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The Presence of Absence: Ethnicity Policy in Russia [1]
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Even though nationalism as an analytical category and political practice has been widely condemned in recent decades, the nation-state remains the predominant form of political structure throughout the world. The break-up of the Soviet Union led to the emergence of 15 states, which began actively promoting national identity as a building bloc of their newly-won independence. The Russian Federation is something of an exception to this trend, since it faces difficult and unresolved questions arising from its multi-ethnic composition. Russian nationalism played an important though somewhat ambiguous role in the break-up of the Soviet Union. Boris Yeltsin used appeals to Russian sovereignty to undermine the position of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. But Yeltsin never subscribed to a clearly-articulated concept of Russian national identity. For Yeltsin, the most important symbol of the new Russian state was – Yeltsin himself. (He was officially described as the 'first president' of Russia.)

Russia inherited from the Soviet state a culturally diverse population, with ethnic Russians only making up four fifths of the country's population. It also inherited an elaborate structure of ethnic federalism that recognized the rights of certain ethnic groups in their officially designated home territories. Another part of the Soviet legacy was a tradition of political and economic centralisation that had tied the fate of distant regions to decision making in Moscow – a system that had broken down during the final years of the Soviet Union.

What policies did the state adopt to address these questions of majority and minority ethnic identity? In the 1990s, ethnic policy was overshadowed by struggles over what kind of political system should be introduced, and the pace and character of the economic transition. President Vladimir Putin implemented a clear and coherent policy regarding the reassertion of state power after he came to power in 2000, but he did not resolve the ambiguities in nationality policy that he inherited from Boris Yeltsin. As historian Alexei Miller notes, 'One would be hard pressed to find another country in which there is no consensus on such a broad range of basic topics. There is no agreement on whether Russia should be considered a nation-state or on whether we should strive to make it such a state'.[1] Ethnographer Emil Pain even more provocatively argues that the unwilling birth of the Russian Federation from the ruins of the Soviet Union means that the state sees itself as fundamentally illegitimate. He asks 'How can a single and positive identity form among the inhabitants of a state that is regarded by both the authorities and the public as an unexpected, illegitimate child, a cripple, the victim of a catastrophe or plot?'[2]

The missing link

Throughout the 1990s, Western scholars carried out extensive studies of political mobilization in individual ethnic republics, most notably Chechnya, Tatarstan and Bashkortostan.[3] There have also been numerous studies of the republics through the prism of federalism: the formal territorial administrative structure of republics and regions, and the ebb and flow of power between them and the federal centre.[4] What is still missing is a study of ethnic

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[1] Forthcoming in *Institutions, Ideas and Leadership in Post-Soviet Russia*, edited by Julia Newton and William Tompson (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), a Festschrift for Archie Brown.

policy per se: that is, the central government's policy towards ethnicity outside of the federalism framework.[5]

The reason that the subject has not attracted academic attention is simple: the Yeltsin and Putin eras saw no clearly articulated and implemented official Russian government policy towards ethnicity.[6] If there has been no policy since the Soviet collapse, how can one study it?

The absence of a policy was underlined by the absence of a single ministry responsible for ethnic policy. The State Committee for Nationality Questions went through eight name and status changes before its final incarnation, the Ministry for Federation Affairs, Nationalities, and Migration Policies, was abolished in 2001.[7] Its duties were then split between the Interior Ministry (migration); the Trade and Economic Development Ministry (regional development); the Foreign Ministry (the Russian diaspora in the former Soviet republics); and the Justice Ministry (national-cultural associations); among others.[8] There remained only a minister-coordinator without a ministry, a position filled by Valentin Zorin. That post too was abolished in September 2004, in the government reshuffle that followed the Beslan school tragedy. A Ministry for Regional Development was then re-created, headed by former St. Petersburg Governor Vladimir Yakovlev.[9]

From Soviet to post-Soviet

This policy vacuum stands in sharp contrast to the Soviet era, when there was an elaborate and intellectually coherent set of policies addressing the 'national question'.[10] Soviet policy combined some rather disparate elements:

a) a recognition of ethnic identity rooted in culture and language, incorporating a primordialist ethnographic model of human development;
b) an ethno-territorial federalism based on Leninist political pragmatism, aimed at turning ethnicity into source of legitimacy and support for the new state, while bringing it under state management and control; and
c) a corresponding territorial and hierarchical compartmentalisation of political bargaining, held together by the state's vertical power structures – the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and Committee of State Security (KGB).

These policies produced regional elites with a strong ethnic identity who were able to use this as a resource to bolster their political power once the USSR collapsed. Territorialisation of ethnicity had been introduced as a tool for state control, but 75 years later it turned out to be the major threat to the integrity of the Soviet and then the Russian state.

