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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia assumed the federal form of government. The choice was due to its vast territories, multiethnic society, pre-existing territorial divisions, and, most importantly, strong centrifugal forces and ethnic separatism. Under the 1993 Constitution, ethnic republics got their statehood attributes, such as their own Constitutions, parliaments, Presidents (later renamed as heads of republics), and Supreme Courts. They were allowed to tailor their regional government bodies to the needs of their population.

Federalism as a system of interdependence of various government levels requires alignment of interests, mutual adaptation, and balance seeking, often through tough negotiations, on the ongoing basis. Institutional and legislative flexibilities allow tuning the institutes and political practices to accommodate the changing needs and conditions in the federal centre and regions. Advanced multi-party system, the independent Constitutional Court and genuine political competition are crucial for the federal relations development. However, democratic processes failed to gain momentum in Russia. The weakness of the federalism in Russia in the 1990s also resulted from the weakness of its federal centre.

When Vladimir Putin came to power and the federal centre started to grow stronger rapidly, Russia had a chance to build well-balanced federal relations based on “strong federal centre — strong regions” principle. And yet, Russia missed this opportunity. Instead of further building up the federation, the new Russian administration gradually stripped the regions of their sovereignty and formed a hyper-centralised system of government.

Since Vladimir Putin’s third term in the presidential office, the federal authorities have been clearly seeking to further unify regions and minimise the federative features of ethnic republics. They have been increasingly pursuing assimilative policy, including decreasing regional components in school curriculums and passing amendments to the Law on Education that rendered previously mandatory regional language studies optional.

The new “vertical of power” has brought under its sway not only financially-dependant elites of the poorer, socially deprived regions, but also the authorities of the leading regions (with Chechnya being an exception from rules). Regional elites have been reluctant to defend the sovereignty of their republics being aware of the fact that this could end their career and personal wealth. We have analysed the cases of Tatarstan, one of the most prosperous ethnic republics, and Dagestan, one of the poorer and socially deprived regions, to illustrate the transformation and the present state of the relations between the federal centre and the regions in today’s Russia.

## Republic of Tatarstan

In the late Soviet era, the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic sought to be recognised as the union republic. During the political changes that accompanied the USSR collapse, it managed to obtain economic and political sovereignty within Russia and become the only region that had a separate Treaty on Mutual Delegation of Authority (1994) signed with the Russian Federation. Then political leader and the first president of Tatarstan Mintimer Shaimiev was an influential political figure at the federal level, and his power within Tatarstan was nearly unlimited. He had built an authoritarian government model with non-alternative

elections, government-controlled mass media and marginalised opposition long before the federal authorities managed to do the same.

Political and business elites in Tatarstan consolidated the former Communist party bureaucracy and executives of large enterprises and partially co-opted moderate nationalist and democratic opposition. Under Shaimiev's administration, the political elite consisted of people from rural areas recruited for their origin, family relations or nepotistic reasons. Later, under Rustam Minnikhanov's leadership, upward social mobility has been enabled thus creating some career opportunities for the mid-level officials and other social groups.

Large businesses, mostly oil, have been controlled by the close-knit political and economic elite, hence the government micromanagement in many industries in Tatarstan. This also creates a specific environment for the relations between the Kremlin and Tatarstan when private interests of the republican elite often factor in significantly to the negotiations on the new treaty conditions for Tatarstan. Many analysts believe that the political elite was guaranteed the immunity of their personal assets in exchange for their acquiescence which resulted in Tatarstan easily and rapidly losing its sovereignty since the mid-2000s and its political elite eagerly following the new federal rules.

Since the 2010s, the government model in Tatarstan has been focusing on developing modern bureaucratic culture, on one hand, and on innovative economy and foreign policy success, on the other. Among the Russian regions, Tatarstan is one of the leaders in social and economic development, science and technology sector, and in the investment climate. With Tatarstan being a federal budget donor, Minnikhanov has managed to secure the inflow of financial resources back from the federal level to Tatarstan and, by doing so, gained the support of the local population and elites. This makes him one of the leaders in the Russian administrative and bureaucratic system. Therefore, although Tatarstan's independence decreased significantly, the federal centre assigns a notable role to Tatarstan and its president in the domestic and foreign policy agenda. Presence of the members of Tatarstan's government bureaucracy and business elite in the federal government bodies in Moscow and in other regions considerably contributes to that and reinforces Tatarstan's network of influence.

Ethnocultural and language issues remain a hot button after losing the sovereignty. For the outside audiences, Tatarstan poses itself as a Muslim republic; however, in its internal policies it promotes multicultural agenda highlighting the centuries-long co-existence of Islam and Orthodox Christianity and Tatar and Russian cultures. Yet, ethnic tensions continue.

Since the 1990s, the revival of Tatar culture and language has been key to restoring and maintaining their status that declined in the Russian Empire and especially during the Soviet era. On the one hand, it helped to eliminate the stigmatisation of the Tatar language and establish the system of education in the native language; on the other hand, it failed to create unity in the society and gave rise to negative attitudes among some of the Russian-speaking residents, especially towards the parity between studying the two languages at school.

In 2018, Russian-speaking families managed to make the federal centre interfere: the amendments to the federal legislation pertaining to the optional study of native languages at school were passed and the parity in studying Tatar and Russian as the two state languages in Tatarstan, which had been enshrined in Tatarstan's Constitution and confirmed by the Russian Constitutional Court, was eliminated. The top-down decision-making in this matter without any additional mechanisms to secure the positions of the Tatar language antagonised those of Tatar-speaking residents of the republic who want to maintain and develop their language.

However, there are no overt ethnic conflicts, and, most likely, there won't be any in the foreseeable future, and Tatarstan government practices are being tested elsewhere in Russia, including through the "export" of its bureaucrats.

## **Republic of Dagestan**

In the 1990s, the federal framework allowed the Republic of Dagestan, the most multiethnic region in the Russian Federation with over 30 ethnic groups and indigenous peoples, to shape specific power relations that included the additional system of representation and checks and balances for ethnic groups. Dagestan's State Council comprised representatives of 14 main ethnicities and was a form of the collective presidency while the proportional representation in the People's Assembly and informal ethnic quotas in the government bodies helped to relieve ethnic tensions in the republic in the post-Soviet years.

Unlike Tatarstan, Dagestan, being pluralistic in nature, managed to maintain many of its liberties for quite a while. However, the control over the processes in Dagestan was shared between several influential ethnic groups consisting of dynasties of ex-Soviet officials who remained in power, on one hand, and newly emerged non-systemic leaders who rose in ethnic movements or from the business environment, including the "security entrepreneurship". Dagestan's permanent leader until 2006 Magomedali Magomedov, the Chairman of the State Council, chose to co-opt the leaders of ethnic groups and bribe them with controls over financial flows. At the same time, Magomedov's administration would let people in Dagestan take care of themselves turning a blind eye to the growing grey economy.

