

ASYMMETRICAL FEDERALISM.

THE CASE OF TATARSTAN

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Abstract

The composition of the Russian Federation sets an example of the multi-national state with ethno-federal structure. The asymmetry of this structure, with ethnically and regionally based units, raises the question of the rights and responsibilities each type of unit gets. Among other units, the case of Republic of Tatarstan within the RF can be considered as a positive model of the relation between the federal government and the ethnic unit. This study aims to find out if the status of Tatarstan is different from the positions of the other units, especially other republics, and if so, what are the reasons for that.

In order to do so, literature on the topics related to the study, as well as official documents of the RF were analyzed. Among various motives, such as historical ties, economic opportunities, legal framework, and others, that indicate that Tatarstan enjoys privileges that most units do not, the reason that should be highlighted is the loyalty of the unit to the federal government and lack of the conflict. This indicates that the ethno-federal unit and minority associated with it have special rights and status only because the central government allows them.

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Table of Content

Introduction 1

Ethno-federal Structure and Self-determination of Nations 1

Chapter 1: Federal Structure of the Russian Federation with the Special Focus on the Republics..... 9

1.1 The Status of the Republic – Self-determination or Sovereignty?..... 9

1.2 Structure and its Shortcomings 14

Chapter 2: Theoretical Background – from Minority Rights to Federal Unit..... 20

2.1 Protection of Minorities and their Rights 23

2.2 Right for Self-determination..... 25

2.3 Autonomy – Settling the Conflict or Step Towards Secession?..... 26

2.4 Federalism 28

Chapter 3: Russian – Tatar Relations over Time..... 34

3.1 Bulgars and Mongols..... 34

3.2 Tatars within the Russian Empire 36

3.3 Self-determination of Tatars during the Soviet times 38

Chapter 4: Struggle for Current Status in Early 1990s 42

4.1 The Rise of Separatism 44

4.2 The Confusion of the Aims and Demands: Full Independence or a Special Status 47

Chapter 5: Tatarstan Benefits in Practice 52

5.1 Situation with the Legal Documentation 52

5.2 <i>International Relations</i>	54
5.3 <i>Availability of Economic Resources</i>	56
Conclusion	59
Loyalty of a Unit as a Way to Get Benefits	59
Appendix	64
General Information about the Republic of Tatarstan	64
Bibliography	68

Introduction

Ethno-federal Structure and Self-determination of Nations

The federal structure of the Russian Federation causes a lot of question. It consist of 83 federal subjects, 21 of which have the status of republics, 9 are regions (krai), 46 are areas (oblast), 2 are the cities of federal significance (Moscow and Saint Petersburg), Jewish autonomous area, and 4 autonomous districts. Constitutionally they suppose to be equal in relations to the central government and each other. This, however, is not always the case. Another difficulty is the ethno-federal nature of the state. Being a home of more than 100 nationalities and ethnicities, the issue of minorities is one of the central in RF. The main peculiarity of the republics as units is that they all named after the peoples that are majorities in the subject or have historical ties with the territory. Russians constitute approximately 4/5 of the population of the state, the rest can be considered as minorities.

Talking about minorities in the RF, it is impossible to ignore the history of the minorities during the Soviet times. The choice of belonging to one particular ethic group was the part of the policy in the USSR. The so called “fifth column”, the line in the Soviet passport that indicated person’s ethnicity (nazional’nost’), was an integral part of every Soviet citizen identity. With the collapse of the Soviet Union the question of ethnic belonging did not fade away, even though the ethnic identification was taken away from the RF passports. The question of minorities was raised once again in late 1980s – early 1990s, especially when 2 autonomous republics – Chechnya and Tatarstan - started to articulate separatist idea. Titular ethnicity of Tatarstan constitutes the second largest ethnicity in the Russia but it is only a little above 3% of the total

population. Nevertheless, Tatars enjoy their own federal unit, republic, with their own President, Constitution, three branches of Government and symbols of the state which are guaranteed by the Constitution of the RF.

It is also very important to stress the role and understanding of the terms “ethnicity” and “nation” during the Soviet times and difference they made after the collapse of the system. V. Tishkov, as one of the leading experts in the area of ethnicity and nationality in USSR and post-Union territories, points out that it is wrong to assume that nations compose and constitute states but rather political elite creates the notion of common nation among the people in order to use it as a tool for mobilization and sometimes manipulation.¹ Of course, ethnicity is not created out of nothing but is built around the social and cultural commonalities of the people. Nevertheless, for him the debates around the terms “ethnicity” and “nations” and absence of the clear definition is explained by the fact that they are mostly politicized and used in masses for various purposes.² The importance and role of these terms during the Soviet times also changed over time.

The studies of the ethnicity as a part of social science started only in 1960s, not surprisingly after the Stalinist repressions and his death. If during the revolution, Lenin’s claims about self-determination of the nations was one of the key aspects of the attraction of various people on the side of Bolsheviks, during Stalin rule ethnicity could have become a matter of life and death. Nevertheless, in many Soviet Autonomous republics, which were based on the titular ethnicities, Soviets were the ones, who started to research, develop and document costumes, traditions, and culture of the peoples and nations. In 1960s, when ethnography and anthropology started to develop as parts of social science, ethnicity was closely linked to the class, which by that time

¹ Valerii Tishkov, “On the Phenomenon of the Ethnicity,” in *Essays on Theory of Politics of Ethnicity in Russia* (Moscow: University of Ethnology and Anthropology, RAN, 1997), 69-70.

² Valerii Tishkov, “On Nation and Nationalism,” in *Essays on Theory of Politics of Ethnicity in Russia* (Moscow: University of Ethnology and Anthropology, RAN, 1997), 84-85.

played much more important political role in the state.³ The concept of the self-determination was almost forgotten. The word nationalism itself in the USSR, unlike in some European states, had nothing to do with creation of the nation and state or unification of the people under the common cultural and political umbrella. In contrast, it was used as a synonym of separatism, aggression and had very negative inclinations.⁴

With the collapse of the system, nationalism became the only available source of ideology in all the parts of the union. It resulted in the ideas of separatism in all parts of the union, including the RF. Various units started to declare their sovereignty and the right for self-determination began to matter again.⁵ The RF was the only post-Soviet state that had to deal not only with the complicated ethnic picture but also with federal structure. Drafting of the new constitution of the RF in early 1990s was not an easy process due to various reasons and had to balance multi-ethnicity and federal structure of the state. The units that used to be autonomous republics during the Soviet Union fought for the special status with several key privileges whereas other units were against any kind of distinction among the units. The equal treatment of all units and the exclusion of the right to succeed for all was the main demand of the regional units that were not ethnic republics.⁶ New constitution had to balance these diversities, unity of the peoples and satisfy every party. Basic human rights were not enough to do so, as a result the RF had to act through the ethno-national politics and include multi-ethnicity as a key base for the formation and later functioning of the state. In order to make sure that the state is stable, the equality of the people had to be included in the Constitution. It was made through various

³ Leokadia Drobizheva, *Sociology of Inter-Ethnic Tolerance* (Moscow: Publishing House of the University of Sociology RAN, 2003), 34.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

⁵ Leokadia Drobizheva, *Social Problems of the Inter-National Relation in post-Soviet Russia* (Moscow: Publishing House of the University of Sociology RAN, Center of common to all mankind values, 2003), 28.

⁶ Anuradha M. Chenoy, "Regional Politics in Russia," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 29, No. 27 (1994): 1647-1651.

articles that clearly addressed multi-national nature of the state, such as linguistic laws, ethnic units, and right for the national development.

Nevertheless, it is obvious that there is no equality neither between minorities nor federal units. The equality of the minorities exists only on paper and some of them enjoy more rights than others or rather some units are more equal than others. It seems that the confusing formulation of laws, historical ties and importance of the peoples, economic opportunities and individual political actors are the main determinants of the status of the minority and the federal unit that they are entitled to. The asymmetrical federal structure of the state strengthens this tendency even further. I would like to research it on the example of Tatarstan as a unit and Tatars as a minority entitled to this unit. So the question is “What is behind the special status of Tatarstan within the Russian Federation?” To answer it I will have to analyze the specific political, cultural, economic, and geographic preconditions of the unit, as well as legal documentation.

Minorities in the state are rather the rule than the exception nowadays, where as ethno-federal structures are not very common. In order to exist, the heterogeneous society has to agree on basic things, such as how to rule and who is the subject of the rule. It is widely accepted that the rule should be democratic but not simply turned into tyranny of majority. One of the ways to solve this problem is to give the minorities right to decide on some issues on their own which is granting self-determination rights.

Before that right for self-determination itself should be looked at. It is not enough to be a minority in order to express the claim for certain rights and freedoms, the others, more importantly, the political decision-making bodies, should also recognize the group as a minority and be ready to ascribe them to these rights. Charles Taylor in “The Politics of Recognition”

highlights this problem. There are two sides of the argument. “For one, the principle of equal respect requires that we treat people in a difference-blind fashion.”⁷ This means to consider people equal and same and not to grant any special rights because no one is “special”. This already contradicts the majority-minority relations in the state. “For the other, we have to recognize and even foster particularity.”⁸ The second approach is more applicable for my research, as it highlights the necessity of the different treatment of the ethnic group that constitutes the majority and the minorities in the state. The term “self-determination” itself is often misused nowadays. For Donald L. Horowitz, the right of self-determination of the peoples goes hand in hand with the right to choose their own form of governance. “Self-determination is to ethnic groups what moral autonomy is to individuals.”⁹

Self-governance of the minority within the state, or autonomy, is not a simple topic to address because of the outcomes it may cause and the motives of the minority. If the end point is the self-rule itself, then granting autonomy can stop or help avoid the conflict. Another case appears when autonomy serves the base for secession which creates new problems. Hurst Hannum discusses both outcomes, highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of the autonomy of the certain region as a way to settle ethnic conflicts. The most important thing for him is to understand that the granting of autonomy does not put a final stop in the conflict. Because of the vagueness of the term, the leaders of the minority might see it only as the first step towards full independence of the territory.¹⁰ Nevertheless, autonomy can settle two main

⁷ Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 43.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁹ Donald L. Horowitz, “The Cracked Foundations of the Right to Secede,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (April, 2003): 7.

¹⁰ Hurst Hannum, “Territorial Autonomy: Permanent Solution or Step toward Secession?” http://www.zef.de/download/ethnic_conflict/hannum.pdf.

claims of the parties that are in conflict – it makes sure that minorities are not disadvantaged and preserves the territorial integrity of the state. This may lead to the federal structure of the state.

Federalism is mostly suitable for territorially large or/and ethnically diverse states. For the RF, being the biggest country in the world and having around 120 ethnicities sharing the state, federalism seems the only possible option. Furthermore, federalism seems to bring people and officials closer which make the latter correspond to the needs of the former more effectively and efficiently. As with autonomy, the danger of secession should not be forgotten, however. As it was stated above, the RF is ethno-federal state. Graham Smith in “Federalism: The Multiethnic Challenge” specifically focuses on the federations with complex ethnic situation. In ideal case, “[federation] is above all an organizing principle, containing institutions and structures and legitimized on the basis of providing for and celebrating both unity and difference.”¹¹ Nevertheless, this is not always the case due to several obstacles – not all federations are built around democratic principles, asymmetry can be considered as a way towards ethnic tensions, and danger of ‘tyranny by minority’.

When it comes to asymmetric federalism, Michael Burgess explicitly highlights that asymmetry of the federalism should not be taken as something negative. “In practice, asymmetry reflects difference; it does not create it.”¹² There are several preconditions for asymmetry as well as outcomes. Asymmetry is also discussed by Kahn but in rather negative prospective. For him, asymmetry represents unequal treatment of the units when some unit is better off from the asymmetry whereas others are worse off.¹³ Nevertheless, the federal system in the FR is

¹¹ Graham Smith, “Mapping the Federal Condition: Ideology, Political Practice and Social Justice,” in *Federalism: The Multiethnic Challenge*, ed. Graham Smith (New York, NY: Longman Publishing, 1995), 7.

¹² Michael Burgess, “Asymmetrical federalism and federation,” in *Comparative Federalism. Theory and practice* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 221.

¹³ Jeffrey Kahn, *Federalism, Democratization, and the Rule of Law in Russia* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2002), 47.

asymmetric and this should not be seen as something purely negative. The federation contains what we can call “ethnic units”, which are design to be the homeland for particular ethnic groups, and regions with Russian majority.

The federal structure of the state, with the focus on asymmetry and ethno-federalism, represents an interesting case. The fact that most authors refer to federalism with accordance to democracy also raises an issue because it will be wrong to assume that the RF is fully democratic state, especially taking into account recent trends towards centralization. As Donna Barry also stresses, it is should not be forgotten, however, that for ethnic federal units, republics, autonomy of the unit is not only the way to control a certain territory but also a very symbolic gesture of self-determination of the minorities in a bigger state.¹⁴

In my research I would like to show that Tatarstan and the self-determination rights it was granted officially, including autonomous republic, as well as some other aspects that are applicable only to this particular case can be considered as a successful example of granting autonomy to the unit and giving self-determination rights to the minority, with several shortcomings though. This will be a qualitative research that mostly will rely on available Russian and English language literature, as well as both Constitutions (the RF and Tatarstan), bilateral agreements between the RF and Tatarstan, as well as other official documentation. It will be analyzed in order to make critical evaluation and answer my questions.