In Soviet times the prevailing framework of identity politics was the '*matrioshka*' model, where several layers of identity nest within each other. At the top was the concept of the *Sovetskii narod* (Soviet people) which was supposed to transcend ethnicity, drawing upon common achievements such as the space race and the Great Patriotic War.[11] The Soviet people would speak Russian, but this would be a language of 'inter-ethnic communication' rather than the bearer of ethnic Russian culture. Below the Soviet People were the nations of the 15 union republics, below them smaller ethnic groups, and finally the *malochislennye narody* (the quaintly designated 'small-numbered peoples').[12] Over time, these identities were supposed to 'draw together', but somehow time stood still – or went into reverse – and as the decades passed ethnic distinctions did not disappear.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the category 'Soviet people' evaporated as an instrument of state ideology and policy, living on in a vague popular nostalgia for a lost past. At

the same time, the vertical power structures binding the matrioshka together also collapsed. Thus the Soviet framework for theoretically conceptualising and practically managing ethnicity disintegrated. The Russian Federation that emerged as a sovereign state in December 1991 inherited a cumbersome ethno-territorial structure, with 89 federal units or 'subjects', of six different types. A process of mergers from 2005-08 eliminated six small national districts, reducing the total to 83: 46 oblasts (regions), 21 republics, 9 krais (districts), 4 autonomous okrugs (territories), one autonomous oblast and two federal cities.[13]

Ethnic policy under Yeltsin

President Boris Yeltsin's 'policy' towards the ethnic republics was a by-product of his efforts to secure control of the central state and push through his economic reforms. Yeltsin's approach was driven by his pragmatic encouragement of self-rule for the leaders of the ethnic republics. He famously told them to 'take as much sovereignty as you can swallow' in a speech in Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan, in August 1990.

The leaders of many of these republics eagerly seized their chance, using ethnicity as part of their strategy to secure economic and political power in their regions.[14] They did this despite the fact that the 'titular' ethnic group formed an absolute majority in only seven of the 21 republics. This strategy was most successful in republics that had enjoyed relatively privileged treatment in Soviet times and/or had natural resources at their disposal – most notably Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Sakha (Yakutiya). Republic leaders used their control over the media and education systems to build up ethnic pride and identity. The number of languages taught in Russia's schools went from about 40 in 1989 to about 80 by 2003, and according to the 2002 census, the number of people who said they spoke their native (non-Russian) language grew by 2.7 %.[15]

In March 1992 Yeltsin drew up a vague federative agreement (an amendment to the 1978 constitution) regulating the relations of the ethnic republics with Moscow. Tatarstan and Chechnya refused to sign. Chechnya declared its independence in October 1991, a path that led ultimately to war. Tatarstan declared itself a sovereign state, and in March 1992 held a referendum in which 61% voted in favor of independence.[16] However unlike Chechnya, Tatarstan is located in central Russia and is physically surrounded by Russian provinces. Independence was not a realistic option. The five million Tatars, predominantly Moslem, were the largest ethnic minority in Russia. Tatars had established a state of their own in the middle Volga region, long before they were conquered by Ivan the Terrible in 1552. The incumbent leader of Tatarstan was Mintimier Shaimiev, who had become head of the Tatarstan government in 1985 and then first secretary of its Communist Party in 1989. Shaimiev's career path was not unusual: in about half the republics, former Communist leaders became the post-1991 president. Shaimiev was appointed president in June 1991, and would go on to win election in 1996, 2001 and 2005. Appeals to Tatar nationalism combined with an extensive patronage machine enabled Shaimiev to consolidate his grip inside the republic, and hence to strike a hard bargain with Moscow. Tatar was introduced as an official language and soon an extensive state-sponsored mosque-building program was under way. But Shaimiev had to play a careful game, since Tatars made up only 48.5% of the population in 1989, barely ahead of the Russians at 43.3%.

Yeltsin's policy of ethnic *laissez faire* stumbled on through his *de facto* toleration of Chechnya's declaration of independence and a series of bilateral treaties that he signed with the republics in 1994 – a reward for their support of Yeltsin in the October 1993 parliamentary crisis. It paid off for Yeltsin politically: in the 1996 presidential elections his average vote was 8% higher in the ethnic republics than in the non-ethnic regions.[17] Yeltsin's actions amounted to an

implicit policy of recognition of Russia as a multi-ethnic, federal state, with a special status for ethnic groups that happened to be sitting in one of the republics inherited from Soviet federalism.

The new constitution adopted in December 1993 began with the words "We, the multinational people (*mnogonatsional'nyi narod*) of the Russian Federation…"[18] It declared Russia to be a unitary state (art. 77) and federal laws sovereign over all others (art. 76), yet at the same time it recognized the legality of bilateral treaties (art. 66.4) and gave a long list of items of joint jurisdiction between the center and federal subjects (art. 72). It recognized the right of republics to introduce their own official state languages and guaranteed to all the peoples of the Russian Federation the right to maintain their mother tongues and appropriate conditions for their study and cultivation (art. 68).

The official presidential policy on ethnicity was laid out in the 1996 document 'Conception of the State National Policy of the Russian Federation'. However, the secrecy of the deals brokered by Yeltsin, and the accompanying asymmetry in the treatment granted to different republics, indicates the absence of a principled and logically coherent national policy. By 1999 46 of the 89 federal subjects had signed bilateral treaties with the Kremlin, most of them not published and hence of dubious legality. According to the regional ministry's 1998 report, 42 of the 46 treaties then in operation violated federal laws, and the legality of thousands of pieces of local legislation were appealed by regional prosecutors.

The December 1994 invasion of Chechnya tells us a great deal about the Yeltsin regime – its disrespect for human rights, its disdain for international opinion, and its inability to control the military. But what does it tell us about ethnicity policy, beyond the fact that secession would not be tolerated?[19] The ethnic identity of Chechens as Chechens was not challenged; the state merely insisted that they accept Russian sovereignty and stay within the matrioshka model.