After Chechen armed groups led by Shamil Basaev and Khattab attacked Dagestan in August 1999, some of Dagestan's political leaders, especially those who bravely repelled the attack, were granted the concession to govern the republic. As the federal centre was growing stronger and the "vertical of power" was being built, the competition for the leadership in Dagestan narrowed to establishing relationships with Moscow while the unchecked rivalry for power and money transformed into the competition for government positions and budgets limited by the unspoken rules.

As the federal centre was getting stronger, it eliminated the special institutional set-up in Dagestan in 2003 when presidential government and mixed system of elections to the People's Assembly were introduced. In 2006, the State Council was abolished, and Mukhu Aliev was appointed as the president of Dagestan. The ethnic movements had already been weakened so the abolition of the State Council and loss of parliamentary and government representation went smoothly although many people still think that Dagestan needs a separate body to harmonise ethnic relations and represent the interests of its indigenous peoples.

Mukhu Aliev, who was tasked with keeping the clans equidistant from the government, reducing the level of corruption and strengthening Russian state institutions in Dagestan, was drawn into conflicts at the district and corrupt industrial markets levels and lost in most of them. He failed to find powerful political allies either in Moscow or in Dagestan and consolidate their support.

Mukhu Aliev did not create a clan of his own, but allowed other groups to bolster their positions. Still relatively lenient regime in the republic co-existed with harsh authoritarianism at the local level while the strengthened clan leaders were carving Dagestan into clan-controlled territories and spheres of influence, which made local regimes even harsher. Rural communities

that had been a powerful support base for the leaders of the ethnic clans in the 1990s turned into a hindrance or even a threat to their well-being.

In the new reality, political leaders needed muscle to fight their rivals and suppress the discontented communities. To this end, local barons often used members of security forces or hired the fighters of Imarat Kavkaz (the Caucasus Emirate)<sup>1</sup> to eliminate their political rivals. The insurgency grew stronger, and by 2009 Dagestan became the epicentre of the armed conflict in the North Caucasus. Criminals, members of protest groups and religious dissidents were pushed “into the forest”. The insurgency had a solid economic base formed by the proceeds from racketeering and extortion and “jihad taxation” of officials and businessmen while the law enforcement could do nothing to protect them.

The activities of Imarat Kavkaz justified special treatment of elites in Dagestan, including condoning the non-transparency of their financial flows or arbitrary actions by the law enforcement and judicial system. Elites in Dagestan were unable (and were not even trying) to offer its residents a symbolically or ideologically meaningful political project for the development of the republic. Non-systemic leaders, often radicals, filled the ideological vacuum for the younger people.

Dagestan was sliding towards war, and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev appointed Magomedsalam Magomedov, Magomedali Magomedov’s son, as the head of the republic instead of Mukhu Aliev. Magomedsalam Magomedov had to resolve conflicts within the elites, launch civil peace building initiatives, including facilitating Sufi-Salafi dialogue, and create commissions to rehabilitate insurgents. The federal centre kept placing its stake on the clans in Dagestan in recognition of their role in thwarting Basaev’s attack and due to the efforts of the clans’ lobbyists in Moscow.

The established system of power relations in Dagestan came under threat when the run up to the Sochi Olympics required security. Between 2013 and 2015, Imarat Kavkaz was almost crushed down by the security forces. At the same time, the newly-formed terrorist group Islamic State<sup>2</sup> in the Middle East attracted hundreds of radicals from Dagestan. The armed conflict in Dagestan significantly deescalated.

With the armed conflict subsiding, Moscow started to dismantle the criminal clan system of government in Dagestan realising that the authorities in Dagestan would not be supported by the local people who they had strayed too far from. The process began with the appointment of Ramazan Abdulatipov as the head of Dagestan in January 2013. Under Abdulatipov’s administration, prominent figures and “feudal lords” of Dagestan vacated the political arena after the series of resignations and high-profile arrests. However, Abdulatipov turned out to be a failure of a leader: soon, he created a clan of his own which included people from his home district and relatives and re-directed the corrupt money flows to his associates, and after a short while his disapproval rating was critically high. Absence of upward social mobility for the youth, closure of legal political projects for Islamic activists and continuing violations by the security forces fuelled the radicalisation of those dissatisfied with the state of affairs. This resulted in a massive outflow of radicals to the war zone in Syria, high labour migration from Dagestan, and a surge of public protests.

In October 2017, Vladimir Vasilyev, a politician from another Russian region without any

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<sup>1</sup>*Recognised as a terrorist organisation and banned in Russia.*

<sup>2</sup>*Recognised as a terrorist organisation and banned in Russia.*

family or other ties with vested interests in Dagestan, was appointed as an acting head of the republic. The move was against the traditions of Dagestan; however, it was in line with the emerging trend to unify regional bureaucracies. Artyom Zdunov, former Tatarstan Minister of Economic Affairs, was appointed as the Prime-Minister of Dagestan. The key positions in the government of Dagestan were also given to people from other regions.

The unprecedented anti-corruption campaign targeting the patron-client system in the Dagestan government from top to bottom was launched. Hundreds of criminal cases (both in Dagestan's capital and in remote districts) came as a heavy blow to the clans in Dagestan. Yet, the client networks have not disappeared; instead, they have re-grouped, have maintained their economic resources and still hope to return to power.

The total political elite cleansing planned by the Kremlin does not seem to be aimed at deep modernisation of the economy and political system in Dagestan. Its primary goal has been to improve fiscal performance, get the economy out of the grey zone, and optimise the budget spending in the republic. However, balanced and stable situation in Dagestan will only be possible if solving those very important problems is accompanied by the massive improvement of the state institutions in Dagestan. Otherwise, the measures will lead to dramatic decline of living standards in the republic because corruption and tax evasion compensate for nonoperational public services when Dagestan residents have to pay directly out of their pockets for public road maintenance, water supply system construction, public amenities in their villages, and orphan support, and give bribes to secure proper healthcare or a spot in a public kindergarten. Although meaningful improvement of public services is yet to be seen, all our interviewees noticed that no one dares to openly solicit bribes in Dagestan any more.

The attitude towards the current government has changed over the past 18 months: the discontent with the "external management" has been gradually superseding the enthusiasm caused by the removal of the predatory clans. Conflicts with the officials from other regions have acquired an ethnic overtone Prime-Minister Artyom Zdunov brought with him to Dagestan a group of advisors from Kazan, and business groups from Tatarstan started winning some government contracts. The decision-making on some of those projects was not transparent, and many people in Dagestan are under impression that the Prime-Minister was redirecting the financial flows to himself and lobbying the interests of Tatarstan businesses. His government failed to at least properly inform people about its decisions to dispel such doubts.

Amidst unresolved economic, land and territorial issues in Dagestan, people increasingly voice their concerns that they are not allowed to elect their talented and committed representatives while the outsiders who know nothing about Dagestan, infiltrate the republic with their nepotic networks and treat its residents with contempt are imposed on them instead. Our interviewees underscored the huge distance between the residents and the government bodies and the lack of development strategy for Dagestan among the new elite. Indeed, the federally-appointed management team has so far failed to present the new vision of Dagestan development or offer a symbolic or ideological project of its future, like in Tatarstan. The resolution of land and ethnic conflicts, which have always been in the centre of ethnic movements in Dagestan, has been postponed indefinitely; hence, the ethnic tensions will continue.