The federal structure of the RF should be elaborated on before we can talk about specific units and its position in the federation. The historical development of the unit and its people within the context of the general history of the federation is also very important to note. Before doing so it is important to look at the theoretical picture on the minorities, their rights, self-

¹⁴ Donna Bahry, “The New Federalism and the Paradoxes of Regional Sovereignty in Russia,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Ph.D. Program in Political Science of the City University of New York, 2005), 127-146.

determination and self-rule. The path towards the current status of the unit during early 1990s serves as a base in this particular case and should not to be underestimated. Furthermore such elements as economic opportunities, first presidents of the RF and Tatarstan, their role and the rise of Islam should also be considered. The current trends towards more centralized federation and withdrawal of some rights from the units should also not be ignored in order to prove the hypothesis state above. Some minor comparative examples, within the RF and in other unitary and federal states will be used in order to elaborate on the situation further.

Chapter 1: Federal Structure of the Russian Federation with the Special Focus on the Republics

Federal structure of the RF is the consequence of the historical circumstances that took place in the beginning of the XX century. Before that Russian Empire was a unitary state, though divided into several units. The Constitution of 1918 of the Russian Social Federal Soviet Republic (RSFSR) declared the federal principle of organization of the state – “The Russian Soviet Republic is organized on the basis of a free union of free nations, as a federation of soviet national republics.”¹⁵ It was already asymmetrical with various types of units, with autonomous republic having the highest level of autonomy. Next constitution of 1937 defined 17 autonomous republics and 6 autonomous regions, which later in 1978 was changed to 16 republics, 5 regions and 10 autonomous districts.¹⁶ In the Constitution of 1978 was also state the right of all 16 Soviet states to leave the USSR voluntarily, which is not the case of the present RF. It should be noted, however, that the USSR constitution has more symbolic than practical meaning. It still was very centralized state with strict vertical hierarchy of the governmental bodies.

1.1 The Status of the Republic – Self-determination or Sovereignty?

Current constitution of the RF states that it is a federal state with 89 federal units of various structures with, nevertheless, equal relations with the federal government. There are,

¹⁵ The Constitution of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic of 1918, adopted by the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets, July 18, 1918, Article 1, Chapter 1, accessed April 14, 2012. <http://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/government/constitution/1918/article1.htm>.

¹⁶ Nicholas J. Lynn and Alexei V. Novikov, “Refederalizing Russia: Debates on the Idea of Federalism in Russia,” *Publius*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (1997): 190.

however, several problems that are important to mention. First of all, current political trends are directed towards more vertical and strict structure of the federation. This is the shortcoming of the biggest problem in the federal structure of the RF. The Constitution was drafted during early 1990s, which is known in Russia as a “parade of sovereignties”, meaning that many units started to declare their independence and sovereignty during the transitional period of Russia from the part of the USSR toward independent democratic state. The text and the structure of it were very confusing. Sometimes it is very hard to understand where federal rights and responsibilities stop and regional laws come to power. This is one of the biggest problems in the current RF and there are various attempts to solve it.

Legally, any regional law that does not come to compliance with the federal one has no power, as only federal laws rule on the whole territory of the RF. Nevertheless, in the units this principle is often ignored, especially in the republics. Some of them deliberately declare the highest status of their law on the territory above the federal one, ignoring the fact that they are still only the part of the bigger Russian state. Among these states are Saha, Komi, Bashkortostan and Tatarstan.

To understand why this is happening it is important to look at the rights, responsibilities and structure of the autonomous republics and their relations with the federation. As the constitution of the RF states, Republic is a state within the Federation and it possesses all attributes of the sovereign state on its territory.¹⁷ It has a right to adopt Constitution, whereas other types of units can have only the set of regulations. Also only republics can have the President, Parliament, government and judicial body. Another important aspect is the official language – only republics can declare any other language as an official on the territory of the unit, together with Russian. Territorial principle of the organization of the republics which was

¹⁷ The Constitution of the Russian Federation, Article 5.

often drawn in the Soviet times is still preserved in the modern RF and is not allowed to be changed without permission of the federal government. The status of the republic also cannot be changed in unilateral manner. This is, however, true for any unit.

Unlike any other units republics possess the title of the state, this, however, has nothing to do with independence or sovereignty in practice, no matter how much some republics try to declare their sovereign status. Republics were created and their borders were established in early 1920s, in the period where the importance of national or ethnic self-determination was one of the key arguments which Bolsheviks used in order to get the support of multinational population of Russia.¹⁸ So it can be concluded that various ethnic groups of the RF enjoy their own federal units, the republics, because of the policy of the USSR. This contradicts the claims that some units, Tatarstan being the most active among them, express. In early 1990s Tatarstan included the term “sovereign” in their Constitution, falsely assuming that the RF is the state composed with the permission of the units, or rather the unifying force of the various units that agree to coexist under the common umbrella of the federation. Historically, however, this is not the case at all. Talking about Tatarstan specifically, it should be noted that during the Soviet times, it never had as many privileges as in the RF.

The whole federal structure of the RF is build around the concept of the right for self-determination of the nation, or at least is claimed to be so. Nevertheless, this was the main reason for some of the units to express separatist ideas in early 1990s, Tatarstan being one of them. The most important thing about self-determination of the nations is the fact that this right is often granted to those peoples who are discriminated against or mistreated by the majority. Peoples who strive for such rights are often deprived of some basic human rights and freedoms, one of

¹⁸ Leon Trotsky, “Between Red and White,” *Workers Vanguard*, No. 919 (1922), accessed April 14, 2012. <http://www.icl-fi.org/print/english/wv/919/qotw.html>.

the most important is the right for taking political decisions that affect the lives of the members of the community. This was, however, never the case in the RF. So when stating the right for self-determination, the composers of the Constitution included this right but specifically highlighted that none of the peoples have special status in the federation.¹⁹ The biggest stress was put on the decree of the UN on minorities, stating that the right of self-determination of any nation cannot put under the treat or violate the integrity of the borders of the state.²⁰ For the RF in 1990s this was one of the most important points. Constitution states that “the federal structure of the RF is established on its state integrity.”²¹ It is expressed in the territorial unity, common economic space, which does not allow any customs services or tax barriers between the units,²² supremacy of the federal laws²³ and absence of the right of the units to leave the federation in the unilateral way.

When it comes to territorial integrity of the RF and its units, the key thing here is inability of any unit voluntarily leave the federation. This does not cause any problems as since 1994 none of the units express this kind of will. After the war in Chechnya, which started with separatist ideas, and claims of Tatarstan on their independence, which was quickly settle with bilateral agreement, the integrity of the RF is not under any threat. The territories of the unit, however, sometimes cause some problems. The most widely spread is the question of the natural resources and the claims that the peoples of the unit has a right to manage them without federal interference. This is illegitimate due to two main reasons. First, constitutionally the right to manage resources is divided between federal and local government so it is unconstitutional for

¹⁹ The Constitution of the Russian Federation, Article 5 (4).

²⁰ Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, accessed April 14, 2012. <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/47/a47r135.htm>.

²¹ The Constitution of the Russian Federation, Article 5 (3).

²² The Constitution of the Russian Federation, Article 8.

²³ The Constitution of the Russian Federation, Article 4.

the units to claim the ultimate right.²⁴ The second reason is more complex. The claim on the management of the resources is built around the self-determination right. The peoples inhabit the territory that historically was theirs and it happen to have resources, so these peoples are free to be in charge of them. This brings us to one of the points above – the territories of the current republics with the RF were drawn by the Soviets, often ignoring the historical inhabitants but taking into account only administrative and bureaucratic reasons. So the current border of the units in some cases has little to do with the historical borders of this or that people. This issue is very important, as Tatarstan possesses huge amount of gas and oil on its territory.

The question about resources is often followed by the issue of sovereignty, which was solved only as late as in 2000 with the issued by Constitutional Court of the RF decree, stating that units do not possess any sovereignty, it belongs to the RF as a whole. This is also has to do with the equal status of all units declared in the Constitution. According to it, any unit is equal in its relations with the federation and federal bodies. If one or several units are “sovereign” the equality principle is clearly violated. The principle itself, however, is also under big question mark. It is deliberately highlighted that units are equal in their relations with the federal bodies. Nevertheless, little indicates that they are equal among each other. The opposite, of course, is not clearly stated but analysis of the Constitution and other federal laws leads to this conclusion.

Only republics can have their own constitution and three branches of the government, languages of the titular nations can be official only in republics, even though some other autonomous units are also established with principle of self-determination of nations in mind. “Republics have a right to establish their languages as official. In governmental bodies, local bodies of self-governance, state institutions of the republics they are used along with official

²⁴ The Constitution of the Russian Federation, Article 72 (4).

language of the Russian Federation” (Russian).²⁵ More importantly republics have a right to distinguish their citizenship documents (passport) from the documents issued in other units. However, citizens of the republics are automatically Russian citizens.

1.2 Structure and its Shortcomings

Coming back to the general structure of the RF, it is important to note that as any other unitary or federal state it is based on the unitary system of governmental power. There are federal three branches of the government and also several vital issues that are solved only at the federal level. Among them are federal structure and the territory of the RF, ratification of any changes in the Constitution, regulation of the rights and freedoms of the people, with special attention to the minorities, several important economic and legal issues, security, etc.²⁶ What is more interesting is the chapter in the Constitution that regulates the questions that supposed to be solved by the federation and units together. Among them are guaranteeing that local and federal legal systems come to compliance, regulation of the rights and freedoms of all people, including minorities, question of territory and resources, as well as issues of culture, education and science, protection of the indigenous peoples and their natural habitat, etc.²⁷ This particular chapter causes a lot of questions.

First of all, when the question is under the jurisdiction of both, local and federal government, who is responsible for the implementation and fulfillment of it? Another big issue is the fact that several points, such as protection of rights and freedoms of the people, are stated in the both chapter. This brings us the question above – what level is in charge of these issues? The

²⁵ The Constitution of the Russian Federation, Article 68 (2).

²⁶ The Constitution of the Russian Federation, Article 71.

²⁷ The Constitution of the Russian Federation, Article 72.

third problem is the fact that the compliance of the local and federal legal documents and regulations sometimes is only a principle on the paper and has nothing to do with the reality. So two documents can contradict each other, which often is the case, and it is hard to understand what law is legitimate where. Tatarstan actually is a demonstrative case, as by 2000 there were more than 40 point of the local legal documentation that did not come to compliance with the federal one.²⁸ Nevertheless, little was done to change the situation. Furthermore, before the Presidency of the V. Putin the Constitution of Tatarstan was declared to be the supreme document of the territory of the unit, whereas Constitution of the RF had second meaning.

When it comes to other types of units, it is important to just briefly note how they are different in their status in practice in order to highlight the lack of equality between the units. Other types of units also possess the right to issue local legislature and control the territory, if it does not threaten the integrity of the RF. Some autonomous regions are also built around the principle of the self-determination of nations, and these nationals do not always constitute the majority of the territory of the unit. For example, in Nenect Autonomous region Nenect people constitute only 16.5%, whereas in Hanty-Mansisk region Hanty make up as low as 1.4% of the total population of the unit.²⁹ Nevertheless, it is claimed that autonomy is a way to secure the right of the people to govern and choose their way of the national and cultural development. None of the units, however, can have their own state government, constitution or local language as official. Unlike republics, they do not have their state symbols, like hymn and flag. So it is clear that the status of republics brings more freedom to the unit in terms of governance of the

²⁸ Larisa Petrenko, "Constitution of Tatarstan," *Vestnik Novgorodskii*, June 11, 2001, accessed April 20, 2012. <http://nnovobzor.ru/article.php?id=4221>.

²⁹ "Population, demography, migration and national composition," accessed April 20, 2012. <http://www.yamal.ru/new/obinf03.htm>.

territory and expression of the culture and traditions of the titular nations, even if they are not a majority in the unit (for example, Bashkortostan, where Tatars constitute the majority).

Coming back to the contradictions between federal and local constitution, there is also another point that complicates the federal structure and relation of the units even further. Besides these legal documents, the federal government and the units sometimes also sign so called bilateral agreements. These are documents that describe the relations of the center with the specific unit only. This puts the asymmetry and inequality of the units to the next level. The first such agreement was sighted between the RF and Republic of Tatarstan. This was mainly the mean to stop separatist claims but also set as an example for other units, not only republics, that started to demand similar agreements. The role and place of these documents in the legal structure of the federation is very unclear. The Constitution highlights that “that relationships between the federal authorities and subjects of the federation are regulated by the Constitution, the 1992 Federation Treaty, and other treaties.”³⁰ Besides the fact that Federal Constitution is the supreme source of rights and obligations, there is no other hierarchy in the legal documentation which leads to the confusion.