Who are the Russians?

The keystone in the arch of *Soviet* ethnicity was the concept of the *Sovetskii narod* (Soviet people). In the course of the 1990s, Russian identity did not emerge as a sufficiently coherent and inclusive category to replace that absence.[20] The Yeltsin administration never developed a clear policy on who are the Russians. Yeltsin himself preferred to use the inclusive, civic terms *rossiiskii* and *rossiyane* (pertaining to citizens of the Russian state), rather than the more exclusive and ethnic term *russkii*, as in *russkii narod* (Russian people) or *russkaya natsiya* (Russian nation).

The leading Russian academic theorist of nationalism, Valerii Tishkov, was a Yeltsin advisor and briefly served as head of the State Committee for Nationalities in 1992. He was the most consistent exponent of the idea of developing a 'civic' national consciousness in Russia, based on the notion of *rossiyane* – that is, defining citizenship in inclusive terms, not tied to Russian ethnicity.[21] Tishkov thought that rewarding assertive nationalism in Tatarstan and the other republics was a recipe for endless conflict. Tishkov insists that 'the Russian state, regardless of its organizational structure—monarchy/empire, a union of republics and country of Soviets, or a republic/ federation—can and must be classified as a nation-state'.[22] At the same time, Tishkov tied the rise of civic nationalism in Russia to Western scholarship on the transcendence of nationalism in the late 20th century.[23] Similar civic nation-building efforts were also under way in Ukraine.[24]

One problem was that democratic institutions were fading fast in Russia in the 1990s – and some kind of democratic participation is central to the notion of a civic political nation. A civic national identity that is dictated from above is arguably a contradiction in terms.[25] A second problem was that the term *rossiiskii* had little emotional resonance, since it usually connotes

official state institutions. The term *russkii* is far more common in popular usage, though it usually refers to cultural identity, without any clear political agenda.[26] The term *rossiiskii* was seen as an anti-ethnic term, with some claiming that its use implicitly denied Russians the right to take pride in their ethnic identity. For example, Aleksei Chadaev complained that 'In the official rhetoric of the Russian state, the word "Russian" (r*usskii*) has been semi-prohibited'. He went on to argue that '"*Russki*i' is not narrower but in fact broader than "*rossiyanin*". The word "*russkii*" applies today not just to the state of Russia but to the greater Russian world too'.[27] Chadaev's article was endorsed in an afterword by Putin's influential deputy chief of staff, Vladislav Surkov. Arguably, even the concept *rossiiskii* included within it some awareness of *russkii*, since the ethnic Russians were seen as the moving force behind the Russian state. (It was also suggested that a reference to someone as a member of the *rossiiskaya natsiya* could even be a way to signal that person's non-Russian ethnicity.[28]) Tishkov's more radical critics argued that he was putting up an intellectual smokescreen to disguise what the Communists referred to as the 'genocide' of the Russian nation under Yeltsin's rule. Even an academic such as Mikhail Rutkevich could bemoan the 'accelerating extinction of the Russian people' due to demographic decline, the loss of Russians living in the newly-independent states, and the influx of migrants into Russian cities.[29]

Yeltsin encouraged efforts to come up with a definition of the 'Russian idea' (*rossiiskaya ideya*) to put some flesh on the bones of the *rossiiskii* category – there was even a national essay competition on this topic in 1998.[30] But the search for a 'Russian idea', with its emphasis on spirituality and unique collective historical experiences, bore scant relation to Western approaches to 'civic' definitions of national identity, based on individual rights. The intellectual quest for Russian identity came to be dominated by writers in the Eurasianist tradition, a curious school of thought that arose among Russian émigré intellectuals in the 1920s and experienced a revival in the 1990s. Eurasianists believe that Russia forms the core of a distinct civilization, neither European nor Asian.[31] Eurasianism did not easily translate into specific proposals for Russian state policy. It tended to mean support for a more assertive policy of integration with or dominion over the 'near abroad': that is, the former Soviet republics that had become independent states in 1991.

Putin to the rescue?

Things seemed to change with Vladimir Putin's accession to the presidency in 2000. Putin moved decisively to dismantle the confederal system that Yeltsin's recognition of republican sovereignty had allowed to entrench itself. Putin insisted on the supremacy of federal laws over the legislation of federal 'subjects', and the need for a unified legal and fiscal space. He introduced a new system of seven federal districts headed by presidential representatives to ensure the 'power vertical'. By his second federal assembly address in April 2001, Putin was confidently asserting that trends leading to the 'disintegration' of the state had been reversed.[32] Emil Pain argued that Putin's concern with restoring the 'power vertical' had more to do with a desire to restore central political and economic authority in general than any specific fear of ethnic secession spreading beyond the case of Chechnya – which had undoubtedly been instrumental in Putin's own rise to power.[33]

However, at that point things ground to a halt. Putin's attention was focused on the state rather than the nation: the state needed an anthem, some symbols, some rituals. But Putin showed little interest in weaving these instruments of state into a convincing, emotionally engaging narrative of Russian identity. In his public speeches, Putin was far more accustomed than Yeltsin to use *russkii*, and rarely uttered *rossiyane* or *rossiiskii* – typically, only in connection with matters pertaining to the Russian state (*rossiiskoe gosudartsvo*), and not the Russian people.