The ethnic movements have significantly reformatted in the recent years. Ethnic organisations created in the 1990s have stepped down. The current ethnic movements consist of a bunch of internet-based, predominantly youth initiatives, and Dagestani communities in the Russian cities beyond Dagestan and abroad play a significant role in them. At the same

time, local rural initiatives have been budding; they lack political dimension, but allow people to acquire experience of activism and ethnic socialisation.

Studying native languages is as much of concern for Dagestan as it is in Tatarstan: languages of the peoples of Dagestan are rapidly assimilated due to fast-paced urbanization, massive migration from the mountain districts and increasingly diverse population, all of which means relying on common Russian language in everyday life. Native language skills are further weakened, especially among city dwellers, because of the influence of the Russian-language media space, low profile of native languages in absence of relevant language environment and inefficient teaching.

## **Conclusions**

The analysis of the transformation of the federal relations of two republics, Tatarstan and Dagestan, shows that federalism as a system of government no longer exists in Russia in its classic sense. The federalism and public politics have been essentially replaced by the competition between federal and regional patron-client networks. Frequent appointments of outsiders to the key positions in the regional governments create a new market for such networks and administrators. The officials appointed to improve the management quality and counter corruption in the region often introduce members of their informal network and affiliated business groups to the region along with new management practices.

The areas of autonomy that have not been brought under the federal control are few. The issues concerning ethnic specifics in the regions are usually discussed and tackled in Moscow. The principle of subsidiarity is hardly ever employed when dealing with these matters.

Many residents of the republics are frustrated by losing any meaningful sovereignty. Each of the peoples has its core group who are focused on their ethnic identity, love their language, value their culture and strive to preserve them. Ethnic movements are active in both republics, although weakened and lack political agenda. Many activists focused on their ethnic identity limit their activities to grassroots work to preserve native languages and culture.

Simmering ethnic conflicts and tensions have not disappeared; yet, the authorities postpone their resolution and do not include it in the strategic agenda. For example, Russian-speaking residents of Tatarstan approve the unitary trend while ethnocentric Tatars and Dagestanis feel threatened by the prospect of the unitary state fearing that they might lose their languages, culture and ethnic identity. Re-federalisation and preservation of ethnic identities is clearly supported by a significant part of the population in Tatarstan and Dagestan.

Moreover, the government institutions are inherently federative in nature, and federalism can be reinstated as soon as the conditions are right for its revival. This requires rebuilding democratic institutions both in the federal centre and in the regions. With the federal centre remaining strong, Russia can develop mature federal relations based on “strong federal centre — strong regions” principle.

# INTRODUCTION

On October 3, 2017, the Russian President Vladimir Putin held a meeting with the Deputy Speaker of the State Duma Vladimir Vasiliev, offering him the position of Acting Chairman of the Republic of Dagestan. *“I would like the Republic to be headed by a person experienced in federal work, a politician of the federal level”, Vladimir Putin said, calling Vasiliev “a political heavyweight, who the Republic needs at the present time.”*<sup>1</sup>

On February 5, 2018, the central TV channels showed the spectacular detention of Dagestan high-ranking officials: acting Chairman of the Government of the Republic of Dagestan Abdusamad Gamidov, acting Deputy Chairman of the Republican Government Shamil Isaiev and Raiudin Yusufov, as well as former Minister of Education of the Republic Shahabas Shakhov, being suspected of embezzlement of budget funds for the implementation of social programs.

On the video of the Investigation Committee, the FSB officers in masks take the officials out of the mansions with a luxurious decoration; Abdusamad Gamidov in a blue jacket with a patriotic inscription “RUSSIA” is being put in a minibus “Gazelle”, the viewer sees the seized registered guns, frightened faces of the arrested, and then their figures blindfolded and handcuffed being loaded into a helicopter and taken to Moscow.

On the same day the Head of Tatarstan Rustam Minnikhanov visited Dagestan. He took in the sights and visited some leading enterprises of the Republic, and signed an agreement for trade and economic, scientific, technical and cultural cooperation, and a number of other agreements with Vladimir Vasiliev. Following the meeting, Vladimir Vasiliev said: *“Tatarstan is a leading region... It collects a billion taxes a day. 2 million dollars of investment are raised per day. If we had it today, we would live in other Dagestan... I have always considered that it is necessary to learn from those, who are at the head of the epoch.”*<sup>2</sup>

On February 6, Vladimir Vasiliev submitted for consideration of the Parliament the candidacy of the Minister of Economy of Tatarstan Artem Zdunov for the position of Chairman of the Government of the Republic of Dagestan. On February 7, the People’s Assembly of Dagestan approved his candidacy. Artem Zdunov brought a team of advisors from Kazan. It was soon announced about the planned launch of direct flight connection between Makhachkala and Kazan, the opening of the regional Tatar Koresh Federation, as well as the Tatar holiday Sabantui was held in Dagestan in the summer. The cooperation between the two national republics has been officially established.

The Federal Center has made no secret of the fact that it has decided to transfer the successful management experience of Tatarstan, which is one of the five most socially and economically advanced Russian regions, the top three in terms of the science and technology development and the leader of the national investment climate<sup>3</sup> rating to socially deprived Dagestan.

According to ratings and social surveys, Tatarstan, to which the Federal Center has not

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=72&v=TSXLv4cgcKQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=72&v=TSXLv4cgcKQ)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjb4bYCY\\_\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjb4bYCY__8)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.dag.aif.ru/politic/nebolshaya\\_politika\\_chem\\_dagestana\\_i\\_tatarstan\\_stanut\\_polezny\\_drug\\_drugu](http://www.dag.aif.ru/politic/nebolshaya_politika_chem_dagestana_i_tatarstan_stanut_polezny_drug_drugu)

extended the agreement on the delimitation of powers, despite a shrewd loss of sovereignty, remains a region of stability and high satisfaction of its citizens with authorities and their lives. Dagestan is one of the last regions of the country in terms of social tension, allowance and subsidy provision and living standards.

Thus, this is an unprecedented event in the history of Russian federalism: a federal official without roots and experience in the region has been appointed to the post of the Head of the national republic, and key positions in the national government institutions have been occupied by officials from other regions. In addition, the Federal Center has for the first time tested a transfer of management experience and part of the elite from one national republic to another.

For Dagestan, the external governance may represent a chance to be back to the legal framework of Russia, improving financial discipline and the quality of public administration.

For Tatarstan, the export of elites is the recognition of the high level of development of the region, the spread of the influence of Tatarstan's political networks, a mechanism for the upward mobility of young political managers, new business opportunities. In the conditions when the Federal Center places much more premium on the rotation of senior officials among the constituent entities of the Federation, Tatarstan's political managers are becoming its new export product.