The last important point on the structure of the RF has to do with the recent more vertical policy of the federal government. In 2004 the law on “Common principles of organization of the legislative and executive bodies of the state power of the units of the Russian Federation” was passed. The logic behind this law is the ability of the President of the RF not only to appoint the heads of the units but also to dismiss them with the vague reasons “in connection with the lost of trust of the President of the RF, inappropriate execution of his or her responsibilities and in other cases included in the present federal law”. Taking into account not very democratic nature of the

³⁰ Nicholas J. Lynn and Alexei V. Novikov, “Refederalizing Russia: Debates on the Idea of Federalism in Russia,” *Publius*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (1997), 199.

Russian state, this law brings vertical structure of the government to the whole new level. The most recent use of this law was in 2010 when the mayor of Moscow was dismissed due to lost of the trust which cause a lot of debates.³¹ So far this law was used couple of time but none of the presidents of the republics was dismissed.

To do so in other than republic units can cause discontent among Russian population, as it is seen as a very undemocratic practice and puts under the threat the stability of the state. The dismiss of the head of the unit which was previously elected can be seen as an example of the disrespect of the will of the people and the extraction of the right for the self-rule. Nevertheless, to do so in the titular republic can cause even more serious problems, exactly because of the right for self-determination. If this is one of the key principles of the RF, dismiss of the head means that dismiss of this right. This particular law shows that there is no harmony between the multiculturalism and unity in the RF. It is also ruins already fragile balance between federal and local relations and interests. Lastly, it puts under the question the federal structure of the RF and resembles the so-called “federal” practices of the USSR.

Talking specifically about Tatarstan as a unit of the federation, it should be noted that it was first Autonomous republic within RSFSR that claimed their right to form a separate unit or even independent republic. These demands were based on the claims for self-determination of the Tatar people. So the claims were both, territorial and cultural. Nevertheless, the republic of Tatarstan was never applicable for the purpose of being the state of Tatar people. First of all, by 1989 Tatars constituted only a slight majority according to unofficial data – 52%. Official census indicated even lower number – 48.5% with more than 40% of the population being Russians.³²

³¹ Sergey Guneev, “Dismiss of Lujkov: President had no choice,” *Ria Novosti*, September 28, 2010, accessed April 20, 2012. <http://ria.ru/politics/20100928/280062074.html>.

³² Marie Bennigsen Broxup, “Tatarstan and the Tatars,” in *The Nationalities Question in the post-Soviet States* (London: Longman, 1996), 75.

Secondly, huge number of ethnic Tatars was dispersed across the federation and post-Soviet states. Around 26% of all Tatars inhabiting the USSR lived in Tatarstan.³³ This proves the point that the border served rather administrative purposes than were the expression of the right for self-determination. In order to understand what kind of claims and why were made between 1990 and 1994 it is important to understand the previous path of the relationship between Tatars, Tatarstan and Russian Empire, later the RSFSR and the Russian Federation, which will be discussed in details in Chapters 3 and 4.

To conclude, the federal structure of the RF is very complicated not only because of the vast territory and complex ethnic composition of the state but also because of the historical circumstances and legal aspects. For the first time in history the leader of the RF had to make democratic legal system that would work but were not prepared for it. The chaotic events of the 1990s led to the various unilateral demands for sovereignty, political struggles, and as a result very complex, often contradictory legal status of the units of the RF. As a result, it is hard to understand what legal document has the final ultimate power and what the status of this or that unit is. The presence of such units as republics, that ascribes totally different meaning than, for example, region, calls for the necessary strict control over the jurisdiction of the center and the unit. The distinction between the two is, however, not always clear.

This creates a federal system that is not only asymmetric due to various legal types of units but also because of the different treatment of them in practice. Republics clearly enjoy more rights and freedoms. As all republics are named after some titular nation, these rights are often ascribed to the peoples in general. This ethno-federalism can be seen as a democratic tool for the implementation of the right for self-determination of the ethnicities that do not enjoy their

³³Marie Bennigsen Broxup, "Tatarstan and the Tatars," in *The Nationalities Question in the post-Soviet States* (London: Longman, 1996), 75.

own state. It can as well cause some problems. Furthermore, the legal aspect is not the only important reasons for the special in practice status of the unit. Historical ties, economic opportunities, as well as politically active individuals, also contribute to it. All these aspects are present in the relations between the federal government and the Republic of Tatarstan.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Background – from Minority Rights to Federal Unit

After 70 years of totalitarian regime, where everything was decided in Moscow, which had followed the Tsarist times, when only personal decisions mattered, in 1991 the RF first faced the need in the real constitution that would matter in practice and not be just a symbol. The federal structure of the state and two strong nationalist and even separatist movements – in Tatarstan and Chechnya – complicated the case even further. Even though, the USSR was the federal multinational state, the real problem was in the non-practical nature of this structure. Graham Smith deliberately highlights that the problems that were partly the cause of the dissolution of the Soviet Union translated into the RF.³⁴ Ethnicity and ethnic conflicts became an issue in the USSR as late as in 1980s but were never directly dealt with and were considered secondary. The RF took into account this problem and included such terms as “self-determination of minorities” in the Constitution. Nevertheless, the individual rights remained more important than group rights. Among other problems are growing ethnic awareness of non-Russian population, great economic gap between some ethnically based republics and the center and low level of commitment towards democratization. As a result there are doubts about democratic federal future of the RF.

People started to organize themselves in some kind of societies from the very beginning of the history but such formation as “state” as we see it right now is not an ancient creation. The whole understanding of the state was changed and now both, the state as a government, and the

³⁴ Graham Smith, “Federation, Defederation and Refederation: from the Soviet Union to Russian Statehood,” in *Federalism: The Multiethnic Challenge*, ed. Graham Smith (New York, NY: Longman Publishing, 1995), 157-179.

subject of the state, the people, have mutual rights and obligations. On the global scale, the states are often referred to as something homogeneous and unitary. The whole complex society is referred to as “Japan” or “France” without taking into account how multifaceted the population of these states is.

In order to exist, society has to agree on basic things and the voices of the minorities also should be heard. As Vincent Ostrom points out, referring to Hobbes, democracy should be ruled by assemblies but not simple one when all people just come together, the rule of law should also exist.³⁵ The main problem with the rule by assemblies was the fact that states tended to grow and as they did so the voices of the people became less important and the power of the government grew. As Montesquieu puts it “if a republic be small, it is destroyed by foreign forces; if it be large, it is ruined by internal imperfection”.³⁶ These imperfection can come from the fact that state is inhabited by the people who have different demands and consider different issues to be important. These can be various social groups but for my research the most important will be ethnic groups who share one state and try to put forward their interests without causing ethnic conflicts and trying to coexist. In case of the RF, the largest state in the world, this particular problem of how to rule such vast territory is a huge issue.

One of the ways to solve this problem is to give people the right to decide on some issues on their own. In order to do so, the government should acknowledge that the society is not ethnically homogeneous. Heterogeneity often means that only a small portion of the population varies from the majority, which means that there is a minority in the state. Furthermore, it is desirable to leave it this way rather than to try to even it up by the means of assimilation or more

³⁵ Vincent Ostrom, “A Conceptual-Computational Logic for Federal Systems of Governance,” in *Constitutional Design and Power-sharing in the Post-modern Epoch*, ed. Daniel J. Elazar (University Press of America, Inc., 1991), 7-8.

³⁶ Charles Louis de Secondat Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws*, ed. David Wallace Carrithers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 181.

radical means such as extermination or cleansing. So the minorities should be granted some rights as it is already widely acknowledged that individual human rights, which are guaranteed in every democratic state, are no longer enough. Minorities require the protection and special rights. One of the most important rights that the government can grant to the minority is the rights of self-determination. If it is not only cultural but also political self-determination, minority can strive for territorial autonomy. The furthest where the state can go in this issue is granting to the minority the self-governed unit within it, which basically turns unitary state into federal. This chapter will follow this pattern from minority protection to federalism.

When it comes to the RF, there are more than 120 different ethnic groups that constitute the state. It is also the biggest in terms of territory country in the world and the only possible way to rule it is the division of it into units. Minorities are protected and their rights are guaranteed by the Constitution of the RF. Article 26 guarantees the right of the citizens of the RF to state their ethnic belonging and the usage of the native language in communication, education and art. Furthermore, the cultural self-determination of the peoples of the RF is not restricted. The political autonomy based on the ethnicity is also the right granted to some ethnic groups. The biggest question, however, remains the asymmetrical structure of the state. Some units of the federation are ethnic, which raises the point of ethno-federalism of the RF, whereas other units are based on the regionalism. Furthermore, the treatment of the ethnic units is also different in practice, even though equal on paper. So the question of minorities in the RF should be raised, as well as the unequal treatment of them with regard to the asymmetrical federal system.

2.1 Protection of Minorities and their Rights

National or ethnic minorities or indigenous people exist in every state. As the movement toward the protection of minorities is a world-wide issue now, it is impossible for states to ignore it. Various international organizations, starting since World War I, try to draw attention to the issues of the minorities and put forward their rights. Nevertheless, this concern at the beginning was more local than global. Three main organizations that became interested in the minority rights were the European Union, the Council of Europe and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.³⁷ From the very name of these organizations it is clear that this trend toward the recognition of the minorities and their problems started in Europe. Even though some years later this concern reached the United Nations, where even were developed some “mechanisms to promote minority rights, including a Working Group on Minorities and an Independent Expert on Minority Issues”³⁸ still not a lot of progress has been reached in other parts of the world. The concern with the minorities in the Council of Europe was born out of the Yugoslav War in order to stop the discrimination. Right now it is functioning as a protector of the minorities and guarantee of their rights.³⁹ Even though there are mechanisms to make sure that the Convention that is developed by the Council is followed by those states that ratified it, still the implementation of the principles fully depends on the commitment of the individual states, which in some cases slow down the process.

It is wrong to assume, however, that Europe is the only part of the world that is concerned about minorities. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of Will Kymlicka’s

³⁷ Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Odysseys. Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 36-37.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

³⁹ “Fostering diversity: when equality matches variety,” *Council of Europe*, accessed May 2, 2012. <http://www.coe.int/what-we-do/human-rights/national-minorities>.

contribution to this topic with his focus being on Canada. Kymlicka is looking at three levels of political community – minorities, nations and transnational institutions. The main focus of the scholars in this area is nation-states. As the state of one nation was never the reality and is not right now and neither the split of multinational states nor the subordination or the destruction of minorities is desirable, he insists that the future of the states is not in one-nation but rather in multinational states with the protection of minority rights and provision of some level of self-governance for them.⁴⁰

The author goes further by distinguishing the minorities and saying that they often demand different rights. The main distinction should be made between national minorities, which are present on the territory of the country due to historical circumstances, and immigrants. Latter do not usually demand any cultural or group rights, whereas the former do. The problem is in assimilation policies of the state or simply denial of the fact that minorities exist on the territory of the state.⁴¹ If the state does recognize the minorities and they are organized, there are three basic types or forms of rights that national or ethnic minorities can demand – self-governing, polyethnic and special representation rights.⁴² In respect to my research, the first set of rights represents the biggest interest, as Tatars are granted self-governing rights. Nevertheless, they also enjoy polyethnic rights, as they are not afraid to express their belonging to Tatar nation and are not discriminated. Special representation rights are not there but only because they already have their own federal unit. No matter how just the theory and various international conventions

⁴⁰ Will Kymlicka, “Cosmopolitanism, Nation-States, and Minority Nationalism,” in *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship*, co-authored with Christine Straehle (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 221-241.

⁴¹ Will Kymlicka, “Misunderstanding Nationalism,” in *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 243-253.

⁴² Will Kymlicka. “The Politics of Multiculturalism,” in *Multicultural Citizenship. A liberal theory of Minority Rights* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), 27-33.

may be, Geoff Gilbert helpfully point out the fact that the status of minorities, their privileges or discrimination still fully depend on the will of the state.⁴³

2.2 Right for Self-determination

The conclusion that can be drawn from the above is the following – it is not enough to be a minority in order to express the claim for certain rights and freedoms, the others should also recognize the group. Charles Taylor stresses the importance of the survival of the certain groups. If we refer this to minorities, the circumstances should be built in such way, that the threat of the assimilation of the minor group should be wiped out. People should be free to express their views, either individually or collectively, as an ethnic group. Taylor goes further by claiming that “free people are self-governing people.”⁴⁴ For him self-determination is just a little step from self-respect towards the main goal – self-rule. He, however, rejects the idea that every nation has to become a state, putting forward the structure of the state where minorities are let to govern the issues that are most important for them, highlighting the advantages of the federal structure.⁴⁵ His discussion is mostly based not on the cultural but territorial and political self-determination of nations that happen not to have their own state.

