict and the Changing World System", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 38, 1994, p. 366.

*Given the multitude of ethnic groups in the world, advocates of autonomy argue that group rights need to be recognized below the state level in order to avoid the proliferation of hundreds of additional states. The traditional structure of the international system is already threatened by the relative reduction of the role of states in international affairs by the increasing importance of substate entities such as ethnic, national, or religious groups, as well as by suprastate entities such as regional and international organizations. Autonomy is basically the only possible compromise to balance the conflicting territorial interests of the group and the state.*<sup>58</sup>

Thus, autonomy provides a mechanism that addresses and overcomes potentially destabilizing forces at the sub-state and international scales and thereby helps stabilize the world state system.

One major drawback of territorial autonomy, though, is that it generally assumes legal preference for the region's titular group, since autonomous arrangements normally are established in response to a specific ethnic group's territorial demands. Because sub-state territories rarely are homogeneously populated by a titular cultural group, the establishment of an ethnic autonomy brings up obvious questions of equal rights for all of the region's citizens. This is especially pertinent in the Russian context, where ethnic autonomies are generally populated by large numbers of ethnic Russians and other non-titular peoples. Furthermore, the institutionalization of cultural differences tends to accentuate, perpetuate, and exacerbate cleavages that otherwise may subside or eventually disappear in a unitary state. Thus, such arrangements may lead to a state made up of ethno-territorial autonomies that, as Steiner says, resembles "more a museum of social and cultural antiquities than any human rights ideal."<sup>59</sup> For followers of the Soviet and post-Soviet nationalities policies, with the attendant officialization of ethnic culture, Steiner's observation strikes a familiar chord. But, as Tatar national leaders are apt to remind, Russia's endemic cultural diversity that stretches over an immense landmass may fate the country to remain a patchwork of ethnic autonomies if it hopes to remain a unified state; asymmetrical federalism, it is argued in Kazan, is the only political structure that can accommodate Russia's national diversity.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Svante Cornell, "Autonomy as a Source of Conflict: Caucasian Conflicts in Theoretical Perspective" 2002, p. 250.

<sup>59</sup> Henry Steiner, "Ideals and Counter-Ideals in the Struggle over Autonomy Regimes for Minorities", *Notre Dame Law Review*, Vol. 66, 1991, p. 1550.

<sup>60</sup> See; Rustam Arifdzhanov, "Ob'edinennaia Rossiia", *Natsional'*, 1 April 2004, p. 2.

Indeed, from the very beginning, the Tatar political leadership probably strove for territorial autonomy within an accommodating federal structure instead of all-out sovereignty, but it was hampered by a problem of categories. When a space was first opened for Tatarstan to reassert its national self-determination, the republic already possessed a *de jure* autonomous status within an ostensible federal Soviet structure; this autonomy proved to be a legal phantom as Moscow *de facto* managed a unitary state. Thus, aiming to assume a meaningful degree of control over the territory designated as their historic homeland, the Tatars were compelled to pursue the next category in the spectrum of independence, i.e. sovereignty. Once this concept was introduced into the discourse and subsequently written into the republic's constitution, it assumed a symbolic power connected with the actual freedom from the center that Tatarstan enjoyed throughout the 1990s. Although claiming sovereignty, which would have implied full independence from Russia, the Tatars sought – and attained – authentic autonomy within the Russian federal structure that they should have possessed in the Soviet structure. And autonomy gave the republic freedom to direct itself largely independently in its internal political, economic, and cultural spheres. This latter sphere is analyzed in the final substantive section of this article.