This report attempts to analyze the transformation of the political aspects of the federal relations between the Center and these two national republics, how the Center's relations with the republican elites and within the elites are built today, how the unique national specifics of the regions are taken into account, what happens to the national movements and republican languages. We have not set ourselves the task of covering all aspects of the federal relations of the the two big regions. Thus, for example, we have deliberately excluded the economy and fiscal policy and focused on the relationship of elites and the preservation of national identity and interethnic peace.

The field work for this report was carried out by Dr. Ekaterina Khodzhaeva and Dr. Ekaterina Sokirianskaia in Dagestan and Tatarstan; some additional interviews were made by e-mail and telephone. the Chapter about Tatarstan was written by Ekaterina Khodzhaeva, about Dagestan - by Denis Sokolov and Ekaterina Sokirianskaia.

Many experts and locals have agreed to share their opinions on the basis of anonymity, for which reason we quote them without names.

## **Loss of sovereignty and request for refederalization**

Federalism has a plenty of definitions, and hundreds, if not thousands of academic outputs in the field of philosophy, political science, economics and law are dedicated to its study. This phenomenon has many aspects and different forms of its implementation in practice.

The researchers Mikhail Filippov, Peter Ordeshuk and Olga Shevtsova believe that a state is federal if its state system is characterized by the presence of several levels (usually national, regional and local) and at each level officials are either elected for senior positions such as governors, presidents, prime ministers, judges by citizens through direct voting or (as in the case of judges) appointed by officials elected at this level.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Filippov M., Ordeshook P.C., Shvetsova O. Designing Federalism: a Theory of Self Sustainable Federal Institutions. New York, 2004. P. 9.*

Irina Busygina, a specialist in Russian federalism, emphasizes some of the key aspects of federations: *“Federal relations are essentially an intertwining of interdependencies: regional politicians, at least in some areas, are empowered to act independently, while in other areas they act as dependent agents of the Federal Center. On the other hand, federalism requires reciprocity, and federal politicians depend on regions and their representatives as well... In each federation, the balance in the relationship is under constant review, in fact, every generation of politicians believes that it is necessary to a greater or lesser degree in one or another sphere to reform the relationship between the Centre and regions to address emerging challenges ...”*<sup>5</sup>

Federalism requires constant coordination of interests, bargaining, mutual adaptation, getting the balance often through complicated negotiations. Institutional and legislative flexibility makes it possible for institutions and policy practices to be “tailored” for the changing needs and conditions of the Centre and regions. In such a case, federalism presupposes a significant degree of publicity and transparency of such a harmonization process.

Many experts on federalism claim that after the collapse of the Union, Russia was forced to adopt a federal form of government - vast territories, a multinational population, already existing territorial divisions, and most importantly - centrifugal forces and ethnic separatism too strong at that time. Indeed, the early 90s went down in the annals of history as a “parade of sovereignty”, which became a reaction to the excessive centralization of power in the USSR. To save the country, on March 31, 1992, Boris Yeltsin signed a Federal Treaty with all constituent entities of the Federation, except Tatarstan, Ingushetia and Chechnya.

If we follow the logic of researchers working in the framework of integral federalism<sup>6</sup>, Russia actually had no choice, but not only in connection with the spate of regional separatism: the Russian society is too complicated and multi-layered, includes dozens of densely located and territorially detached segments.<sup>7</sup> The country, which occupies the largest territory of the planet, inhabited by numerous indigenous ethnic groups residing in their historical homelands, had to find a flexible design that would satisfy both the strive of the regions for self-government and the need to preserve unity, to ensure both political freedom and political integration.

The Russian federalism, which is asymmetric and complex, reflects the peculiarities of the country: its constituent entities are very different in size, population, degree of urbanization, the volume of gross national product, budget income, birth rates.

Under the Constitution of 1993, national republics, in fact, have received the status of states: they have their own constitutions, parliaments, presidents (subsequently renamed as heads), supreme courts. Each region could introduce its own characteristics to its institutional design, thus accommodating the regional needs.<sup>8</sup>

Clearly, federalism is not limited to the problem of ethnic entities and inter-ethnic relations, but the national question is its important aspect. The federal structure enables to create a system of governance that is closest to the needs of local communities that can be key to the

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<sup>5</sup>[http://counter-point.org/11\\_busygina/](http://counter-point.org/11_busygina/)

<sup>6</sup>Developed by such scientists as Raymond Aron, Alexander Mark, Arnold Dandier, who talk about the danger of destruction of natural social relations and structures by a modern centralized government apparatus. These scientists see a way out in the restructuring of social, economic, political organization of society on a federal basis. <https://www.peterlang.com/view/title/33368>

[https://superinf.ru/view\\_helpstud.php?id=2130](https://superinf.ru/view_helpstud.php?id=2130)

<sup>7</sup>[https://superinf.ru/view\\_helpstud.php?id=2130](https://superinf.ru/view_helpstud.php?id=2130)

<sup>8</sup>[https://elibrary.ru/ip\\_restricted.asp?rpage=https%3A%2F%2Felibrary%2Eru%2Fitem%2Easp%3Fid%3D5078574](https://elibrary.ru/ip_restricted.asp?rpage=https%3A%2F%2Felibrary%2Eru%2Fitem%2Easp%3Fid%3D5078574)

viability and organic integration of a state of such scale and diversity.

Nevertheless, federalism is not only the legislative implementation of the principle of subsidiarity (according to which only those functions that cannot be effectively performed by the lower-level structures are transferred to upper levels of authority). Developed party system, an independent constitutional court, actual political competition are highly important for its implementation. The development of these institutions in a politically mature society ensures viable federalism, preventing it from being turned into formality. However, democratic processes have not sustainably developed in Russia. The weakness of the Russian federalism of the 90th is also explained by weakness of the federal center.

When Vladimir Putin came to power which was followed by rapid strengthening of the federal center, Russia got a chance to build a balanced federal relationship on the principle of “strong center - strong regions”<sup>9</sup>. However, this opportunity has been missed. Instead of developing the federation, a new national leadership has begun to build a vertical of power, depriving the regions of former sovereignty.

The essence and sequence of these reforms are well known and have been described many times. Changes in the order of formation of the Federation Council (elected governors and republican presidents have been replaced by their representatives), bringing the constitutions and legislation of national republics in line with the federal one, creation of federal districts with a system of presidential plenipotentiary representatives and the main blow to regional sovereignty - the abolition of direct gubernatorial elections (in most entities election by the regional legislative assemblies after the approval of nominees by the President of the Russian Federation), the prohibition of the transfer of the national languages with the state status to the Latin alphabet, reduction in the number of constituent entities through their consolidation, the redistribution of power in favor of the center, the growth of the imbalance of the federal, regional and local budget incomes whereby the increasingly greater part of the income was concentrated in the federal centre, depriving other government levels of economic self-sufficiency.<sup>10</sup>

The abolition of popular-vote elections has deprived regional leaders of legitimacy, minimized the level of political competition that has significantly lowered the status of the highest officials of the republics, gradually turning them into executors of the will of the federal authorities, but not voters. On the wave of “Medvedev’s thaw”, elections in some regions have been returned, but a municipal filter was introduced, moreover, the degree of control of the federal center over the economic, social, political activities of the regions has deprived the popularly elected heads of their political independence.