Importantly the right to self-determination of the nation is rarely the end point. Rather it is the beginning of the self-rule, autonomy and even the secession movement. This term is handled with special care not because it is negative itself but rather because of the outcomes it may lead to. If the national or ethnic minority is granted or not restricted to express its right for

⁴³ Geoff Gilbert, “Religio-Nationalist Minorities and the Development of Minority Rights Law,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 389-410.

⁴⁴ Charles Taylor, “Why Do Nations Have to Become States?” in *Reconciling the Solitudes. Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*, ed. Guy Laforest (Canada: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), 41.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 53-58.

self-determination within the bigger state, there is always a threat that it would go further. Nevertheless, often the end point is not the dissolution of the state that let this right to be exercised, but the autonomy of the minority, that can be both, costly for the majority or beneficial for the both parties.

When it comes to Russia, the right of self-determination was granted not after the discrimination or mistreatment of the minorities, but before it, in order to prevent this on the legal level from the very beginning. However, more and more often the criticism of the reforms of Vladimir Putin during his presidency aiming towards re-centralization of the federation is heard. More and more autonomy is taken away from the regions and federal units leaving a strong feeling of de-democratization of the whole state. The special attention should be given to the unclear constitutional definition of the ethnic minorities, poor legal base for minority protection and de-facto hierarchy of the ethnic groups.⁴⁶ This recent trends make Russia depart from the core principles of federalism.

2.3 Autonomy – Settling the Conflict or Step Towards Secession?

Self-governance of the minority within the state, or autonomy, can be either a helpful tool to stop or the lever to escalate the conflict. It can either preserve the borders or set the dispute over them. For Hannum, for example, the people and their security come first, not the integrity of the borders. “When responding to claims of self-determination, protecting basic human rights should be policy-makers’ foremost goal.”⁴⁷ He does not approve the secession movements and says that autonomy of certain regions that more or less correspond to the ethnic borders is

⁴⁶ Andreas Heinemann-Gruder, “Federal discourses, minority rights, and conflict transformation,” in *Federalism and Local Politics in Russia*, ed. Cameron Ross and Adrian Campbell (UK: T & F Books, 2008), 55-81.

⁴⁷ Hurst Hannum, “The Specter of Secession,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 77, No. 2 (March/April, 1998): 15.

enough, if the members of the minority group are not discriminated against. Not every ethnicity or nation must have a state. He refers to several examples, such as Spain and the United Kingdom, that correspond to his claim.

The specific structure of Spain leaves room for the debates on how unitary the state really is. Taking into account national minorities, more precisely Basques and Catalans, Spain has so called Autonomous Communities System allowing certain minorities maintain high level of autonomy and self-rule. The Basque Country, for example, is treated differently constitutionally.⁴⁸ The similar case is Scotland in the UK, which represents an interesting comparative case. Scotland enjoys a high level of autonomy, with such affair as judiciary, education, defense, foreign affairs, and even fiscal policies being under the local control. Even though, only a little more than one per cent uses Gaelic, it is an official language together with English on the territory of Scotland.⁴⁹ Both cases represent the state with unitary system but the autonomous regions, where the ethnic minorities enjoy self-rule in the issues that are important for them. But the picture is not as bright as it may seem. The biggest threat of the autonomy, the secession, is articulated in both cases, as there are so called independence movements from the sides of both minorities.

It is no longer the case that autonomy is treated as an interstate issue, as more and more international actors get involved in this topic. Hans-Joachim Heitze highlights that there is no internationally accepted rule or term for either “national minorities” and “autonomy” and it is still decision of the ruling majority whether to grant an autonomy or not. Nevertheless, “it is more likely that an autonomous entity gets more international support than a minority without a

⁴⁸ Montserrat Guibernau, “Spain: a Federation in the Making?” in *Federalism: The Multiethnic Challenge*, ed. Graham Smith (New York, NY: Longman Publishing, 1995), 239-254.

⁴⁹ Daniel J. Elazar, “United Kingdom,” in *Federal Systems of the World: A Handbook of Federal, Confederal and Autonomy Arrangements* (UK: Longman Group UK Limited, 1991), 286-303.

special status.”⁵⁰ Autonomy, of course, is not the perfect solution for all conflict cases as it can plant secession ideas within the minority but it can also settle the conflict. The secession, however, is not the only further step after autonomy is granted. The federal structure of the state, rather than unitary, should be considered as well.

As one of the indicators of autonomy of the state or unit is the ability to establish international ties with other states, some points on the achievements of Tatarstan in this field should be noted. One of the obvious problems is the fact that Tatarstan is represented by various means in many states, whereas it hosts only 1 mission from Turkey. This highlights the fact that no matter how autonomous the unit might be, Moscow is still in charge of international connections. Nevertheless, “the list of agreements signed by the government of Tatarstan includes over 50 documents (international agreements, declarations, protocols on cooperation or intentions and memoranda). From this list, 14 agreements are with foreign states.”⁵¹ Overall, Tatarstan is trying to prove its sovereignty by various means, such as even disagreement with the federal position on international questions, for example the issue of Kosovo. This will be discussed in details later.

2.4 Federalism

The key difference of the federal system is that it contains not only horizontal division of power but also vertical. Of course, it is necessary to highlight that most authors refer to federalism as a system that can work only under democratic rule. That is why division of powers

⁵⁰ Hans-Joachim Haintze, “Implementation of Minority Rights through the Devolution of Powers – The Concept of Autonomy Reconsidered,” *International Journal of Minority of Group Rights*, Vol. 9 (2002): 342.

⁵¹ Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, “Paradiplomacy in the Russian Regions: Tatarstan's Search for Statehood,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Taylor & Francis, Ltd., 2003): 617.

is taken into account. Ramesh Dikshit explicitly underlines that "...federalism is essentially a democratic phenomenon, or at least that it is incompatible with dictatorial forms of the government."⁵² There are other features that make federalism work. Among them are written constitution and "explicitly formulated exclusive and concurrent areas of jurisdiction."⁵³ So in order to federalism to work properly, not only the power should be divided on the several levels but also strict rule of law should be present in order to make sure that there is no abuse of power at any level. In this case federal structure helps people and government come closer to each other. Frank L. Wilson also stresses that even unitary and more or less homogeneous states recently started to become more decentralized.⁵⁴ This indicates that division of powers seems to be recognized as more effective tool than centralized power of the center.

The fact that federalism is closely related to democracy was also highlighted by Arend Lijphart when he discussed consociational democracy. For him, it is the best way to deal with heterogeneous societies. Consociational has four basic characteristics – governance of the state by means of a grand coalition; the mutual veto; proportionality; and autonomy of the units. Last point represents the biggest interest for my research. The purpose of the consociational democracy is not to wipe out the differences of the population but rather make various groups coexist with mutual respect. Lijphart sees federalism with autonomous regions as the best way to make this coexistence work.⁵⁵ Other options – assimilation and partition – seem to be less democratic and peaceful. This particular point, however, imposes on the government the biggest cost, as federations are usually expensive.

⁵² Ramesh D. Dikshit, "Geography and Federalism," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (Mar., 1971), 104.

⁵³ Jeffrey Kahn, "Federal Theory," in *Federalism, Democratization, and the Rule of Law in Russia* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2002), 21.

⁵⁴ Frank L. Wilson, "Political Frameworks," in *Concepts and issues in Comparative Politics. An Introduction to Comparative Analysis* (New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., 2002), 153-170.

⁵⁵ Arend Lijphart, "Consociational Democracy," in *Democracy in Plural Societies: a Comparative Exploration* (New York, NY: Vail-Ballou Press, 1977), 25-52.

Consociational democracy, with federalism being one of its parts, is believed to be mostly applicable to the states with different ethnic, religious or linguistic groups. However, not all federations are built around democratic principles (the RF falls into this category). In this case asymmetry can be considered as a way towards ethnic tensions, and danger of ‘tyranny by minority’. One of the ways to manage these problems can be found in Lijphart’s consociationalism and its four key principles, which in practice, nevertheless, seem to have a lot of shortcomings.

One of the examples that can be seen more or less positive is discussed by Alexander Murphy. Even though his focus is on Belgium, he raises an important theoretical point. The territorial aspect of the federalism is not widely discussed in the literature, though it is very important issue. It is wrong to treat the territories of federal units as given. The borders of the units, if drawn a little different, could have shaped the whole federal state and its political, social and economic life in very different way. In federal states, often some rights and freedoms are attached not to individuals but to the territories.⁵⁶ This represents a particular interest because of the way the federal units were drawn in Russia. It will be wrong to say that federal units correspond to ethnic boundaries in the Russian Federation. If they were drawn differently, we might observe the whole different picture.

This is what is discussed by Michael Burgess. His main focus is on how and why states choose the federal structure as oppose to unitary. The argument is built around theory of William Riker who claimed that federations come to existence under the military pressure either coming from the state or aiming towards it. Bringing up a number of examples, Burgess comes to the conclusion that this assumption is not entirely correct. According to him, historical

⁵⁶ Alexander Murphy, “Belgium’s Regional Divergence: Along the Road to Federation,” in *Federalism: The Multiethnic Challenge*, ed. Graham Smith (New York, NY: Longman Publishing, 1995), 73-100.

circumstances, economic reasons and other common interests, along with the external and/or internal threats served as a base for creation of various federal states that exist now.⁵⁷ For him, nevertheless, the main question remains not why but how federations come to existence. This question seems to be more relevant in case of the RF as it came to existence not like many federal states – through mutual agreement to share the state – but due to completely different reasons and through very different means.

Taking a step further, Burgess considers two ways to build federalism - symmetric or asymmetric, with the special focus on the second one. The author explicitly highlights that “in practice, asymmetry reflects difference; it does not create it. Asymmetrical outcomes are designed to achieve flexibility in the pursuit of legitimacy and overall federal political stability.”⁵⁸ There are several preconditions for asymmetry as well as outcomes. In reference to the RF, the discussion of asymmetric federalism can be considered relevant because of both, preconditions, such as social and ethnic cleavages, and de facto and de jure outcomes.

Kahn, on the other hand, is not that positive. He explicitly highlights the Russian case, when individual regional political actors managed to be involved in the dialogue with federal government and as a result these regions get more privileges.⁵⁹ In the case of the RF the discussion involves the relationship between federalism and nationalism. Burgess again highlights that this is relevant to the federal states that contain more than one nation, linguistic or religious group. Federalism seems to be a logical outcome of the situation when diverse groups decide to share one political community. While looking at various examples, such as Canada, Switzerland,

⁵⁷ Michael Burgess, “Federalism and federation: the origins and formation of federal state,” in *Comparative Federalism. Theory and practice* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 76-101.

⁵⁸ Michael Burgess, “Asymmetrical federalism and federation,” in *Comparative Federalism. Theory and practice* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 221.

⁵⁹ Jeffrey Kahn, “Federal Theory,” in *Federalism, Democratization, and the Rule of Law in Russia* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2002), 47.

etc., the author comes to the conclusion that there is no one single formula for multicultural states, as no common pattern was found in the comparison of different federal states.

Nevertheless, the case of Switzerland was referred to as 'ideal'. Historical, economic and social circumstances played crucial role in the formation of such states. Burgess concludes that the political legitimacy, as well as the question of minorities, remains the key aspect of the multicultural federalism.⁶⁰

Kymlicka is also concerned with this issue. While drawing distinction between territorial and multination federalism, Kymlicka concentrates on the latter. Federalism should not be seen as a panacea for all troubles caused by multination nature of the state. He ruins the assumption that this system is flexible. The success of the federation will deeply depend on the territorial and power-sharing arrangements. Even the stable federalism, however, contains the danger of secession, as the minorities see the federal structure of the state not as a way to grant them some autonomy but as a mechanism to take self-governance and part of the power away. Most importantly, Kymlicka touches the issue of asymmetrical federalism with regional units, where population consists of representatives of majority, and what can be called 'nation units', where minorities are concentrated.⁶¹ When both types of units are present in one country the problem with their different perception of power-sharing arise, which is the case of the RF.

"Ethnofederalism, a federal political system in which component regions are intentionally associated with specific ethnic categories, has frequently been recommended by policy makers as a way to reconcile democracy and ethnic difference."⁶² One of the main reasons why the RF is

⁶⁰ Michael Burgess, "Federalism, nationalism and the national state. Legitimacy and the problem of national identity," in *Comparative Federalism. Theory and practice* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 102-131.

⁶¹ Will Kymlicka, "Minority Nationalism and Multination Federalism," in *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 91-119.

⁶² Henry E. Hale, "The Makeup and Breakup of Ethnofederal States: Why Russia Survives Where the USSR Fell," *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (American Political Science Association, 2005): 55.

not breaking up is the demography; Russians constitute 85% of the population. Structurally, 57 regions of the RF are not 'ethnic'. Furthermore, units now enjoy more autonomy and many issues are solved on the regional level, without interference of Kremlin.