### **The Tatar National Revival: Asserting Territorial Autonomy**

Treisman concedes that sovereignty campaigns such as that of Tatarstan, with their associated separatist overtones, may in fact have been “part of a strategy sincerely aimed at acquiring increased independence” within the Russian Federation.<sup>61</sup> However, he goes on to argue that Russia's various independence drives, including that of the Tatars', in fact were not carried out in the name of primordialist concerns for national culture, but rather were “calculated gambles to elicit economic or political concessions from the center.”<sup>62</sup> This assertion reflects a heavy strain of thought contending that claims of national distinctness more often are smokescreens for local elites to grab political power or fatten their bank accounts – instrumentalism and rational choice, it is argued, outweigh concerns for culture in the Eurasian heartland. If this were true in the case of Tatarstan, then it stands to reason that political elites would have abandoned or severely rolled back their promises of

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<sup>61</sup> Daniel Treisman, “Russia's ‘Ethnic Revival’: The Separatist Activism of Regional Leaders in a Postcommunist Order”, 1997, p. 221.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* p. 223.

protecting and developing Tatar national culture after the republic attained its autonomy. Evidence suggests otherwise.

By most accounts, the Tatars asserted their autonomy and enjoyed a "national revival" in the 1990s,<sup>63</sup> most vividly symbolized by the reconstruction of the Qul Sharif Mosque within the confines of the Kazan Kremlin. According to a presidential edict of 1995, this historically important mosque was to be rebuilt as a replica of the one razed by Ivan the Terrible's troops as they conquered Kazan in 1552. Re-erecting this national symbol of pre-colonial Kazan, according to a sign that stood within the Kazan Kremlin in 2004, restores the "centuries-long hope and dream of the entire Tatar people" (my photo archive). In this manner, the Tatars would restore their connection to national history as they reassert their claim to the highly symbolic territory within the Kazan Kremlin. Linking the modern Republic of Tatarstan back to an idealized Kazan Khanate, the physical resurrection of Qul Sharif empowers the Tatar nation and contributes to its members overcoming what Rorlich calls the "colonial/dominated quality of Tatar identity."<sup>64</sup> The reconstruction of Qul Sharif is a physical representation of the rebuilding of the Tatar nation, and it is emphasized that neither can be rebuilt without state support.

The reconstruction of the Qul Sharif Mosque in part was a response to the ceremony surrounding the resurrection of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow. Like the mighty mosque within the Kazan Kremlin, the cathedral in Moscow, demolished by the Bolsheviks in 1931, was ordered to be rebuilt as a symbol of national rebirth. Standing 103 meters tall and capped in gold, the Cathedral of Christ the Savior was opened in September 1997 after only one year of construction to coincide with the 850-year anniversary of the founding of Moscow. Its realization, in the words of one observer, "is a powerful symbol of the presumed break with the Soviet past and the beginning of yet another epoch for Russian society."<sup>65</sup> Forest and Johnson state that the cathedral provides "an elite representation of the imagined community of the nation."<sup>66</sup>

<sup>63</sup> M. "Tatarstan na Puti Suvereniteta: Dvizhenie ot Proshlogo k Budushemu", 2000.

<sup>64</sup> Azade-Ayse Rorlich, "History, Collective Memory and Identity: The Tatars of Sovereign Tatarstan" 1999, p. 380.

<sup>65</sup> Dmitri Sidorov, "National Monumentalization and the Politics of Scale: The Resurrections of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 90, No. 3, 2000, p. 548.

<sup>66</sup> Benjamin Forest & Juliet Johnson, "Unraveling the Threads of History: Soviet-Era Monuments and Post-Soviet National Identity in Moscow", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 92, No. 3, 2002, p. 526.

Hence, it was clear to Kazan that Moscow, in devoting so much symbolic capital to the reconstruction of an orthodox cathedral, imagined Russian society as coterminous with the ethnic Russian nation; Muslims and other non-orthodox peoples somehow were not included in this nation-(re)building.

The pomp in Moscow confirmed the conviction expressed in the Tatar leadership's primary justification discourse that only a Tatar state could safeguard the Tatar nation. But in ordering the resurrection of the Qul Sharif Mosque, Shaimiev, keeping in mind the symbolism in Moscow, was careful not to snub Tatarstan's Russians. He simultaneously ordered the refurbishment of the Cathedral of the Annunciation within the Kazan Kremlin, which had fallen into a terrible state of disrepair under Soviet power. Exhibiting sensitivity toward the very symbol of his people's lost statehood, Shaimiev emphasized that the Tatar national revival, as embodied by the mosque's rebirth, was not directed against the Russians. In this manner, the republic's ethnic and civic justifications appeared harmonious.