A leading expert on Russian regions Natalia Zubarevich states: “A highly centralized government system was formed in Russia in the 2000s”<sup>11</sup>. As Irina Busygina rightly pointed out, “*given the huge area of the territory, diversity and multinational population composition, some degree of decentralization will be present, but this decentralization will not make the country a federation*”<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> [http://counter-point.org/11\\_busygina/](http://counter-point.org/11_busygina/)

<sup>10</sup> Isakova G. K., Jalilova M. M. *Features of Russian Federalism in the Public Administration System. // Economics and Enterprise. 2018.No. 4; Busygina I. “Is Russia a Federation?” in Russia: Strategy, Policy and Administration;*

Irvin Studin (ed), I Zulkarnay «Why Russia Has Again Been Sliding from Federalism to Unitarianism», *Public Administration Issues. 2018. Special Issue.*

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.counter-point.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/zubarevich\\_counterpoint11.pdf](http://www.counter-point.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/zubarevich_counterpoint11.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> [http://counter-point.org/11\\_busygina/](http://counter-point.org/11_busygina/)

In the recent years, soon after the re-election of Vladimir Putin for a third term, it has become obvious that the federal authorities are striving to further unify the regions and neutralize the federal features of the national republics. At the same time, it is obvious that these measures are implemented in a manual mode, and some regional elites manage to gain more independence than others.

According to the Dagestan expert, *“We see and understand how the modern Russian state is being built. You get your freedom because you are strong. If you either have /strong/ economy, or the unanimity of the population, or strict control over this population, the center will accept concession”*.

However, in the recent years, even strong regions and leaders (with the exception of Chechnya) are increasingly embedded in the vertical power structure to ensure the loyalty of the elites, the repressive machine is working more intensively. Assimilation tendencies are strengthening: reducing the quality and scope of formation of regional components and national languages, amendments to the Law on Education, as a result of which national languages will be studied not as a compulsory subject in school, but on a voluntary basis.

The Federal Center is implementing these reforms slowly and carefully, avoiding drastic steps. However, trends towards continued centralization increase the demand for re-federalization in the regions, although citizens and activists have an understanding of the extremely low probability of such a scenario. In Dagestan we were told that:

*“Most [citizens] understand: it’s impossible to break the butt end with a lash... Those who have the opportunity to resettle somewhere – do it. Many have a sense of transition from one formation to another.”*<sup>13</sup>

In the following chapters we will take a look at the evolution and current state of the federal relations in the two very different regions of Russia – Tatarstan and Dagestan and offer some general conclusions.

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with a public figure, Makhachkala. May 2019.

# THE REPUBLIC OF TATARSTAN

Tatarstan is perceived as a good example among many national republics of the establishment of a truly independent political entity within the borders of the Russian Federation. The academic literature<sup>14</sup> has described well the transition of this region from the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (TASSR) as a part of the RSFSR to a virtually independent region of Russia in the early 1990s, the only one associated with the Russian Federation by a separate Treaty for the Delimitation of Powers (1994).

At the turn of 1989-1990-ies, the then party and nomenclature leadership of the Republic (including a party boss Shaimiev, who was closely associated with the agricultural sector of the region) felt the momentum and tried to use the two main demands of citizens — economic independence of the donor region within the USSR and ethno-cultural demands of the Tatars as the titular ethnic group, expressed in the agenda of the mass national movement.<sup>15</sup> This enabled the ruling elite and party nomenclature not only to stay in power, but also to gain actual political capital in Russia.

## I. POLITICAL ELITE

Mintimer Shaimiev, the first President of Tatarstan, politically supported by two main pillars — the Tatar national movement and the regional branch of the Communist Party of the Republic of Tatarstan<sup>16</sup>, — as well as informally supported by managers of large enterprises (primarily the oil sector), who saw in this alliance the guarantees of their economic interests<sup>17</sup>, used this support to shape independent economic policy in the most unstable period of economic transition (the early 1990s) and carried out a soft transition to the market economy.

This has enabled:

- firstly, to avoid a serious economic collapse and to strengthen the support of the elite

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<sup>14</sup> Farukshin M. Kh. *Political Elite in Tatarstan: Challenges and Difficulties in Adaptation* // *POLIS*. 1994. No. 6. P. 67-79; Sagitova L. V. *Ethnicity in Modern Tatarstan*. Kazan: Publishing House “Tatpoligraph”, 1998; Salagaev, A. L., Sergeev S. A. *New Masks, Old Roles. Transformation of the Provincial Nomenclature of Tatarstan into the Regional Ruling Elite of Tatarstan* // *POLITEX*. 2010. Vol.6. No. 2. P. 41-57.

<sup>15</sup> See the following section of this report.

<sup>16</sup> According to some experts, this was reflected even in one of the political symbols of Tatarstan — the red-green flag. “Shaimiev had a green-red flag: nationalists and communists — two pillars” (Interview with an expert political scientist, a member of the democratic movement in the 1990s. June 2018).

<sup>17</sup> “...the peculiarity of the directorate, namely the Tatarstan Directorate, is that many of them, such as KAMAZ, for example, were directly subordinate to Moscow... they looked at local authorities with respect at best. Therefore, when the movement towards sovereignty began, they struggled with two such intentions. On the one hand, they are always used to obey the party leaders, but on the other hand, the local party leaders directed them in the wrong way... There was some hidden, poorly understood resistance on the part of some large enterprises. But the thing was that the directors went to pieces after the first free elections of 1989. Most of the directors... lost the election. It took the wind out of their sails. But that situation added more ammunition to the Shaimiev-Usmanov party nomenclature, because it seemed as if one of the competitors in power were eliminated by the hands of the democrats...” (interview with an expert political scientist. June 2018).

by the population (it is important to take into account that in 1991 counter to the Russian legislation M. Shaimiev got his position through the uncontested elections<sup>18</sup>, which required the bolstering of his legitimacy);

- secondly, to transfer the property of large enterprises into private hands, especially “his own people”<sup>19</sup>, as well as representatives of the formed coalition of the former party nomenclature and managers of Soviet enterprises, and to implement the republican control (directly through a controlling stakes or through private structures affiliated with the political elite) to the most profitable and strategically important productive sector<sup>20</sup>;
- thirdly, to bargain with Moscow and the new Russian political elite from the position of a uncontested leader of the territory having both control and effective levers of governance. Between 1991-1993 (that is, prior to the conclusion of the Treaty) federal elections were not held or considered null and void on the territory of Tatarstan, various alternative projects of the development were considered, including full independence from the Russian federation, the creation of its own national guard, borders, among other things. During the preparation of the treaty with the federal center the region paid no taxes:

*“At first we were not part of the Russian Federation... And all the Russian flags disappeared... No elections were held in Russia, it was announced that they had not been held. Referendums were not held. Until they signed the so-called big treaty... It contradicted itself and both Constitutions<sup>21</sup>, so, let it..... Another feature was that we were rather slowly moving to the market, our own currency appeared. Not just the fleet and national troops. But also our own monetary system enabling to*

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<sup>18</sup> M. Shaimiev, from the three of his election campaigns, was twice (in 1991 and 1996) elected in a one-candidate race in violation of the current Russian legislation on elections. In addition, in the same years, the formation of the Parliament of the Republic of Tatarstan violated the current Russian electoral law and did not comply with the basic principles of separation of powers. Thus, as a result of the 1995 elections, some of the parliamentary seats were occupied by the current heads of district administrations and other employees of state structures (78 deputies out of 130), who de facto supported the decisions adopted by the administration of M. Shaimiev. For more information about the features of the formation of the “bureaucratic parliament”, see: Farukshin M. H. *Federalism and Democracy: a complex balance // POLIS/Political Studies*. 1997. No. 6. P. 164-173.