Moreover, Putin quickly and energetically revived a symbolic repertoire for Russian national identity, pulling up some features from the Tsarist past (for example, new uniforms for the Kremlin guard and regular visits to Orthodox churches) while reviving some Soviet symbols (such as restoring the Soviet anthem, with new words). The innovations enjoyed limited success. In a 2006 survey only 58% of respondents could get the flag colors in the right order and only 34% knew the first line of the new anthem.[34] In his 2005 State of the Federation Union address Putin talked about the *rossiiskii narod* and *natsiya* as having a 'civilizing mission' in the Eurasian continent. Later that year the November 7 holiday (marking the 1917 revolution) was replaced by 'Unity Day' on November 4, marking the liberation of Moscow from the Poles in 1612.[35] In his 2007 address, Putin talked about the role of Russians and Russian-speakers beyond Russia's borders – a 'Russian world' (*russkii mir*).[36]

As in many countries around the world, football is perhaps the most powerful indicator of national loyalty. In June 2008 after the defeat of Holland in the European cup quarter final, '700,000 Muscovites poured into the streets in what the official RIA Novosti press agency called the biggest spontaneous street demonstration Moscow has seen since the USSR defeated Nazi Germany'.[37] It is interesting that in a television debate on the eve of Unity Day in 2009, journalist Sergei Dorenko was asked what he thought contemporary Russians have in common, and in response he cited the two iconic achievements of the Soviet era – the victory over fascism and the first man in space.[38]

While state policy was marking time, popular attitudes were shifting. In the 1990s Russia experienced heavy migration from the former Soviet Union – mainly ethnic Russians. The revival of the Russian economy under Putin brought an influx of non-Russian migrant workers, from Ukraine, Central Asia and the Caucasus. By 2008, they numbered in excess of 7 million. Their presence in Russian cities raised ethnic tensions and gave renewed vigour to those calling for the assertion of the 'Russianness' (*russkost'*) of Russian citizens. Popular support for nationalist ideas such as 'Russia for the Russians' clearly grew, with support for that slogan rose from 45 to 55% of respondents between 1998 and 2002 according to VTsIOM polls.[39] However, of that 55%, only 17% supported it unconditionally, while 38% said it should be 'within limits'.[40] Putin did not encourage such sentiments, nor use such language himself. He specifically denounced the 'Russia for the Russians' slogan, which was used by the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), in his December 18, 2003 live question and answer session on Russian TV.[41]

This leads one to suggest that Putin is a statist (*gosudarstvennik*) but not a nationalist. State power – and not national community – is his object of veneration. What Putin sought as President was clearly not bound up with 'ethnic' nationalism. Nor was it about '*civic*' nationalism in the Western sense, since it was not connected to individual rights and democratic participation. Putin made only routine references to Russia as a multi-cultural and multi-confessional state. Pain argued 'the idea of a multicultural society is absolutely foreign to the current authorities and to the majority of the Russian population.'[42] Others agreed that 'recognition of difference' was absent from Putin's political idiom.[43]

Putin's Western critics argue that his statist brand of nationalism will not be satisfied with building a state within the current boundaries of the Russian Federation.[44] They suggest that Russia is in its very essence an 'empire-state', one whose leaders' identity is deeply rooted in their capacity to rule over a multiplicity of peoples across the Eurasian land mass. The collapse of the Soviet Union shrank the Russian state to the boundaries it had occupied in the 18th century – before two centuries of steady expansion west, south and east. According to this school of thought, the Russian state will not be content until it once again exercises hegemony over Ukraine, the south Caucasus and Central Asia. Emil Pain shares the concern that the Russian

state has a strong imperial component, one which also means that inside the country its inhabitants are treated as subjects rather than citizens.[45]

The anti-national nationalism

Under both Yeltsin and Putin, the state recognised that developing a policy of assertive ethnic Russian nationalism would antagonise the non-Russian groups that according to the 2002 census made up 20.2% of the country's population (up from 18.5% in 1989).[46] Putin ignored, or at times resisted, the clarion calls for Russian nationalism that came from the State Duma or from the ultra-nationalist intellectuals and social movements.

Putin's enthusiastic embrace of foreign partners (German, Chinese, American) during his first term as president was anathema to the nationalists and clear evidence of his statist agenda. Putin was intent on repositioning Russia's identity as an accepted member of the global community. But this strategy, while it persisted, denied nationalists the space to use state policy to define Russians in opposition to the Western or Chinese 'other'.[47] Without such an 'othering', a powerful and assertive national identity would not be forged.