The danger of ethno-federalism is stressed by Ivo D. Duchacek. He raises the question of whether is it desirable to have full coincidence between ethnic boundaries and territorial unit and what are the positive and negative consequences of it.⁶³ There is no simple answer to this question, as there are cases that should that this is desirable, whereas other examples are negative. However, neither example can be taken as an answer because there are no completely homogeneous units. Even if the unit is designed as a homeland of minority within the majority, still even this unit contains another minority.

In the context of the Russian Federation, I find it is important to look at the pattern discussed above that leads from the minority rights to the federal unit designed specifically for the Tatars. The historical development of the federal structure as well as the relations between Russians and Tatars during the Russian Empire but most importantly during the Soviet times, which are discussed in the next chapter, are also the part of the bigger picture.

⁶³ Ivo D. Duchcek, "Comparative Federalism: An Agenda for Additional Research," in *Constitutional Design and Power-sharing in the Post-modern Epoch*, ed. Daniel J. Elazar (University Press of America, Inc., 1991), 30.

Chapter 3: Russian – Tatar Relations over Time

The history of the Tatars is closely related with the history of other Turkic peoples and is often intertwined with it. The term Turkic is often used when the discussion is about ancient history. As other people of that time and geographical location, Tatars always include Mongols and their achievements in their history. Nevertheless, they clearly try to distinguish themselves and underline the specificity of the history of the Tatar people. One of these important differences is the Kazan Khanate, which is named after the city which is still the capital of Tatarstan. But before that another important period should be mentioned.

3.1 Bulgars and Mongols

One of the chapters of the history includes so called “Bulgar State” which refers to the VII-IX centuries. Among other important things that happened to the ancestors of the modern Tatars, such as innovation in political life and unification of some tribes, Bulgar period is mostly known for the conversion of the Tatars to Islam.⁶⁴ Before that they were pagans. It also should be noted that the term “Tatar” at that period was used not as an indicator of the ethnicity. There were rather different tribes that distinguished themselves from each other and it may be assumed that the term is used for the purpose of the simplicity. Nevertheless, all the tribes are included in the history. The acceptance of Islam as a religion and base for the political, social and legal life on the Bulgar state actually allowed the state became legitimate in the eyes of the neighbors and

⁶⁴ Frid Rashitov, *The History of Tatar People. From Ancient Times to Modern Days* (The Russian Federation, Saratov, 2001), 43.

gave first opportunity to talk about sovereignty of the unit. This is also the period when the tribes set first relations with the Slavic people, mostly important Kievan Rus. However, the history of Russians and Tatars became closely interlinked only in XII century. Tatar history likes to talk about this period as a cradle of the Tatar culture and glorifies this epoch. Geographically it is also important era because Bulgar state was established on the river Volga, where Tatarstan is located now. This fact is often used as a claim that these lands are original Tatar territory. The importance of the period was also reflected during the 1990s when some nationalist groups proposed to change the name of Tatars to Bulgars. Actually, these claims are still heard from time to time.⁶⁵

This glorification of the Bulgar state can be considered controversial with regards to the next period which is unification of the Tatar tribes and Mongols. The Mongolian tribes annexed Bulgaria after the long period of wars between these two empires. Nevertheless, the period when Tatars were the part of Mongolian rule, the Golden Horde, is also glorified and considered as one of the most important periods of the history.⁶⁶ Tatars attribute the achievements and successes of the Golden Horde as their own. The cult of Chingiz Khan and his victories is still present in Tatarstan. This period is very long and full of events that shaped not only Tatar but also world history. For this paper, however, the biggest interest represents the relations between the Horde and the Slavic peoples, most importantly Russians. To be more specific, the Russian and Tatars history start to come to connection after the fall of the Horde in the XV century.

This is the times when Kazan becomes the most important center of the Tatars. Kazan Khanate was part of Mongolian Empire and after its fall became an independent unit. It was

⁶⁵ Jan Gordeev, "Either Bulgars or Bashkir Tatars. Inhabitants of Tatarstan face the choice for national self-identification," *Nezavisimoya Gazeta*, May 18, 2010, accessed May 16, 2012. http://www.ng.ru/regions/2010-05-18/1_tatarstan.html.

⁶⁶ Azade-Ayse Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars. A Profile in National Resilience* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986), 18-23.

located on the former Bulgar territories in the center of modern Russia.⁶⁷ The connection between these two periods is often specifically highlighted by the historians, indicating how Bulgars influenced Tatars. Basically it was Islamic feudal state. When it comes to Russia, it was paying tribute to the Mongols during the Horde times but it was also paying to Kazan Khanate at the same time due to war agreement. When Mongol empire collapsed, the main enemy of the Russian principalities that were involuntarily taxed became Kazan. Besides, due to the fact that Tatars were composed of various tribes, it was torn by number of feuds. Moscow's aim was to destroy the Khanate and annex its lands. Nevertheless, it became possible only when Ivan the Terrible came to power in Moscow.⁶⁸

3.2 Tatars within the Russian Empire

After a long period of wars, in 1552 Kazan fell.⁶⁹ This date is still unofficially celebrated in Tatarstan, even though it clearly indicates the struggle between Russians and Tatars and can be effectively manipulated for antagonistic purposes. Since that period the history of Tatars is part of the Russian history. For Tatars, this is era when Tatars were repressed by Russians and it lasted until the early XX century. The repression took various forms, such as Tatars were not allowed to live in Kazan but only outside its borders. They were economically restricted.⁷⁰ But the biggest stumbling block became religion. Before this date, as it was indicated before, Islam played major role in organization of Tatars. Russians by that time became Christian. It was

⁶⁷ Azade-Ayse Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars. A Profile in National Resilience* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986), 26-27.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶⁹ Roza N. Musina, "Contemporary Ethnosocial and Ethnopolitical Processes in Tatarstan," in *Ethnic Conflict in the Post-Soviet World. Case Studies and Analysis* (New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1998), 195.

⁷⁰ Frid Rashitov, *The History of Tatar People. From Ancient Times to Modern Days* (The Russian Federation, Saratov, 2001), 123-127.

forbidden to open new Mosques; the old ones were closed at mass. Open compulsory baptism of Muslims also took place, as well as some hidden strategies, such as Muslims could not perform some economic activities but were promised to be allowed as soon as the convert.⁷¹ Actually, the new Christian Tatars were even respected by Russian political elite. However, it is wrong to assume that it was targeted only against the Tatars but it was the same for all other Muslims. This policy had three main ways – physical elimination of all signs of Islam on the territory of Russian, economic sanctions and educational “enlightenment”. As a result, there is now a big segment of Christian Tatars.

Historians often underline the importance of individual Tatars in important in Russian history events in order to indicate their place in Russian history. Often, however, they put stress on the events that had to do with rebel against political elite to make sure that Tatars were in struggle with those who repressed them. There are very little stories on those Tatars who supported Russian rulers.

Due to the restriction to live on the territory of Kazan and other reasons such as compulsory channeling of many Tatars to build Saint Petersburg, very soon Tatars began to spread all over Russia. With the reign of Ekaterina the Great all religious persecutions were over. It went as far as Russian Orthodox Church in 1773 proclaimed that all “traditional for Russia religions” were tolerated.⁷² So Islam two centuries later became one of the traditional religions for Russia. This was a huge step for Russia at that time toward the acceptance of the fact that Russia is populated by the various peoples and they finally became the part of the society, not just the population of defeated lands. With this economic opportunities of Tatars also grew

⁷¹ Azade-Ayse Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars. A Profile in National Resilience* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986), 38-39.

⁷² Frid Rashitov, *The History of Tatar People. From Ancient Times to Modern Days* (The Russian Federation, Saratov, 2001), 146.

rapidly and spread of them as well. Even though there are some attempts to distance the Tatar history from Russian, starting from the middle of the XIX it becomes very hard. Tatars, as a part of population of Russia, went through the same political, social and economic changes, such as industrial revolution and many others.

With this started what can be called “Russification” of Tatars. It took various forms, such as cultural and linguistic. Even though there were those who firmly stood on the belief that Tatars are distinct and should not become russified (the biggest stress was put on religious and ethnic belonging), the assimilation process was also massive.

3.3 Self-determination of Tatars during the Soviet times

The beginning of the XX century was marked by the various national movements and Russia was not an exception. National districts within it began to organize around the claim for national equality. The situation was complicated even further by civil war which was also full of inter-ethnic struggles. There is a claim that national feelings were often manipulated during this hard period⁷³. Nevertheless, it still was more the war of various political ideologies than ethnic war. The revolution of 1905-1907 had two important for Tatars results. First, Tatars started the movement towards systematization and unification of all Muslims in Russia. Second, the issuing of newspapers in Tatar in different Russian cities aiming to develop national consciousness took place⁷⁴.

⁷³ Rocky L. Rockett, *Ethnic Nationalities in the Soviet Union. Sociological Perspectives on a Historical Problem*, (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, CBS Educational and Professional Publishing, 1998), 85-86.

⁷⁴ Frid Rashitov, *The History of Tatar People. From Ancient Times to Modern Days* (The Russian Federation, Saratov, 2001), 190.

Nevertheless, the policy toward national minorities in Russia became harsh which was a fruitful ground for those who organized Great October Revolution of 1917. The propaganda of self-determination of the peoples that took place that time gave the Soviets a massive support from the national minorities. From this event the history of Tatar unit of the territory of Russia begins, even though its status, name and form changed couple of times through out of history. At first, it was just common concern about self-determination of all Muslims in Russia. Later there was a project on Tatar-Bashkir republic, which was never implemented due to civil war in Russia.⁷⁵ After the final victory of the Soviets the Tatar Soviet Social Republic was established in 1920 with strict borders that were described in the decree. Kazan became capital and Tatar language was proclaimed official together with Russian.⁷⁶ By the date of signing of the decree the status of the unit was somewhat lowered and it became Autonomous Tatar Social Republic within RFSFR. Nevertheless, this date is mostly praised by Tatars as they see it as a first unit with national government in 370 years.

Nevertheless, the status of the autonomous republic was different from the status of those units that were the establishers of the USSR and any attempts to equalize them were met with hostility. These attempts were coming, of course, from the side of autonomous units. Aside from political freedoms and rights, cultural and social development of the unit and Tatars in and outside the unit flourished. This was the period when periodic newspapers in Tatar were published, Tatar language public schools were opened, as well as universities and other higher education institutions, such aspects of culture as art and music developed rapidly and with governmental support.⁷⁷ However, any attempts to go beyond of what was allowed were brutally

⁷⁵ Frid Rashitov, *The History of Tatar People. From Ancient Times to Modern Days* (The Russian Federation, Saratov, 2001), 217-219.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 224.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 239.

stop and initiators were often claimed to indicate the raise of bourgeoisie and nationalistic ideas, which in 1930s could put the whole nation under the threat.⁷⁸

The followed decade was mostly marked by the WWII and Great Patriotic War which is still a very important period of USSR history and serves as one of not many unifying factors for the post-Soviet republics, not all though. Intra-union struggles were put aside and strong propaganda of the unity of all Soviet people in front of the common enemy did its job. This was, however, a period of time when a lot of Tatars migrated beyond the RSFSR, mainly to Central Asia, where is still quite big Tatars Diaspora. One of the most important events of this decade for Tatarstan was, however, the development of the oil industry.⁷⁹ It later shaped the relations between the unit and the upper level of the government and it can be openly claimed that it still does. This was also a period which can be marked with the linguistic switch from Tatar to Russian language by the majority of the Tatars. As Russian became dominant in political, economic, social, cultural and educational spheres, less and less people saw the necessity in learning any other language. The biggest determinant, however, was education which since 1950s was mostly on Russian. The attempts to create Soviet identity that can replace ethnic ones also took place but failed. It seemed odd to propose something like that without taking out the fifth column from the passports.

Education not only changed the language, it also reconsidered some parts of the history. For example, it was forbidden to research further the period of the Golden Horde and the role of Tatars in this period was claimed to be exaggerated.⁸⁰ At the same time in early 1960s the

⁷⁸ Azade-Ayse Rorlich, *The Volga Tatars. A Profile in National Resilience* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986), 154-155.

⁷⁹ Zufar Abdullin, "Where is beginning of the sources of Tatar oil?" April 1993, accessed May 9, 2012. http://www.bavly-cbs.ru/index.php?id_article=104.

⁸⁰ Frid Rashitov, *The History of Tatar People. From Ancient Times to Modern Days* (The Russian Federation, Saratov, 2001), 260.

importance of ethnography and anthropology was recognized and started to take an important place in the social science. A lot of books on history and culture of the peoples were published, including Tatars. Massive researches were made and published. So 1960-1970s can be marked as a very contradictory period. On one hand, the Sovietization reached its peak, all people were Soviets, shared one huge country, unity was based on the common victory, common by that time language, ideology and so on. On the other hand, it was politically approve to research and put in masses the history, ethnography and culture of the nations sharing this common state.