<sup>19</sup> “Own people” are understood by different political scientists primarily as the closest relatives of Shaimiev and his close circle, and in general the committed elite core — people from rural areas, who had graduated from agricultural and veterinary universities of Kazan. (See: Beliaev V. A. *Worldview and Social Behavior of the Ruling Elite of Tatarstan // Social Sciences and Modernity*. 2007. No. 3. P. 150-157; Farukshin M. H. *Political Elite...*). “The idea of the political elite of Tatarstan, rural in its origin, is widespread in the expert community, placing this group in opposition to the citizens. At the same time, it is often beyond the scope of political studies that a significant part of the citizens in the early 1990s are ethnic Tatars, urban residents in the first generation. The census data show that mass urbanization affected the Tatar population in TASSR in the 1960s-1980s, when its share among citizens increased to more than double. Thus, according to the 1959 census, 29.3% of Tatars lived in cities, and according to the 1989 census — 63.4 %. See: *Results of the All-Union census of 1989, Vol. 2. National Composition of the Population of the Tatar ASSR, Kazan, 1990*. Actually, the political elite in Tatarstan, as a result, has represented and represent not only the villagers, but also a significant part of the citizens who are migrants from the village in the first generation.

<sup>20</sup> Before the collapse of USSR, 80 % of industrial enterprises of Tatarstan were in the Soviet ownership, 17 % — owned by the Russian SFSR (See Salagaev A. L., Sergeev S. A. *Op. cit.*).

<sup>21</sup> And the same expert explains: “...the second article states that the protection of human rights is an exclusive prerogative of the Russian Federation, the third article indicates that that it is an exclusive prerogative of the RT, and the fourth highlights that it is joint authority. Although under the Russian Constitution, it is an exclusive right of the Russian Federation” (the interview with an expert political scientist, a member of the democratic movement in the 1990s. June, 2018).

*provide “soft” entry into the market appeared as well.*<sup>22</sup>

At the same time, since the mid-1990s, Tatarstan has declared itself a subject of international law and implemented largely independent foreign policy: first of all, contractual relations with Turkey, Iran, the development of business and cultural relations with Western governments.

This all has worked as a leverage over Yeltsin and his inner circle to bargain for the new conditions of sovereignty — an independent economic, foreign and ethno-cultural policy without a formal departure from the Russian Federation, but with the status of an independent state assigned to Tatarstan by concluding a separate agreement with the Russian Federation.

In general, most experts note<sup>23</sup>, that the main features of the political elite of the region had already developed by 1994.

1. This is the former party nomenclature that has partly incorporated managers of enterprises and some of the moderate and democratically-minded national-centric political leaders.
2. In the vast majority, this nomenclature consisted of people from rural areas, being recruited on the principle of local, nepotist or family ties.
3. As a result, the political elite in a significant majority has been comprised of representatives of the titular ethnic group, enabling some analysts to refer to it as ethnocracy that does not represent the urban population (75% of the population of the Republic) and is formed from rural groups on clan principles. However, according to other experts, this is not quite true: the ethnic imbalance in power circles is associated with the peculiarities of recruiting the elite through the mechanisms of nepotist protectionism and the formation of clientella from the managerial circles, mainly engaged in the public sector.

In this regard, the chances of vertical mobility and political career of the Russians were small almost to the same extent as the majority of Tatars, not included in the inner circle of clan relations — for those and others in the country there was a ‘glass ceiling’ within the management system.<sup>24</sup> Some Russian experts, however, note that the Russian or Russian-speaking population as a whole<sup>25</sup> is well represented among business to a greater extent than among the political elite, and it is the business environment (both the productive sector and the financial and credit sector, as well as the media, IT), often affiliated with the political elite, was in the post-Soviet period, and remains the area of vertical mobility of Russian, urban Tatars and ethnic minorities.

At the same time, experts have repeatedly argued that the business environment in Tatarstan is increasingly under the ethnocratic control of the cohesive political and economic elite: the control, which is quite tough in the most profitable areas that complicates the market

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<sup>22</sup>*Interview with an expert political scientist, a member of the democratic movement in the 1990s. June, 2018.*

<sup>23</sup> Salagaev A. L., Sergeev S. A., *Salagaev New Masks... Op. cit.*; Beliaev V. A. *Political Management and Public Policy of the 21st Century*, M., 2008. P. 205-218; Farukshin M. H. *Op. cit.*; Salagaev A. L., Sergeev S. A. *Regional Elite of the Republic of Tatarstan: Structure and Evolution. Politika. 2013. No. 2.*

<sup>24</sup>Guselbaeva G. Ya. *Formation of the Political Elite under the Transformation of the Social Structure of Modern Russian Society. Thesis for PhD in Social Sciences on specialty 22.00.04. Kazan, KSU, 2005.*

<sup>25</sup>According to the latest census, the Russians make up 39.7% of the population [http://www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/perepis2010/croc/perepis\\_itogi1612.htm](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/perepis_itogi1612.htm)

entry of entrepreneurs living outside the region, including the Tatars:

*“I can give an example. Almost all the land of Tatarstan is cultivated and divided among five or six large agrarian corporations... The land has been transferred to Tatar barons, although in some places, where the land is not very fertile, there are remnants of collective farms, in the north, in the north-eastern regions, where the land is bad, it is unprofitable... I have seen with my own eyes many attempts of rich Tatars from outside Tatarstan to enter here economically, and no one has been given access. Here everything is divided and, therefore, others or those not related to some groups cannot create business... It’s called “The Tatarstan Corporation.”<sup>26</sup>*

This cohesion of interests of business elites explains the almost manual management of many production areas in Tatarstan — representatives of the political elite either own leading enterprises or they are members of their boards of directors and increasingly control the business and production, which, if necessary, can be used for political purposes:

*“The property has remained with the right people and within the Tatarstan vertical power structure. Supposing that the price for gasoline shows an upward tendency now. This makes agriculture unprofitable... and since most of the elite have come from farmers, they have a special affection to agriculture... Thus, Minnikhanov has agreed with local oil producers, and they, for example, sell a certain number of oil products 10 thousand cheaper. The difference is 51 thousand or 41 thousand. Why? The President has asked to do so.”<sup>27</sup>*