Putin and his PR advisors were obviously aware of the power of appeals to the public invoking nationalist themes. The Kremlin exploited nationalism to build popular support for Putin, using the second war in Chechnya to propel him to victory in the March 2000 presidential election. The Chechens were the obvious target for such a process of identity formation, and judging by opinion polls the Chechens were indeed feared and vilified by ordinary Russians. Yet government policy has always been that Chechens are members of the Russian family, and that the wars were waged to save Chechens from domination by criminal leaders or foreign jihadists. This contradiction grew even sharper in 2003, when Putin switched to a new policy of 'Chechenisation': selecting a loyal Chechen strongman in the form of President Akhmad Kadyrov and devolving responsibility for crushing the rebels to him. From a counter-insurgency point of view this eventually proved successful (despite Kadyrov's assassination in May 2004). But it made it more difficult to build Russian identity on the basis of hatred of the Chechens, as Russian policy was now in the hands of the 'good' Chechens. For this reason, even though 'anti-Chechen attitudes and various phobias have been rising steadily,… these campaigns have not led to Russians uniting'.[48]

Apart from consolidating the presidency, Putin's political strategy included the creation of a pro-presidential party of power, in the form of United Russia. This party, too, is more statist than nationalist, in that its appeal is to consensus and order, rather than to division and differentiation, internal or external. Marsh and Warhola (2001) note that Unity was headed by members of two of Russia's ethnic minorities: Sergey Shoigu (who is from Tuva) and Aleksandr Karelin (whose name evokes Kareliya).

Even if Russian nationalism was not being instigated from above, however, it was flaring up from below, serving as a rallying point for disaffected social groups from skinheads to pensioners.[49] Ramazan Abdulatipov, Chairman of the Assembly of Russia's Nationalities, complained 'Unfortunately, the state passed the "Russian question" to extremist forces'.[50] Particularly during Putin's second term, there was evidence of a rising xenophobic nationalism that appeared to enjoy at least some support from within the security establishment and other parts of the administration. Street violence against foreigners continued to increase in the 2000s, with at least 87 people killed and 378 wounded in racially motivated attacks in 2008, according to figures compiled by the SOVA institute.[51]

Critics accused the government of fostering radical nationalism in order to create a putative threat that would justify its own increasingly tight control over political life within the country. In any case, the official position of the Kremlin and the government remained hostile to such ultra-nationalist movements. At the same time, the increasingly prickly nationalism that characterised Russian foreign policy during the second Putin administration carefully avoided any real ethnic component. It was a statist nationalism, driven largely by the great-power agenda described by Julie Newton in Chapter 4 of this volume.

To the extent that there was an active state policy, it was devoted more to crushing manifestations of ethnic nationalism than promoting them. The state did not want to use the ethnic nationalist tool for itself – but it did not want anyone else using it, either. There was a series of laws condemning nationalist extremism and incitement to ethnic and religious hatred. More surprising still, these laws were sporadically enforced. Article 63 of the 1997 Criminal Code declares 'motives of national, racial or religious hatred or enmity' in committing a crime to be an aggravating circumstance. The 2002 Law 'On Preventing and Counteracting Extremist Activities' led to bans on Russia National Unity and the National Patriotic Party. Between 2001 and 2004 there were 35 cases where the press ministry issued warnings to newspapers on grounds of inciting interethnic conflict, a violation of Article 4 of the Law on Media.[52] The 2001 Law on Political Parties barred the establishment of political parties 'on the grounds of professional, racial, national or religious belonging'.

The nationalist Motherland Party was created by the Kremlin in 2003 with the goal of drawing support away from the opposition Communist Party. However, Motherland gained in popularity, and its leader Dmitrii Rogozin started challenging the Kremlin on issues like corruption. It was banned from running in the December 2005 Moscow city elections on the grounds that its 'Cleanse our city' campaign ads were an incitement to ethnic hatred.[53] The party itself was shut down shortly thereafter. Another illustration of how nation-building could slip out of control of the Kremlin's hands is the Movement against Illegal Immigration, founded in 2002, which started using the November 4 Unity Day holiday as an occasion for noisy demonstrations under the slogan 'Russia for the Russians'.[54] Pro-Kremlin nationalists ousted the radicals from the movement in September 2008 and its founder Aleksandr Belov was jailed in May 2009.[55] The 'Russian March' on November 4, 2009 was dominated by the pro-Kremlin Nashi youth movement. [56]

Important insights into Putin's thinking on the subject can be obtained from his off-the-cuff remarks during his annual live phone-ins. During Putin's televised press conference in December 2002, Chechnya aside, ethnic issues only came up in a viewer's question about attacks on people from the Caucasus in Moscow markets. Putin condemned such inter-ethnic conflict as a threat to stability: 'We all must understand that we are a single family'.[57] Likewise during Putin's December 2004 press conference, despite the recent horror of Beslan, ethnic issues were mostly sidestepped.[58] Putin brushed aside a question from Kazan about the absence of a nationalities ministry, saying the issue could be adequately tackled by the Regional Development Ministry and by the newly-created Public Chamber. In response to a question about the abolition of gubernatorial elections, Putin invoked the threat of disintegration, and cited the example of Dagestan with its 33 ethnic groups. Referring favourably to Dagestan's tradition of power sharing, Putin said: 'This system has existed for decades and is unlikely to be effective in any other way. Otherwise, representatives of this or that ethnic group will feel slighted and pushed aside from the power. However, we cannot develop one system of authorities in one constituent part of the (Russian) Federation and another one in another. We should have a unified (system) for all'.