Assimilation lived side by side with somewhat raised national awareness of the non-Russian population of the state. All this was stopped in the beginning of the 1980s when Brezhnev made his famous speech, declaring that in the Union the national question is solved completely and for good and idea of the unity and convergence took the leading role. So the period of Brezhnev rule was not only political and economic stagnation but also stagnation of the national consciousness. This period, however, lasted only couple of years, as by the end of 1980s national awareness not only grew but also took forms of raising nationalistic and sometimes even separatist ideas.

Chapter 4: Struggle for Current Status in Early 1990s

The dissolution of the USSR in the beginning of the 1990s had a lot of reasons and consequences. It is still disputable whether raising nationalistic moods were the first or the second. Nevertheless, they were present in every part of the union. The dissolution itself was more or less peaceful and followed the disputed pattern of *uti possidetis*, ignoring the fact that it was designed for completely different political atmosphere. Nevertheless, by 1991 all fifteen republics were granted the status of independent within the internal Soviet borders and started the new path. Among them, Russia was the only state that had autonomous regions and republics within its borders. As the dissolution began, Russia had to deal not only with the exit of Soviet Socialist republics but also with the internal autonomous ones. Two of them, Tatarstan and Chechnya, already in 1990 stated their willingness towards more autonomy and later even independence. In case of Chechnya the fight for independence turned into military conflict and is still not completely settled. When it comes to Tatarstan, the claims for more sovereignty and even independence were made between 1990 and 1994 and were settled by the bilateral agreement between Federal government of the RF and the government of Tatarstan.

The republic stayed within the border of the federation. Nevertheless, it achieved a special status with as much autonomy as the federal unit in the RF can get. The demands for sovereignty and even independence were based on the claims for self-determination of the Tatar people. So the claims were both, territorial and cultural. Nevertheless, the republic of Tatarstan was never applicable for the purpose of being the state of Tatar people due to demography discussed above.

Cultural claims were also not that obvious because since the formation of the Soviet Union, there was no discrimination of the Tatars. Looking back at history, there were attempts to integrate Tatars, however, they were mostly aimed at converting them from Islam to Christianity. There were no recent attempts to somehow culturally discriminate or infringe Tatars on the base of culture or language. Of course, during the Soviet times, Russian language had the highest status and was mostly used. Nevertheless, Tatar language was never completely forgotten. It was practiced and used in educational institutions, publications and mass media, even though at the very low level. Tatar language and culture was not discriminated against more than any other non-Russian culture and language during the Soviet times.

So it can be argued that the self-determination claims that were followed by demands for sovereignty and independence, which in the end resulted in the special status of Tatarstan in the RF, were articulated because of the various precedents that were happening at the same time in Europe and in the USSR. Tatarstan and Tatar people were never actually in a situation where their identity or territorial integrity and autonomy were under question. There was no threat either for territorial unit or the people. Because early 1990s were marked by a huge number of similar claims, nationalistic movements and appearance of new nation states, Tatarstan followed the pattern. Furthermore, self-determination through establishment of independent state did not make sense geographically, as Tatarstan is surrounded by the units of Russian Federation. There also were various confusions in Tatar political elite between the territorial and cultural autonomy. Tatarstan as a unit was interchangeably used with Tatars as people. The claims were not clear.

4.1 The Rise of Separatism

In case of Tatarstan, autonomy of the federal unit was not only the most logical and peaceful outcome, it was also desirable for both, federal government and local one. As Donald L. Horowitz puts it in his “The Cracked Foundations of the Right to Secede”, the formation of the new states with the use of secession is highly not desirable and also very dangerous. “A secession or partition converts a domestic ethnic dispute into a more dangerous international one”⁸¹. He sees the secession as a clear path towards more violence. If minorities exist on the territory of the state it is beneficial for all parties to integrate them into political life rather than push them away. He avoids and criticizes any justifications of the secession and insists on the integrity of the borders with the right for self-determination of all minorities within them. In his article he refers to states where ethnic conflicts were the result of the non-inclusive into political life politics towards minorities. As there were no ethnic conflict or even tension within Tatarstan or in other regions with Tatar people, the claims for independence seem irrelevant. Furthermore, politically Tatars were always integrated, both in Tatarstan and beyond it. As there were no discriminatory policies towards Tatar people, language or culture, there was no need for territorial sovereignty or independence, according to Hannum.

Nevertheless, the territorial autonomy was granted after 4 years of negotiations, and this was the best outcome. Following Hannum’s argument in “Territorial Autonomy: Permanent Solution or Step toward Secession?” autonomy has several advantages. It allows making sure that minority rights are maintained, contributes to stability of the state and integrity of its borders and, because there is no clear definition of this term, the level of autonomy may vary from case

⁸¹ Donald L. Horowitz, “The Cracked Foundations of the Right to Secede,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 14, No 2 (April 2003): 10.

to case. The last one, though, can also be a disadvantage.⁸² Even though, autonomy and self-governance is not seen by Hannum as the end of the road, for Tatarstan it actually was. Since 1994 there were no more claims either for more territorial or cultural autonomy. The situation remains stable for 17 year now. The vagueness of the term allowed the Russian Federation to grant more autonomy to Tatarstan than to any other unit and treat it differently with the help of bilateral treaty in spite of official equal status of all units.

When in the late 1980s the Soviet Union started to face various changes and Gorbachev proclaimed the beginning of Perestroika, the claims of Tatarstan became loud. First it started with the demands for more cultural autonomy or even the revival of the Tatar culture with the formation of Tatar Public Center or TOT.⁸³ It was more or less social demands far from any political claims for sovereignty or independence. It started off with the revival of the language with the special attention towards administrative and bureaucratic bodies.⁸⁴ The intentions, however, were never to replace Russian language but rather to even up the usage of both, as languages were equal only officially.

The situation changes in 1990 when TOT and more radical party “Ittifaq” started to associate the revival of the language and culture as a part of the struggle for sovereignty. This did not happen by accident but was rather a respond on the Soviet policy that granted more economic and administrative freedom to the union republics, whereas autonomous republics maintained the status quo.⁸⁵ The year 1990 marked that difference between union and autonomous republics was not just in the official status but actually referred to the different level of freedom. Tatarstan

⁸² Hurst Hannum. “Territorial Autonomy: Permanent Solution or Step toward Secession?” [http://www.zef.de/download/ethnic conflict/hannum.pdf](http://www.zef.de/download/ethnic%20conflict/hannum.pdf).

⁸³ Elise Giuliano, “Who Determines the Self in the Politics of Self-Determination? Identity and Preference Formation in Tatarstan's Nationalist Mobilization,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Ph.D. Program in Political Science of the City University of New York, Apr., 2000): 295.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 308-309.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 309.

government responded to these changes by unilaterally announcing its sovereignty on 30 August 1990, being the first autonomous republic in the RSFSR to do so.⁸⁶ This was the first step that led to the various acts in the following year that Tatarstan undertook on the road towards cultural and territorial autonomy.

In March 1991 nationalistic party “Ittifaq” organized demonstrations that had their aim to stop people from voting on the first presidential elections in the RSFSR.⁸⁷ It was the symbolic act with which Tatar nationalists tried to show that they were not part of the RSFSR and had no interest of the elections. The goal was achieved as less than 40% voted on the federal elections.⁸⁸ That showed that majority of the people were convinced in the claims that Tatarstan should have been granted more autonomy and sovereignty. The refuse to take part in the presidential elections can also indicate that population of Tatarstan distanced itself from the federation. Either to respond on this act or independently, a month later the declaration of independence of Tatarstan was rejected by the RSFSR.⁸⁹ This decision was met with massive demonstrations in Tatarstan’s capital Kazan. Nevertheless, Tatarstan leadership did not give up on the attempts to get officially more autonomy, if full independence was not possible.

In May 1991 the RSFSR leaders prepared the Union treaty that was supposed to frame the relations in the unit. Tatarstan refused to sign it unless its sovereignty was recognized.⁹⁰ This did not result in change of the status. Furthermore, Gorbachev clearly stated that rejection of the treaty was a first step towards secession and “those republics would be free to leave the Soviet Union after a five-year transitional period”⁹¹. This was as close as Tatarstan got toward

⁸⁶ Marie Bennigsen Broxup, “Tatarstan and the Tatars,” in *The Nationalities Question in the post-Soviet States* (London: Longman, 1996), 82.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁸⁸ *The USSR in 1991: A Record of Event*, ed. Vera Tolz and Melanie Newton (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 83.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 326.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 329.

independence since the beginning of its claims. As it becomes obvious now, however, this did not reach the end result. One of the main factors that influenced it was, of course, the change in leadership and the collapse of the Soviet Union itself. Nevertheless, Tatarstan was still sticking to its line. In June 1991 the presidential elections in the republic were held and marked by the higher turnout than the federal ones – 63%.⁹² The only candidate, Mintimer Shaimiev, was elected as the first president and later played the central role in the departure of the republic from the initial goal. At the beginning of his presidency, though, he was strongly opposing the status quo of the republic, claiming that he would not sign the treaty as the unit of the RSFSR.⁹³ His claims can be justified by the fact that he was more supported by the people of Tatarstan than the president of the federation, Boris Yeltsin. As a result he had more legitimate power in the republic than the president of the federation that was elected while Tatarstan clearly boycotted the elections.

4.2 The Confusion of the Aims and Demands: Full Independence or a Special Status

Either on the wave of the popular support or under the pressure of nationalists in October 1991 the Tatarstan Supreme Soviet opened the session with the discussion of the complete independence of the autonomous republic. The debated ended up with unsanctioned demonstrations and clashes between supported of the integrity of the RSFSR and Tatar

⁹² *The USSR in 1991: A Record of Event*, ed. Vera Tolz and Melanie Newton (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 389.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 463.

nationalists. Nevertheless, “on October 24, the Supreme Soviet of Tatarstan adopted a resolution on state independence that called for national referendum on the status of the republic...”⁹⁴

The referendum took place five month later, in March 1992, and was the last component of the self-determination movement of Tatarstan and Tatars. It also demonstrated the obvious confusion of the population and political actors of the republic. The question stated in the ballot was the following “Do you consider that the Republic of Tatarstan is a sovereign state, a subject of international law, entitled to develop relations with the Russian Federation and other states on the basis of treaties between equal partners?”⁹⁵ The referendum was openly opposed by Moscow and Yeltsin himself, who even came to Kazan to convince people to vote “no”. There he expressed his discontent with the whole situation with the famous statement about regions that strive for more autonomy: “Take as much sovereignty as they could swallow”⁹⁶. In spite of this, majority of people voted in favor.

What people were voting for, however, remains the main unanswered question. Different political parties and actors understood referendum differently and therefore indicated absolutely different reasons for voting in favor. The only thing they agreed on was that people should vote for it. “The extremist groups ‘Ittifaq’ and ‘Azatlyq’ urged a “yes” vote in the referendum in order to affirm Tatarstan's independence, which they claimed existed de facto. The more moderate TOT advocated a “yes” vote as the means to create a multiethnic state in which Tatars would have greater rights”⁹⁷. The confusion was not only in the purpose of referendum but in territorial versus national self-determination aim. The demands that Tatarstan should become the state of

⁹⁴ *The USSR in 1991: A Record of Event*, ed. Vera Tolz and Melanie Newton (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 736.

⁹⁵ Marie Bennigsen Broxup, “Tatarstan and the Tatars,” in *The Nationalities Question in the post-Soviet States* (London: Longman, 1996), 83.

⁹⁶ Bo Petersson, *National Self-Images and Regional Identities in Russia* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2001), 177.

⁹⁷ Elise Giuliano, “Who Determines the Self in the Politics of Self-Determination? Identity and Preference Formation in Tatarstan's Nationalist Mobilization,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Ph.D. Program in Political Science of the City University of New York, Apr., 2000): 310.

Tatars were put forward one more time ignoring the fact that Tatars were just a slight majority and $\frac{3}{4}$ of ethnic Tatars lived outside of it. Nevertheless, the formation of Constitution of Tatarstan where it was stated that republic is “an independent subject according to international law, albeit with a special relationship with the Russian Federation”⁹⁸ was the consequences of the referendum. This constitution created a lot of controversies. First of all, it clearly stated that on the territory of Tatarstan it had binding legitimate power over constitution and laws of the RF.⁹⁹ Secondly, it was the first constitution adopted in the autonomous republic on the territory of the federation. Lastly, it had been adopted before the constitution of the whole federation was adopted.

The adoption of the constitution was viewed as a victory and the final stage of the self-determination of the Tatar people as they gained a sovereign unit. Nevertheless, the way towards it was complicated not only because of the resistance of the federal government to let the unit be sovereign but also because of the vague claims. The terms ‘independence’ and ‘sovereignty’ were used interchangeable throughout the campaign. The demands of political elite were confused - some wanted the special status of the unit in the federation, others complete independence, third fought for the cultural determination, recognition and revival. The whole movement cannot be marked as fight for territorial or cultural autonomy. It was a mix of various claims that were not coherent. They were done in the period of time when this kind of claims was heard frequently. It can be confirmed by the fact that “popular support for the nationalists in Tatarstan weakened as the more moderate President Shamiev and his government emerged as the

⁹⁸ Bo Petersson, *National Self-Images and Regional Identities in Russia* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2001), 165.