The Qul Sharif Mosque was opened weeks before Tatarstanis celebrated Kazan's 1000-year anniversary on August 30, 2005. This date intentionally coincided with the 15-year anniversary of the republic's declaration of sovereignty.<sup>67</sup> It is an impressive, dominating structure, constructed out of white stone and topped in aqua, that outstrips the Cathedral of the Annunciation in all dimensions, thereby underlining the Tatars' primary place in their historic homeland and reinforcing the ethno-nationalist, history-based justification discourse. But the Qul Sharif Mosque is only the most strikingly visual symbol of the Tatar national revival that took place in the 1990s. In that period, more than 1,000 mosques opened their doors to Tatarstan's Islamic faithful – up from only 18 in the late *perestroika* era.<sup>68</sup> Also, in an effort to develop a cadre of scholars to serve in the multitude of newly opened mosques, a state-funded Islamic university was founded in the center of Kazan. However striking the rebirth of Tatar spirituality, the revival of the Tatar tongue was more impressive. The 1992 constitution established both Tatar and Russian as official state languages, requiring the government to conduct its business and publish all laws in both tongues. Furthermore, the law required Tatarstan's president to know both state languages, which, as few Russians

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<sup>67</sup> The refurbished Cathedral of the Annunciation re-opened its doors in the summer of 2005 as well.

<sup>68</sup> Amy Waldman, "Shackles off, Russia's Muslims are still Chafing", *The New York Times*, 9 November 2001, p. A8.

speaking Tatar,<sup>69</sup> effectively served to bar ethnic Russians from the republic's highest office. This law also contributed to a major tatarization of the republic's leadership. Whereas there existed relative parity in Tatarstan's elite structures in the Soviet era, by the mid-1990s it was estimated that the ratio had shifted to four-to-one in favor of Tatars.

In addition to tatarizing administrative structures, the government also gave financial support to print and broadcast media in the Tatar language, and state employees who were proficient in Tatar were given a 15 percent salary increase.<sup>70</sup> The language law also changed the face of city streets, as all public signage was required to be printed in both Tatar and Russian, a policy that was official but only half-heartedly implemented under Soviet authority. Thus, the government's stated goal of functional bilingualism appeared to correspond to its vision of civic *tatarstanskii* statehood – safeguarding the equality of Tatar and Russian peoples. But because the titular culture had been suppressed in favor of the dominant Russian culture during seven decades of Soviet power – indeed, for more than four centuries under the tsarist regime – ensuring parity between the two ethnic groups entailed favoritism of the Tatar nation.

More expansive than developments in the government and media were changes in Tatarstan's education system. All students, regardless of nationality, were required to study Tatar for an average of 3.5 hours per week.<sup>71</sup> Because a major gulf in knowledge of the Tatar language separated students along ethnic lines, an unofficial segregation took shape in public schools. This separation was widened by the opening of several Tatar-language schools, which emphasized national culture and were attended almost exclusively by ethnic Tatars, and private Tatar-Turkish schools that were founded with the assistance of Istanbul. This tatarization of public education was not limited to primary and secondary education, but reached the post-secondary level with the establishment of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan (ANRT) separate from the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAN).

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<sup>69</sup> In 1989, only 1 percent of the republic's Russian population reported proficiency in the Tatar language, while 96.6 percent of Tatars are fluent in their native tongue; 77 percent of ethnic Tatars reported proficiency in Russian; see Musina 2004.

<sup>70</sup> See Davis et al., 2000.

<sup>71</sup> See; Katherine Graney, "Education Reform in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan: Sovereignty Projects in Post-Soviet Russia", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 51 No. 4, 1999, pp. 611-632.