So Putin in the same breath praised the unique arrangements in Dagestan and insisted on a unified system. These statements were logically consistent, if one recognises that President is the source of the unified system. If he approved the Dagestani leadership, then it was OK. But if they were to choose an arrangement for themselves, without Moscow's approval, then it would not be acceptable. The same logic explains why it was acceptable for Chechnya to sign a bilateral treaty with Moscow, while all the other constituent units of the Federation were being told that such treaties violate the unity of the legal-administrative system.

In 2002 President Putin instructed Nationality Policy Minister Vladimir Zorin to prepare a new version of the state's national policy, issued in 1996. At the same time the United Russia party launched a 'Russian Project' to build national pride, a campaign which the project's leader Ivan Demidov explicitly identified with the majority ethnic Russian population.[59] The initial draft of the state policy from the Regional Development Ministry was reportedly rejected on the grounds that it included reference to ethnic Russians as a 'state-forming nation' that were objectionable to other ethnic groups.[60] The new policy did not see the light of day by the end of 2009.

National identity did feature in an influential statement of the philosophy behind Putin's presidency, "The nationalization of the future', published by Putin aide Vladislav Surkov in 2006.[61] Surkov wrote that "People want to live freely in a community based on just foundations. For the majority in a society of a certain scale that community is the nation (*natsii*)', which Surkov defined as 'the supra-ethnic sum of all the citizens of the country'. He continued 'The *Rossiisskaya natsiya* (*narod*) unifies all the peoples of Russia in common borders and a common state, culture, past and future.' He later states that '*Russkii* democracy is open and must be welcoming for all *rossiiskikh* peoples'. Surkov's statement clearly shows that the duality of *russkii* and *rossiiskii* concepts of Russianness had not been resolved. In November 2007 United Russia's website posted an article on 'The Russian National Leader Phenomenon', by Abdul-Hakim Sultygov, the party's ethnic policy coordinator, praising Putin as the figure who can unite all Russians.[62] So loyalty to the state, personified in the figure of Putin, seems to be the key factor behind a unified Russian identity.

The individuation of ethnicity

One important part of Valery Tishkov's promotion of civic as opposed to ethnic nationalism was the idea of shifting ethnicity from ethno-territorial administrative units to the level of individual rights, expressed through voluntary associations of co-ethnics.[63] Tishkov floated the model in 1992, and it was adopted by Nationalities Minister Sergei Shakhrai in 1994, with the creation of a Council of National Associations of Russia. 1996 saw the adoption of a Federal Law on National-Cultural Autonomy NCA).[64] The idea was strongly promoted by Valentin Zorin, Nationalities Minister from 2001 until 2004.[65] This policy sought to detach the provision of ethnic rights from the small number of ethnicities with their own territorial administrative units, and root them instead in civil society – allowing groups to request the provision of cultural facilities, media outlets and school classes in the regions where they are based. By 1999 227 National Cultural Autonomous groups had been registered, rising to 594 by 2004.[66]

This idea had several advantages. First, it took as its starting point the Soviet era understanding of ethnicity as a cultural-linguistic, rather than political or economic, category. This was an advantage because it built upon a conception already prevailing in Russian society and among Russian officials, and did not mark too radical a break from past practice. Second, it addressed one of the major flaws in the old system of ethno-territorial units: the lack of

congruence between the ethnic units and the actual distribution of ethnic groups across the territory of the federation. Some 30-40% of non-Russian ethnics (10 million people) live outside of their titular republic. For these people, their ethnic rights (to education for example) are weakly protected, or non-existent. Likewise, there are some 10 million people, Russians and others, living in ethnic republics who are *not* members of the titular nationality. Third, the individual concept of ethnicity accorded with contemporary Western theory and practice, as in US tradition of a plurality of ethnic groups asserting their identity within a common civic identity and shared institutions.

The individualisation approach even fed into post-modern notions of transcending the nation-state.[67] The search for a new policy in Russia happened to coincide with a renewed interest in national minority rights in Europe, for the first time in half a century, in response to the horrors of the Yugoslav wars.[68] It also coincided with a wave of interest in the rights of indigenous peoples, originating in the Native American and Australian aboriginal movements. This was picked up by defenders of the 'small peoples' of the Russian North, and those of the Finno-Ugric group, who have strong backers in the West.[69] But even the Tatars could attach themselves to this movement, regarding themselves as a conquered people (like French Quebecois).[70]

Another example of the individualisation of ethnicity is the policy of seeing ethnicity as the personal choice of an individual rather than an objective, ascribed characteristic, defined according to criteria laid down by the state.[71] Hence the requirement that people list their ethnicity on their passport (paragraph five) was abolished, and in the 2002 census people were given a free choice in self-identifying their ethnicity, rather than being obliged to fit into a pre-arranged list of recognised nations. As a result the number of recorded ethnic groups rose from 130 to 160.

The new approach, however, also brought problems.[72] For one thing, is the federal state really willing to leave ethnicity up to the individual? A controversial part of the model is the idea that the state should continue to register, manage and fund these ethnic associations – and only one federal NCA is allowed for each ethnic group. The idea of ethnicity as a voluntaristic, personal choice does not seem to have sunk very deep roots. For example, in a seminar during the 2002 census, Nationalities Minister Valentin Zorin himself seemed reluctant to accept that 'Cossack' was a valid choice as an ethnic identity, preferring to regard it as a 'social' category. And in Tatarstan the authorities pressed for sub-groups such as Siberian Tatars and Kryashennye (converts to Christianity) to be counted as regular Tatars.