⁹⁹ Marie Bennigsen Broxup, “Tatarstan and the Tatars,” in *The Nationalities Question in the post-Soviet States* (London: Longman, 1996), 84.

political victor.¹⁰⁰ As soon as situation was stabilized and people saw that there is no longer struggle for power, strong nationalistic claims vanished.

Tatar nationalists were not united by the single idea but rather tore public opinion into several segments. What they really wanted was probably more autonomy in the federation. This was what they got in the end. This is also confirmed by the fact that in 1994 Shaimiev and Yeltsin signed the Treaty on the delimitation of Spheres of Authority and Mutual Delegation of Powers¹⁰¹ that took away most privileges that Tatarstan self-proclaimed which is still in power. The treaty was a surprise for all those who thought that the final battle was won. Tatarstan lost partially its economic independence and politically was subordinated to the federation. Nevertheless, it maintained the special status, preserved its constitution, with the promise to comply it with the federal one and had control over unit's budget.¹⁰² It was also allowed to establish diplomatic ties with other states independently from the federal government.¹⁰³ Still, the Treaty surprised many political actors as it was a step back from where Tatarstan was already standing. Autonomy of the unit was greatly reduced. With the new presidency of Putin in 2000-2008, the reduction continued.

The reasons for the step back are still ambiguous. The possible explanation is the fact that complete territorial autonomy or sovereignty was never actually desired either by Tatar people or Tatarstan's political elite. There was also no threat to the cultural autonomy of Tatars that was already on a high level. The revival of the culture, that took place in every corner of the post-

¹⁰⁰ Elise Giuliano, "Who Determines the Self in the Politics of Self-Determination? Identity and Preference Formation in Tatarstan's Nationalist Mobilization," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Ph.D. Program in Political Science of the City University of New York, Apr., 2000), 295.

¹⁰¹ Marie Bennigsen Broxup, "Tatarstan and the Tatars," in *The Nationalities Question in the post-Soviet States* (London: Longman, 1996), 86.

¹⁰² Donna Bahry, "The New Federalism and the Paradoxes of Regional Sovereignty in Russia," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Ph.D. Program in Political Science of the City University of New York, Jan., 2005): 135-140.

¹⁰³ Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, "Paradiplomacy in the Russian Regions: Tatarstan's Search for Statehood," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Taylor & Francis, Ltd., Jun., 2003): 617.

Soviet territory, could have been done independently from the claims for independence of the unit. Furthermore, the revival of Tatar language, which was the starting point of the claims, did not happen as smoothly as nationalist planned. “While Tatar and Russian enjoy equal status de jure, in practice Russian remains the dominant language in government and the workplace.”¹⁰⁴ The establishment of the relationship between culture and independence is what Peter Radan called “romantic nationalism”.¹⁰⁵ People believed that every nation should have a nation state whereas in reality there is no need for that unless the group rights of the nation are violated. As these was not the case with Tatars and Tatarstan, the way the problem was solved and self-determination claims were settle can be considered the best outcome.

Even though the claims about self-determination, sovereignty and so on had no firm base and as it was showed the people and elite were somewhat confused with the terms, Tatarstan got its special status which it still enjoys. These four years build a fundament which is still standing and does not seem to become any shakier. All privileges that the unit has right now are built around the long history and were firmed by the nationalistic threats, as well as personal relations of the Yeltsin and Shaimiev. The economic advance of the units should not be forgotten as well. Unlike some other units, the case of Tatarstan can be considered successful as it was settled quickly, without any violence and satisfied both parties. Nevertheless, it is wrong to assume that other parties were happy. The Russian authorities made sure that everyone understands that case of Tatarstan is unique and not a precedent to be used further by other units. The cases of Bashkortostan and Chechnya prove it.

¹⁰⁴ Elise Giuliano, “Who Determines the Self in the Politics of Self-Determination? Identity and Preference Formation in Tatarstan's Nationalist Mobilization,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Ph.D. Program in Political Science of the City University of New York, Apr., 2000): 308.

¹⁰⁵ Peter Radan, “The Badinter Arbitration Commission and the partition of Yugoslavia,” *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, Vol. 25, Issue 3 (1997): 540.

Chapter 5: Tatarstan Benefits in Practice

The asymmetrical federal structure of the RF is already making the status of the ethnic republics special by granting them privileges listed in the Chapter 1. This inconsistency in the statuses was first grounded in the Constitution making it official. Later on it was taken even further by signing the bilateral agreements, where the rights of the units were expanded even further. The fact that Tatarstan was the first unit to do so already underlines that special position of it. So the whole structure of the RF can be considered contradictory. Unlike many federations it was not created through the mutual agreement to face the common enemy, like Switzerland for example did. The federation was logical outcome of the historical event and geographic circumstances. All this was grounded in the Constitution. To be more specific, not in the text of it but rather in the loose power that it still has in the RF. The principles described in the laws are coherent and neat, the execution of them is what under the big question mark.

5.1 Situation with the Legal Documentation

The fact that Constitution does not have the power it suppose to have was already faced in early 1990s with the formation of the Federal Agreement which ascribed the rights and responsibilities of the federation and subjects that later became that part of the text. This is where the roots of the current special status of Tatarstan start. Two republics refused to sign the agreement, Tatarstan and Chechnya. Nevertheless, the outcomes of the refuse were opposite and well known. Of course, it is irrelevant to compare cases and assume that war in Chechnya was caused by this fact. However, only Tatarstan was proposed to sign separate agreement with the

RF, which they did in 1994. Agreement itself gave Tatarstan much more privileges than to any other unit, including the right to deal with the natural resources. Not only it was the first example of such relation, it also grants much more rights and was one of not many to be renewed by the second President of the RF, Vladimir Putin.

If the agreement of 1994 can be seen as a way to stop separatist ideas and make Tatarstan more loyal, the renewal of it indicates the fact that the status continues to be special and wanted to be such. It is wrong to assume that it is widely supported in the RF as a lot of politicians openly criticize the whole idea. Nevertheless, Putin made it clear that this is how it is working and took many people in the RF by surprise. The dissatisfaction of the political opposition about this and claims that this can be considered as a first step towards turning the federation into confederation were completely ignored by President and loyal to him Parliament.¹⁰⁶ It clearly illustrated that Tatarstan is more equal than any other unit even in the peaceful times. It is obvious that this decision did not lead to giving any special status to any other republics, as neither Bashkortostan nor Chechnya nor Dagestan was given status they asked for. The agreements that these units have clearly differ from what has Tatarstan. The visible dissatisfaction of the opposition and the units seems not to bother neither Putin nor Medvedev, in spite of the more vertical state structure that the RF got with the presidency of Putin.

Another case is the Constitution of the unit. It raises more question and dissatisfaction even than the agreement. The best example is the fact that Tatarstan in 1990s unilaterally declared its sovereignty and still calls itself a state associated with the RF.¹⁰⁷ This is the only such case in the federation and it is tolerated. There are a lot of minor phrases and clause that

¹⁰⁶ Olga Vandysheva, "Tatarstan was granted the special status. Gosduma ratified the agreement between Moscow and Kazan", *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, February 10, 2007, accessed May 15, 2012. <http://kp.ru/daily/23853/63252/>.

¹⁰⁷ The Constitution of the Republic of Tatarstan, Article 61.

contradict the Constitution of the RF. By doing so it undermines the core principle of the equality of the units. For example, the Article 59 in the constitution of Tatarstan states that “Laws of the Republic of Tatarstan have the rule on the whole its territory, unless they contradict the international commitments of the Republic of Tatarstan”.¹⁰⁸ There is no reference to the RF in this phrase what so ever. The oath of the President of Tatarstan also states that he or she will “faithfully serve the people of the Republic of Tatarstan” and “ensure the sovereignty of the Republic of Tatarstan” with once again no reference to the RF as a whole.¹⁰⁹ Even though it was accepted as unconstitutional, nothing was done to change the situation and the new president of Tatarstan followed the old procedure of inauguration in 2010.

5.2 International Relations

That Tatarstan is trying to act as a separate state is also reflected in its attempt to establish diplomatic and international ties with other independent states. Article 62 of the Constitution states - “Republic of Tatarstan enters the relation with other states, signs international agreements, exchanges diplomatic, consular, trade and other delegations, takes part in actions of international organization guided by the principle of international laws.”¹¹⁰ So Tatarstan clearly considers itself as a subject to international law and principles without being an independent state. Nevertheless, as it was noted, it is not enough to consider itself a group, others should recognize it as well.

¹⁰⁸ The Constitution of the Republic of Tatarstan, Article 59.

¹⁰⁹ “Tatarstan lost its Ministry of Interior Affairs because of the police tortures,” *RBK*, March 23, 2012, accessed March 24, 2012. <http://top.rbc.ru/society/23/03/2012/643068.shtml>.

¹¹⁰ The Constitution of the Republic of Tatarstan, Article 62.

There are some successful examples on international recognition of Tatarstan. It is wrong to assume that it all started recently, after the collapse of the USSR, as the first attempts to enter the intergovernmental level of negotiations were taken already in 1980s.¹¹¹ Since then the republic was signing various agreements with sovereign countries on the equal terms. These agreements included economic, political, scientific and cultural cooperation. However, Tatarstan took the easiest way. The cultural ties were established on the base of religion, as most of Tatars practice Islam, and the main partners are the Islam republics such as United Arab Emirates, Egypt, etc.¹¹² Actually, Tatarstan became some kind of target of many Islamic states, as they started to express willingness to cooperate and help if needed.

The other safe way was to establish ties with post-Soviet countries, such as Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova and others, which Tatarstan did.¹¹³ Nevertheless, all these agreements are not that independent from Moscow, after all. As a part of bilateral treaty, Tatarstan has a right to establish various ties and connections but only if they correspond to the general federal law.¹¹⁴

The mere agreements about cooperation and trade was not enough to declare its right to be recognized on the international arena, even though Tatarstan is a not a sovereign state. Tatar political leaders were trying to show that they do not entirely depend on the RF. Even though some actions and rhetoric did not have any major consequences, still Tatarstan was trying to make its point. For example, the president of the republic was very much against Russia's position on Kosovo, which he did not hesitate to articulate.¹¹⁵ This kind of actions were targeted to the international public in order to show that Tatarstan had an opposing to the RF opinion and

¹¹¹ Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, "Paradiplomacy in the Russian Regions: Tatarstan's Search for Statehood," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Taylor & Francis, Ltd., Jun., 2003), 616.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 618.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 617.

¹¹⁴ Donna Bahry, "The New Federalism and the Paradoxes of Regional Sovereignty in Russia," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Ph.D. Program in Political Science of the City University of New York, Jan., 2005), 136.

¹¹⁵ Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, "Paradiplomacy in the Russian Regions: Tatarstan's Search for Statehood," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Taylor & Francis, Ltd., Jun., 2003): 621.

was ready to express it. This kind of behaviors of the political unit is not common, especially in Russia, where the opposition to the central government is still not open and can have harsh consequences.

The relation with Islamic states and position of Kosovo, where the RF clearly supports Christian Slavic Serbs and Tatars express its solidarity to Muslim Albanians, could easily raise a conflict, as for example in Chechnya, on the religious and nationalistic ground. This, however, did not happen in Tatarstan. Kosovo was trying to be independent and clear and obvious position of the RF on it was well known and understood. The fact that autonomous region supported another autonomous region could have raised another set of debates. But it did not. The reasons for this can be various but my claim would be that both parties, Tatarstan and the RF, realized that conflict is not desirable and the situation took moderate form. The RF tolerated the presence of Islamic states on its territory and Tatarstan's support and cooperation with them never extreme form. Once again, Tatarstan proved its loyalty to the bigger state and was giving some privileges for that.

5.3 Availability of Economic Resources

Another special position of the unit is its economic relation with Moscow, which I will touch upon just briefly. Being one of the best economically developed regions in the RF, Tatarstan can at least somehow shape its relation also through the economy. One of the points in the renewed agreement was the mutual decision of the RF and Tatarstan on the natural resources, including oil deposits.¹¹⁶ It seems logical to manage and control resources together with the

¹¹⁶ Olga Vandysheva, "Tatarstan was granted the special status. Gosduma ratified the agreement between Moscow and Kazan", *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, February 10, 2007, accessed May 15, 2012. <http://kp.ru/daily/23853/63252/>.

federal unit. Nevertheless, it can be argued that oil industry was developed in the unit during the Soviet times with Moscow money and it is not really fair if Tatarstan as a part of the bigger state enjoys the benefits on its own. For example, the Agreement of 1994 concluded that only Tatarstan is in charge with the deposits. It was also under unit's decision how much of the profit was transferred to the budget. Logically enough, the amount was minimal.