A key aspect of the Tatar national revival was the decision taken by the Kazan government in 1997 gradually to change the script used for the Tatar language from the Cyrillic alphabet to a Latin-based script. This decision appeared somewhat incongruent with the history-based justifications, since the Tatar language was printed in a Latin alphabet for little more than a decade, until Stalin in 1939 forced the introduction of the Cyrillic. It has been argued that if the Tatars truly seek a cultural revival, they should revert to an Arabic script, which provided a base for the Tatar language for nearly a millennium until Kazan-based intellectuals introduced a latinized one in 1927. However, Tatars counter that neither the Arabic nor the Cyrillic accurately replicates the sounds of their language; only a Latin-based script can be phonetically faithful to their language.<sup>72</sup> Plus, the Latin alphabet has the added attraction of bringing them closer to Western technological norms and to other Turkic peoples who employ the Latin script. While these points can be debated, it is clear that a primary motivating factor for the introduction of a Latin-based script was to further differentiate Tatars from Russians and thereby slow or even reverse their centuries-long assimilation.

Contrary to the cynical view, it is clear that Tatarstan's leadership committed itself to reviving their national culture, a process that involved a skillful balancing act. As Gorenburg writes, Tatar 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."<sup>73</sup>*

Indeed, it is reported that in the face of the Tatar national revival, the republic's ethnic Russians expressed little or no dissatisfaction as they were confronted by Islam's increased profile and the linguistic tatarization of the public sphere.<sup>74</sup> For its part, Moscow in the Yeltsin era raised no objections to the republic's national renaissance, including Kazan's plans to re-latinize the Tatar alphabet. But this apparent indifference was observed at a time when the federal center was very weak.

### **Concluding Remarks**

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<sup>72</sup> See; Tufan Minnullin (Ed.), *Tatarskii Put': Prava Naroda i Politkorrecktnost'*, (Kazan: Magarif, 2003).

<sup>73</sup> Dmitry Gorenburg, "Regional Separatism in Russia: Ethnic Mobilisation or Power Grab?", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 2, 1999, p. 270.

<sup>74</sup> See Graney, 1999.



Since the ascendancy of Vladimir Putin to the Kremlin in 2000, Moscow seems to have consolidated the Russian Federation and, in the process, disabused Tatarstan of any pretensions to sovereignty.<sup>75</sup> Following the creation of seven federal *okrugs* intended to oversee the harmonization of federal and regional law, a series of administrative-constitutional changes were forced upon the republic. The bilateral treaty hailed by Shaimiev as the "ideology" of Tatarstan in essence was rendered invalid, as any allusions to sovereignty were erased from the republic's constitution. However, independence-minded Tatar nationals, mute throughout Putin's second term, today take inspiration from Moscow's recognition of Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's sovereign statehood and once again raise their voices. As Rashit Akhmetov, editor of a Kazan-based oppositional newspaper, writes, "For the first time Russia has recognized former autonomous regions as independent. Tatar society has been moved to action. A certain psychological barrier has been overcome."<sup>76</sup>

It is unclear how Moscow might react to renewed nationalist calls for sovereignty in Tatarstan. A likely scenario is that the federal center will ignore these voices, as they indeed are marginal, and Tatarstan will retain an ambiguous degree of territorial autonomy. A second scenario, one beholding unknown consequences, is that the Kremlin will use the specter of a renewed separatist movement to strip the federation's ethnic regions of their status as republics, which would entail the removal of any trace of territorial autonomy. However this case might unfold, the recognition of separatist states in Georgia has unleashed a second wave of debates over sovereignty and territorial autonomy in the post-Soviet space. This situation points to the need to reexamine critically the trajectory of Tatarstan's campaign for sovereignty in the 1990s. A clearer understanding of the republic's original justification discourses, its projection of sovereignty, and the concrete outcomes should inform current debates.

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<sup>75</sup> See Cameron Ross, "Putin's Federal Reforms and the Consolidation of Federalism in Russia: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back!", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 36, 2003, pp. 29-47.

<sup>76</sup> Rashit Akhmetov, "Mechta", *Zvezda Povolzh'ia*, No. 37, 25 September – 1 October 2008, p. 1.

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