Likewise, local authorities have often intervened to deny registration to ethnic groups, on the grounds that they might incite inter-ethnic antagonism. For example, in December 1999 the Tatar organisation NKAT was denied registration in Ufa, Bashkortostan.[73] Tomila Lankina describes the range of instruments at the disposal of regional elites: registering organisations, granting permission for demonstrations, giving access to premises, and controlling the content of local newspapers.[74] After the upsurge of social activism in 1989-92, Lankina argues, the wave subsided, with control over the new movements shifting from councils to the executive branch in her two cases, Bashkortostan and Adygeya. Civil society traditions in Russia remain too fragile for the pluralistic ethnic group model to flourish.

Managing ethnicity in a global context

Adding to the complexity of the situation is the fact that post-Soviet Russia opened itself to integration with the rest of the world. In the traditional, 19th century world order, nationalism was a domestic affair: it was about building one's nation-state through a process of internal

homogenisation and maybe territorial conquest. In the post-1989 world, nationality policy was internationalised. It is no longer solely, or even mainly, an issue of domestic politics. It is about managing borders, defining citizenship, handling migration flows, and generally adhering to international norms regarding protection of ethnic minorities. While the Russian state drifted through the 1990s without a coherent ethnicity policy, it was forced to explain its actions to an alphabet soup of international organisations – the OSCE, the PACE, the Council of Europe and its Commission against Racism and Intolerance, the UNHCR, etc.[75] This forced it, willy-nilly, to articulate a set of policies, in response, for example, to the report of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention of the Council of Europe for the Protection of National Minorities.[76]

It is not so much that the international community is forcing Russian policy to conform to its norms: rather it is a case of Russia's international undertakings obliging the government to articulate a policy which may or may not actually exist. Curiously, the policy process itself has been globalised, even if the practical and normative content of the policy has not. This was not a one-way street. Russia also tried to use the international system to advance its own interests – most notably, regarding the situation of ethnic Russians in the Baltic states. There were widespread fears in the early 1990s that Russia would mobilize to defend the interests of the 22 million ethnic Russians stranded in the now-independent states of the former Soviet Union.[77] Many leading figures, such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn, argued that Russia should reclaim the Crimea (from Ukraine) and the provinces of Northern Kazakhstan where a majority of the population were ethnic Russians. However, such aggressive nationalist policies never materialized. Though Yeltsin did issue a decree on the subject in August 1994, the focus there was on advancing Russian state interests (military and economic) rather than on protecting the rights of co-ethnics in the 'near abroad'. This policy of passivity in defence of Russian ethnics outside the borders of the Russian Federation continued under Putin. The meek acceptance of Turkmenistan's revocation of dual citizenship in 2003 would be a case in point. (Wary of losing their Russian citizenship, many Russians gave up their Turkmenistan passports, which obliged them to leave the country.)

The way in which ethnic politics sits astride and is connected to domestic and international policy and to Russian state goals is most vividly illustrated by the situation in the Caucasus. Russia's backing for secessionist movements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 1992 drew Moscow very directly into ethnic politics south of the Caucasus mountains. The Chechen rebellion in turn drew support, psychological and practical, from the south Caucasus, and Islamist radicals sought to spread the insurgency into neighbouring Dagestan, Ingushetiya and North Ossetia. This cycle continued into the Putin era. The Kremlin's encouragement of Abkhazian and South Ossetian secession as a tool to advance Russian state goals in the region eventually culminated in Russia's war with Georgia in the summer of 2008 and Russia's subsequent recognition of the sovereignty of those two break-away republics.

Conclusion

This chapter sketches out some of the diverse factors affecting Russian ethnic policy since 1992. Putin brought stability and order to the Russian political system, but made little progress in trying to clear up the ambiguities in Russian ethnic policy. Rather he tried to restructure state institutions to limit any possibility for using ethnicity to challenge Moscow's political power. Putin preferred a 'statist nationalism' that served his interest in consolidating power at home and projecting it abroad, while keeping potential ethnic conflicts in check. In this he was fairly successful, more through guile than through direct confrontation. But Putin largely failed to

articulate a clear vision for the future of Russian national identity and the place of the non-Russian peoples within it.

Endnotes

[1] Alexei Miller, "The Nation as a Framework for Political life', *Russian Politics and Law*, 47, 2 (March-April 2009): 8-29, p. 15.

[2] Emil Pain, 'Russia Between Empire and Nation', *Russian Politics and Law*, 47, 2 (March-April 2009): 60-86, p. 82.

[3] For example, Dmitry Gorenburg, *Minority Ethnic Mobilization in the Russian Federation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[4] For example, Cameron Ross, *Federalism and Democratisation in Russia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

[5] Among the exceptions: Bill Bowring, 'Austro-Marxism's Last Laugh?: the Struggle for Recognition of National-Cultural Autonomy for Rossians and Russians', *Europe-Asia Studies,* 54, 2 (March 2002): 229-50; Sven Gunnar Simonsen, 'Inheriting the Soviet policy toolbox: Russia's Dilemma over Ascriptive Nationality', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 51, 6 (September 1999): 1069-87.