4. The participation (or communication through relatives) of the political elite in the most profitable economic spheres, first of all, in the oil industry, and practically personal control of the top officials of the Republic or their relatives over the largest business structures (TAIF, Tatneft). The wives, children and nephews of both presidents are the richest people not only by the standards of Tatarstan, but also countrywide<sup>28</sup>. This creates special conditions for the development of nepotism in Tatarstan — the private interests of the political elite are often a significant factor in the negotiations with Moscow on new contractual terms and conditions. Thus, the extension of the agreement on the division of jurisdictions in 2007 had only a symbolic status: the sovereignty of the Republic was significantly weakened over the previous few years (from 2001 to 2004) as a result of bringing the legislation of the Republic in line with the Russian one. Many analysts attribute the promptness and ease of the “loss” of sovereignty of the Republic and the willingness of its political elite to comply with the new rules of federal relations to the fact that in exchange for these concessions the elite has been offered the guarantees of retention of title to property:

*“[Question:] What, in your opinion, is left of the sovereignty of the Tatarstan elite?*

*[Answer:] Stock of wealth”<sup>29</sup>*

Despite the protest of the primarily Tatar public and its representatives in the elected government agencies (the State Duma, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Tatarstan), the

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<sup>26</sup>Interview with an expert political scientist, a member of the democratic movement in the 1990s. June, 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with an expert political scientist. June, 2018.

<sup>28</sup>Shaimiev’s sons are included in the list of the richest people in Russia. It’s not personal. Ranking of the Richest Families according to Forbes 2018. <http://www.forbes.ru/milliardery/366483-nichego-lichnogo-reyting-bogateyshih-semey-po-versii-forbes-2018>

<sup>29</sup> Interview with an expert historian, member of the Tatar nationalist movement. June 2018.

most important achievements of sovereignty and independence in the economic and political spheres have been lost. However, in 2007, Tatarstan still reserved some achievements for itself in the ethno-cultural policy<sup>30</sup>, as well as support for the Tatar Diaspora outside Tatarstan<sup>31</sup>.

These features are not always specific — this is how many strong regional elites in Russia can be characterized. **However, a special feature of Tatarstan is the ability of elites to resolve contradictions on their own and value cohesion more than political infighting.** In this regard, the external observer often perceives the elite of the Republic as a single and very consolidated entity, and even the transition of power from M. Shaimiev to R. Minnikhanov in 2010 seemingly occurred peacefully, conflict-free. However, this apparent cohesion of the political elite formed in the early 1990s and strengthened by the early 2000s does not signify a lack of internal contradictions. Both in the 1990s and 2000s, the elites within themselves rejected the most oppositional forces, and co-opted the ones with greatest capacity for compromise.<sup>32</sup>

## 1. Vertical power structure

The Tatar national organizations, which were used in the struggle for sovereignty with the young Russian government, and outlived their usefulness in 1994, when the main agreements were reached with Moscow, became a first targets. Then, by 1998, the split within the elite was overcome, when the urban Tatar elite, supported by managers of large industrial enterprises, tried to stage a coup in the Parliament, the majority of which was the rural nomenclature (the so-called Altynbaiev Fronde). The next was the leadership of Kazan and the sub-elite group, consolidated around the figure of the mayor of Kazan K. Iskhakov.

After the celebration of the 1000th anniversary of the city in 2005, this strong group was weakened by the departure of its charismatic leader and his entourage to the Far East Region to hold federal posts, whereof K. Iskhakov was soon sent to the representative office of the Russian Federation to the Organization “Islamic Cooperation”, where he worked from 2007 to 2011.

On returning to Kazan, K. Iskhakov conducted management activities in one of the Kazan mosques, and (although not immediately, in 2016) was appointed the Assistant to the President of the Republic of Tatarstan to supervise activities related to the creation of the Bulgar Islamic Academy.<sup>33</sup> Thus, as early as the mid-2000s, the political opposition within the Tatarstan elite ceased public activity.

The existing intra-elite groups are well consolidated and have no visible contradictions — in fact, they are one elite, internally divided into two well-consolidated cores, gathered, in turn, around the persons of the first and second presidents of Tatarstan.<sup>34</sup> Each of these groups is affiliated with a strong business structure: TAIF is controlled by M. Shaimiev’s group, Tat-

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<sup>30</sup> *And even then not all; for example, the legislated transition of the Tatar language to the Latin script in 1999 was abolished by the Russian law of 2001, and the regional authorities could not oppose anything to this.*

<sup>31</sup> *Makarova G. I. Ethno-Cultural Policy of the Federal Center and the Republic of Tatarstan: Integration Strategies. Kazan, 2009.*

<sup>32</sup> *Here and elsewhere we rely mainly on the two texts: Salagaev A. L., Sergeev S. A. Regional elites..., Salagaev A. L., Sergeev S. A. New masks...*

<sup>33</sup> *Kamil Iskhakov was appointed Assistant to the President of the Republic of Tatarstan. <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/news/330083>*

<sup>34</sup> *Elite of Tatarstan. How does the “Corporation Tatarstan” work?.. <https://www.idelreal.org/a/28588332.html>*

neft is under the control of R. Minnikhanov. Both groups have their own people at all levels of government (from district administrations to Republican ministries), as well as among the security forces. In fact, after the transition of political power from one president to another within the political elite there is constant bureaucratic infighting for influence and leadership positions. And none of the groups has definitive dominance.

As noted by researchers A. Salagaiev and S. Sergeev<sup>35</sup>, the coherence of these sub-elites is ensured by a significant number of managers integrated into both groups that ensures consolidation and cohesion on fundamental issues. In addition to these two large groups, the same authors single out the smaller communities that currently have “fading” political capital. The first such group is the inner circle of F. Mukhametshin, currently the speaker of the Tatarstan Parliament, a political heavyweight of the 1990s-2000s, who partially lost political influence in the 2010s. This group unites many representatives of the Tatar intelligentsia, including the opposition, around the leader, and ensures the connection of the Tatarstan elite with the Tatar nationalist circles, in addition to the built system of quasi-state Tatar national organizations.<sup>36</sup>

Another “fading” group is consolidated around the first Deputy Prime Minister R. Muratov and unites representatives of business and financial circles. The ministers most successful project is the work on the vision of development of Tatarstan without oil revenues, implemented in the 1990s-2000s with the help of experts-economists from the United States. However, today none of the smaller groups<sup>37</sup> claim to assertive political capital, equal to clans of M. Shaimiev and R. Minnikhanov, they are integrated into a single political establishment.