Summing up, Tatarstan enjoys privileges on many levels. First of all, as a republic it already constitutionally has more rights than other units, such as official language, government and so on. But it went even further with the agreement that made it more privileged than even other republics. Not only it was first in many initiatives, often it remains the only. It is wrong to assume that this does not cause the problem. For example, neighboring Bashkortostan voiced its dissatisfaction with its not as privileged status many times.¹¹⁷ Still, nothing seems to be changed. Economically and politically, Tatarstan feels very free and comfortable within the federation. It also manages to be recognized internationally, even in a very modest manner. It can be argued that it is unconstitutional and if it proclaimed to be the state of equal units, there should be some steps done towards it. The case of Tatarstan shows with every new agreement and decision the situation departs from the equality. The reasons I considered the most important for that are all listed above – vague constitution, long historical relations, chaotic events of the 1990s, economics resources and personal power of the political leaders. One of the most important, however, I would consider the loyalty of the region towards the government. There were and still are hardly any problems in the relation between Moscow and Kazan. The mutual toleration and the respect can be seen as a key distinction of Moscow-Kazan relations, compare to cases of

¹¹⁷ Andrei Riskin, "Kazan is a closer relative than Ufa," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, December 14, 2006, accessed April 28, 2012. http://www.ng.ru/regions/2006-12-14/1_kazan.html.

Chechnya, Bashkortostan and others. Furthermore, there are not many example of such good relation between the ethnic unit of the federation and the federal government.

Conclusion

Loyalty of a Unit as a Way to Get Benefits

The case of Tatarstan, its autonomy and self-determination of Tatar minority which is closely tied to it proves the fact that there can be a successful case of the pretty independent unit in the federation without causing any major problems. Besides the factors that influenced position and status of Tatarstan listed above, I would like in conclusion to pay special attention to the Tatar-Russian, or unit-federal government, relations. There are other regions in the RF that have long historical ties, influential leaders, economic opportunities and so on. None of them, nevertheless, can be considered as “equal” as Tatarstan. I am convinced that this is because there is no open confrontation between the center and the unit. Tatarstan, even though, tries to depart from some Russian influence through language, religion and economy, still does not cause any problem to the RF. Its loyalty to the central government was never under question.

Another thing is national composition of the unit. Almost half of the population is Russian and it has been so for a long period of time. For example, before the conflict, more than a half of the population of Chechnya was Russian. Now the unit is almost homogeneous. This was never and does not seem to be any time soon the case of Tatarstan. Russians compose a considerable part of the Tatarstan. This leads to the conclusion that all the claims and threats to separate from the RF in the early 1990s are nonsensical. It was obvious that nothing like that is either possible or desirable. Nevertheless, Tatarstan was offered the special agreement even though the politics of power could have been used but never was.

Nevertheless, Russia's tolerance has its limits. A good example of it would be the case of changing the alphabets. Tatar's leaders were pushing for the replacing Cyrillic letter to Latin on the territory of the unit. However, the answer of the Moscow on that was harsh and definite rejection.¹¹⁸ This rejection was not only the single case about the language but rather the reflection of the departure of the more federal and decentralized structure developed by the first president towards more Moscow-led close to authoritarian leadership of Putin.¹¹⁹ Apart from the political constrains, such as changing the structure to more vertically firm and centralized, and cultural ones, such as with the example of language, Putin also applied economic limits, such as enlarging the share of Tatarstan tax revenues that should be send to federal budged.¹²⁰

The restrictions went even further this year. After the great scandal about tortures of the suspects by the Tatarstan police and the death of one of them in March 2012 the Ministry of Interior Affairs of Tatarstan was subordinated to the federal one. Before that it was a subject of republic's government.¹²¹ This clearly shows that the freedom that the unit enjoys has its limits and when situation goes too far, federal government and the president of the RF can easily take the power away. This is also can be considered as an example to other units indicating that everything should be in order if the region does not want any troubles. Furthermore, it is also one more step towards more centralized structure of the RF. So by this change the federal government makes three points – freedom can be taken only as far as the center allows, none of the units are sovereign and the RF is not that decentralized as it may seem.

¹¹⁸ Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, "Paradiplomacy in the Russian Regions: Tatarstan's Search for Statehood," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Taylor & Francis, Ltd., Jun., 2003): 625.

¹¹⁹ Elena Chebankova, "Putin's Struggle for Federalism: Structures, Operation, and the Commitment Problem," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (Taylor & Francis, Ltd., Mar., 2007): 279.

¹²⁰ Donna Bahry, "The New Federalism and the Paradoxes of Regional Sovereignty in Russia," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Ph.D. Program in Political Science of the City University of New York, Jan., 2005): 140.

¹²¹ "Tatarstan lost its Ministry of Interior Affairs because of the police tortures," *RBK*, March 23, 2012, accessed March 24, 2012. <http://top.rbc.ru/society/23/03/2012/643068.shtml>.

The federal government has a right to decide on security, economic and political issues. On the path towards self-determination, Tatarstan allowed itself to make decision on the two out of the three key matters – economy, with various trade agreements that they make without federal intervention and natural resources, and politics, in both terms, internal and external, with diplomatic ties and strong opposition to some federal opinions. The security matters, however, might not be discussed not because it is decided to be left to the central government but because Tatarstan is a landlocked state surrounded by the regions of the RF. If it had international borders, the case might have been different.

Overall, the search for self-determination within federal country is possible. The positive results, however, almost entirely depend on the central federal government but not on the units. There are many other ethnically determined regions and republics in Russia that are not allowed to go as far as Tatarstan. Long common history, overall not aggressive or anti-Russian mood and high economic development – all became prerequisites for the tolerance of Russian political elite towards Tatarstan self-proclaimed sovereignty. This is not common all-federal politics towards minorities. It is an exception, not the rule. It is hard to imagine that, for example, any Caucasus region of Russia, known for its instability, would in close future enjoy the same treatment as Tatarstan. Nevertheless, with the new power in charge, even Tatarstan is suffering the decrease in the rights and liberties. This proves once again, that a lot in the RF is dependent on the central government.

Anyways, the recent state of affairs allows us to call the example of Tatarstan in the RF a positive example of self-determination of the minority within the federal state. This is the result of both, moderate, not so much nationalistic mood of the unit and tolerant behavior of the majority and the central government. If one of the elements had been lacked, the outcome would

have been different. The scenarios could develop into the secessionist war, assimilation policies or any other less positive examples. Of course, this case is not perfect, but for the state with centralized power for the last 90 year and that is still in transition into stable democracy, this can be considered as an optimistic and encouraging model, at least for the other minorities within the RF.

It is obvious that other units are not happy about asymmetrical federal structure of the state and the special status. If it is problems that should be solved several recommendation can be made. Most importantly, the vagueness of the Constitution should be eliminated, at least partly. Until republics are officially and constitutionally have this special status we cannot speak about the equality of the units. On the other hand, it is not only impossible but also not desirable to change the formulation of the text of the constitution regarding this. First, republics will never agree to lower their status. Once given the right of self-determination through the ethno-unit, none of the minorities will peacefully give it up. With the ethnic composition of the RF, the situation can blow up easy. Second, other units do not really correspond to the prerequisites to be granted the status of the republic. If the answer is somewhere between, it means that republics will have to give up some of their privileges and this is again very dangerous.

Furthermore, economically equalizing the status is a very hard thing to do. To be a ethno-unit with its own president, constitution, extracted pages in the passport and so one takes some financial cost which the federal budget, logically enough, does not cover. So to be a republic with the federation cost the unit some money. Not all units in the RF are able to spend money on special status as a lot of them are so called subsidized regions meaning that money from rich parts of the RF are transferred to the poor regions thorough the federal budget.

Asymmetrical federalism with ethnic units which have a special status is the only logical and desirable structure of the RF for now. It is not perfect and causes a lot of debates, problems and tension. Nevertheless, to change it even slightly is very hard because of the size and composition of the population and the state. Even though it can be argued that the structure of the RF should be reconsidered, there is neither sharp political necessity nor economic opportunity to do so.

Appendix

General Information about the Republic of Tatarstan

Location

The Republic of Tatarstan is located on the eastern frontier of Europe at the confluence of the Volga and the Kama rivers. The most outlying points of the Republic are in 56°39' North, 53°58' South, 45°15' West and 54°18' East. The distance from Moscow is 797 km.



Territory

The Republic of Tatarstan covers the territory of 68,000 sq. km which is roughly the size of such countries as Ireland, Lithuania, Sri-Lanka. The Republic stretches for 290 km from North to South and for 460 km from West to East. In the North it borders Kirovsky region (oblast), in the North-East Republic of Udmurtia, in the North-West-Republic of Mari-El, in the West-Chuvashia, in the East-Republic of Bashkortostan, and in the South-Samara Region (oblast), Orenburg region, Ulyanovsk region.

Natural resources

The main wealth of Tatarstan is oil. More than 2.6 billion tons has been produced for the whole period of oil extraction in the Republic of Tatarstan. At present, oil stocks of Tatarstan are estimated to be 0.8-1.0 billion tons. The most well-known oil fields are Romashkinskoye, Nova-Yelkhovskoye, Pervomaiskoye and Bondyuzhskoye. Along with oil, bradenhead gas is extracted in the amount of 40 cu. m per ton of oil. The Republic holds rich stocks of petroleum bitumen. Besides, Tatarstan possesses the stocks of brown and black coal, goat, combustible slates, copper ores, gypsum, cement raw material, sand-gravel mixtures, mason's and glass-making sand, limestones and dolomites, clays, phosphorites, mineral waters, medical muds. The Republic has huge water resources - annual flow of rivers of the Republic exceeds 240 billion cu. m. Soils are very diverse, the best fertile soils covering 1/3 of the territory. Due to high development of agriculture in Tatarstan, forests occupy only 16% of its territory. The largest rivers of the Republic are the Volga, the Kama and its two navigable tributaries-the Belaya and the Vyatka. The total flow of the four rivers makes 234 billion cu. m per year. Certain part of the territory of the Republic is occupied by reservoirs-the Kuibyshev and the Nizhnekamskoye.

Population

The population of the Republic of Tatarstan numbers some 3.7 million, including 2.7 million of urban and 1.0 million of rural population. In Tatarstan there are 19 cities and towns, 22 urban settlements and 848 rural settlements. Density of population - 55 people/sq.km. Dynamics of population growth in 1995 per 1000: Birth rate -10,4, Death-rate - 12,93, Migration growth - 4,0. The average population density is 55 persons per sq. km. Tatarstan is a multi-ethnic

republic made up of more than 70 ethnic groups. Two major ethnic groups are the Tatars and the Russians.

Due to some historical reasons only one-fourth of all the Tatars living in the ex-USSR are residents of the Republic of Tatarstan. Large groups of the Tatars are residents of the Volga-Ural Basin, West Siberia, Donbas (Ukraine), Kazakhstan, Middle Asia states, and Moscow and St. Petersburg. The Tatar communities can be found also in many countries of Europe, Asia, America and Australia.

Language

Official languages of the Republic of Tatarstan are the Tatar language (Turkic group of Altaic language family) and Russian (Slavic group of Indo-European language family). The overwhelming majority of the Tatars speaks Russian. The Constitution of Tatarstan guarantees the equality of both official languages - Tatar and Russian. Nevertheless, Russian is still predominant in commercial circles. English and other European languages are known by small part of the population.

Religion

The Sunnite Islam appeared in the territory of Tatarstan in the beginning of the 10th century: at present, it is confessed by half of the population of the Republic - the Tatars and the Bashkirs. The Orthodox Christianity appeared in the middle of the 16th century after collapse of the Kazan Khanate: it is shared by the other half of the population - the Russians, the Chuvashes, the Mari, the Udmurts. the Mordvinians, and some Tatars. At present, about 700 mosques and 200 churches (some of them have not yet official registration) function in the Republic of Tatarstan.

Political profile

NAMES:

Conventional long form: Republic of Tatarstan. Conventional short form: Tatarstan. Local long form: Respublika Tatarstan. Local short form: Tatarstan. Digraph: RT

CAPITAL: Kazan

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS: 43 districts.

NATIONAL HOLIDAY: Anniversary of the Declaration of the Republic, 30 August (1990)

CONSTITUTION: 6 November 1991

LEGAL SYSTEM: based on civil law system

Legislative, Executive and Judicial branches of the government are present.

Economy

Tatarstan has powerful industrial potential and stable agricultural sector. Three industrial regions are distinguished in the territory of Tatarstan: Old industrial Northwest region, the base of which is the Kazan - Zelenodolsk agglomeration. Major industries of the region are machine-building, chemical and light industry. New industrial Northeast region with the core in Naberezhnue Cheiny-Nizhnekamsk agglomeration, major industries are automobile construction, chemical industry and energetics. Oil-producing Southeast region with machine-building under development. The North, Central, South and Southwest parts of the Republic are rural regions.¹²²

¹²² The information is taken from "Tatarstan on the Internet," accessed May 22, 2012. http://www.kcn.ru/tat_en/tatarstan/index.htm.

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