[6] This complaint was frequently raised by North Ossetiya President Alexander Dzasokhov. See: Natalia Ratiani, 'A generation growing up amidst conflict', *Izvestiya* (31 March 2005); and, at the national conference on 'The state's ethnic policy in the 20th and 21st centuries' in Perm: 'Shadow ethnicity', *Izvestiya* (31 October 2002).

[7] Konstantin Smirnov, 'Dolgii put' Minnats ot MVD do MVD' [The long road of the NatsMin from MVD to MVD], *Kommersant-Vlast*, 23 October 2001.

[8] Virginie Coulloudon, 'New appointment may presage changes in Russia's nationalities policy', RFE/RL *Newsline* (19 December 2001).

[9] Yakovlev was appointed presidential envoy to the Southern Federal District in March 2004. He was fired in September 2004 in the wake of the Beslan tragedy, after which he was appointed to head the newly created Ministry for Regional Development. In September 2007 Yakovlev was replaced as minister by Dmitrii Kozak, who was in turn succeeded by Viktor Basargin in October 2008.

[10] On the origins of this system, see: Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nation and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923*–1939 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

[11] Andrei Okara, 'O subetnicheskoi, etnicheskoi i sverkhetnicheskoi gordosti velikorossov'[Sub-ethnic, ethnic and supra-ethnic pride of the Great Russians], *Politicheskii klass*, 18 August 2007.

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[13] Julia Kusznir, 'Russian Territorial Reform?', *Russian Analytical Digest*, 17 June 2008: 8-11.

[14] Donna Bahry, 'Ethnicity and Equality in Post-communist Economic Transition: Evidence from Russia's Republics', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 54, 5 (July 2002): 673-699; Dmitry Gorenburg, 'Nationalism for the Masses: Popular Support for Nationalism in Russia's Ethnic Republics', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 53, 1 (January 2001): 73-104. For pro-nationalist views see: Rafael Khakimov, 'Path Forward for the Russian Federation', Network on Ethnological Monitoring and Early Warning of Conflict, *Bulletin*, 2 (2 June 1995), http://federalmcart.ksu.ru/publications.

[15] Nationalities Minister Valentin Zorin, quoted in *RIA Novosti* (13 June 2004).

[16] Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, "Chechnya Versus Tatarstan: Understanding ethnopolitics in post-communist Russia," *Problems of Post*-Communism, 47, 2 (2000): 13-22; Dmitry P. Gorenburg, *Minority Ethnic Mobilization in the Russian Federation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[17] Christopher Marsh and James Warhola, 'Ethnicity, Ethno-territoriality and the Political Geography of Putin's Electoral Support', *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics* 42, 4 (2001): 1-14. In 2000 Putin also won a plurality in every ethnic region except the Altay Republic.

[18] The Constitution of the Russian Federation, adopted 12 December 1993. http://constitution.ru/en/10003000-01.htm

[19] Matthew Evangelista, *The Chechen Wars: Will Russia Go the Way of the Soviet Union?* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2002).

[20] Vera Tolz, 'Forging the Nation: National Identity and Nation-building in Post-Communist Russia', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 50, 6 (1998): 993-1022; Vera Tolz, *Inventing the Nation: Russia* (London: Arnold, 2001); Pal Kolsto (ed.), *Nation-Building and Common Values in Russia* (Boulder, CO: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).

[21] Valery Tishkov, 'What Are Russia and the Russian People?', *Russian Politics and Law*, 47, 2 (March-April 2009): 30-59.

[22] Ibid., p. 53.

[23] Valery Tishkov, 'Forget the "Nation": Post-Nationalist Understanding of Nationalism', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 23, 4 (2000): 625-50.

[24] On similar debates in Ukraine, see Stephen Shulman, 'The Contours of Civic and Ethnic National Identification in Ukraine', *Europe-Asia Studies* 56, 1 (2004): 35-56.

[25] Emil Pain, 'Russia Between Empire and Nation,' *Russian Politics and Law*, 47, 2 (March-April 2009): 60-86.

[26] For example, a search of the language corpus database www.ruscorpora.ru on 20 June 2008 found that russkii narod scored 552 hits, russkaya natsiya 32, rossiiski narod 45, rossiiskaya natsya 1, rossiiyanin 195 and rossiyane 602.

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[28] Miller, 'The Nation as a Framework', p. 18.

[29] Mikhail Rutkevich, 'On the fate of the Russian ethnic group', *Russian Politics and Law*, 43, 2 (March–April 2005), 70–82, p. 76.

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[31] Marlene Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Washington, D.C.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

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[34] 'Chem gordyatsya rossiyane?' [What makes Russians proud?], VTSIOM press release no. 466, 8 June 2006.

[35] Andrei Zorin, 'A New Holiday for Old Reasons', (20 January 2005), http://www.Russiaprofile.org

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[45] Emil Pain, 'Russia Between Empire and Nation,' *Russian Politics and Law*, 47, 2 (March-April 2009): 60-86.

[46] 'Vserossiiskaya perepis' naseleniya' (2002), www.perepis2002.ru

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[65] For a profile of Zorin, see Coulloudon, 'New Appointment May Presage Changes in Russia's Nationalities Policy'; Mikhail Vinogradov, 'The Story-telling Minister', *Izvestiya* (7 December 2001).

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