## **2. Governance model during the period of the President M. Shaimiev**

The elite governance styles and mechanism also differed in time and were associated with the periods of the top officials’ innings. M. Shaimiev has promoted the political project of Tatarstan as a national political entity. He remains a symbolic “father of the Tatar nation” and enjoys the nascent cult of his personality.<sup>38</sup> In the 1990s, his shrewd approach and high political lability brought political dividends to Tatarstan: during the bargaining with Moscow in 1990-1994, until B. Yeltsin pronounced his well-known words “take as much sovereignty as you want”, the principles of his policy at the federal level were based on playing on weaknesses and maneuvering between different groups.<sup>39</sup>

Shaimiev equally enthusiastically supported the 1991 coup and Yeltsin’s tough policy on the development of parliamentarism, bargaining for Tatarstan more and more economic pref-

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<sup>35</sup> Salagaiev A. L., Sergeev S. A. *New masks...* P. 41-57.

<sup>36</sup> *Expert interview June 2018.*

<sup>37</sup> *Sometimes they also include the core, grouped around the political figure of the current mayor of Kazan I. Metshin, closely associated with the Shaimiev group.*

<sup>38</sup> *Today, the prerequisites for the creation of the cult of M. Shaimiev are formed by analogy with the cult of B. Yeltsin in Yekaterinburg. Thus, a park named after him was opened in his native Aktanyshskii district in the spring of 2018, and the presidential library is being built on the territory of the Kazan Kremlin again in honor of the first President of Tatarstan: “The park has been built, the presidential library in the Kremlin is being built. Once the portraits were hung. The book has been published... He did has done a lot, for sure, — defended the interests of the Republic and the people. And he has the sincere support of the people. Most people respect him” (the interview with a sociologist, researcher of ethnic and religious policy. May, 2018).*

<sup>39</sup> *Interview with an expert political scientist, a member of the democratic movement in the 1990s. June, 2018.*

erences. In the middle and second half of the 1990s, he acquired the status of as a federal politician, playing a significant role in the political bloc of “heavyweights” “Fatherland: All Russia”, gradually losing ground after the 1999 elections and the victory of the “Unity” (Edinstvo) bloc. However, the principles of Shaimiev’s domestic policy have always been the following.

1. Defending not only economic, but also symbolic achievements of sovereignty — the status of Tatarstan as a state entity, de jure independent of the Russian Federation, with its citizenship, the Tatar language as the state language. The closest adviser to Shaimiev R. Khakimov has long been implementing the project of Tatarstan civil identity, aiming at uniting all the inhabitants of the Republic into a single political community. At the same time, the specific ethno-cultural situation of Tatarstan, that is the parity of Russian and Tatar culture, Orthodoxy and Islam, became important elements of this identity. The latter, in turn, was to be perceived as modernized and the closest to European values.<sup>40</sup>
2. In the field of justice and law enforcement, Tatarstan behaved in the 1990s as a truly free and independent region: the Supreme Court of the Republic of Tatarstan did not recognize the right of citizens to appeal to the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation (*“the Russian flag means that the Russian laws will be in force here, that Mavliatshin, the Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Court [RT — the author’s note] will not declare that we have no right to appeal against local court judgments in the Russian courts... a person by the name of Nesmelov has been directly prohibited from taking legal actions there. But we needed this right of appeal, because the local court judgments... could be wrong.. and a plenty of such judgments had been delivered.”*<sup>41</sup>
3. In the 1990s, Tatarstan retained the design of military and security forces different from the Russian one: thus, the KGB remained in the structure of the Republic governance until 2001. Although being subordinated to the FSB of Russia, this Committee was part of the structure of the Republican ministries. The strong connection of security forces and law enforcement agencies with the regional elite has not been weakened even in the process of bringing the national legislation and law enforcement practice in line with the Russian ones, initiated in the early 2000s at the federal level and implemented at the local level by representatives of the prosecutor’s office. This was part of the compromise that the regional elites made to preserve their position and property. However, **leadership of the security services continue to be recruited exclusively from the inner circle or in agreement with the Republican leadership (with the exception of the FSB since the beginning of 2000s)**, which is quite unusual for modern Russia, where, as a rule, rotation and appointment of the top officials of territorial offices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Investigation Committee, prosecutor’s office from other regions is being practiced.
4. Shaimiev’s cadre policy was largely based on personal loyalty and closeness (kinship, community) and was isolationist, limiting social mobility for large groups of people, especially young people. By the end of his term, such a elite was unable to address the new challenges and had all the signs of gerontocracy — when key positions were

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<sup>40</sup> See the program composition by R. Khakimov, “Where is our Mecca?” (Kazan, 2011) and its updated version: Rafael Khakimov: “Where is our Mecca?” Version 2.0. <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/79936>

<sup>41</sup> Interview with an expert political scientist, a member of the democratic movement in the 1990s. June, 2018.

often occupied by persons who were personally loyal to the President and of the same generation, but professionally unable to face up to new realities. By the end of the 2000s, this had caused discontent among the population and business circles.

5. Strong reliance on villages and support of rural areas. Realizing that this is the basis of the political legitimacy of his regime, M. Shaimiev invested a lot in the development of rural areas, strengthening, including politically, the leadership of district administrations through support of social projects and large agricultural holdings. The rural development program included widespread gasification, the development of the social sphere and infrastructure (primarily, the road network). These achievements significantly distinguish Tatarstan from neighboring regions and regions of Central Russia, where in the 1990s agriculture almost ceased to be subsidized and rural communities were dying out.
6. At first, urban development was not a priority for M. Shaimiev, but since the second half of his term a large program of modernization of the regional capital and the elimination of dilapidated housing had been launched, on which in the republic, despite the resistance of the business elite, a one-percent quasi-voluntary income tax income was imposed: *“He has liquidated slum housing, handing out free apartments to residents and clearing up the center of Kazan... But the implementation of the program required money, and he had introduced the income tax of 1 %. Entrepreneurs began to speak out, to make noise. He answered: “If you don’t like it, you can leave”. But Moscow learnt about it and canceled the tax. And then he introduced a voluntary donation equal to the same 1 %. When some dissatisfied people appeared again, he repeated the same phrase.”*<sup>42</sup>

The result of this program has been the resettlement of a large part of residents from dilapidated residential areas of the center of Kazan, followed by their almost mass destruction for the construction of elite housing and business centers. The second big project was the infrastructural modernization of the city in the lead up to the Millennium of Kazan (construction of new roads, bridge, reconstruction of the Kazan Kremlin and the construction of a mosque on its territory). Despite the internal contradictions between the elites and the city administration, he managed to consolidate efforts and for the first time to demonstrate to the federal center the success of the model of cooperation based on return of funds from the federal budget for the implementation of high-profile symbolic and infrastructure projects.

### **3. Governance model during the period of the President R. Minnikhanov**

The governance style of the successor of the first President of Tatarstan Rustam Minnikhanov largely follows the governance priorities of Shaimiev. On the one hand, it is reliance on the villagers (the program of modernization of villages, consolidation and digitalization of rural schools<sup>43</sup>, support for large agricultural businesses). *“A huge number of programs, support*

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with an expert political scientist, a member of the democratic movement in the 1990s. June, 2018.

<sup>43</sup> *“We were the first to completely switch to the Internet in our time. In the 90-ies, the then popular newspaper “Gazeta” published an article of Kevorkova... and there I, amongst others, said the following: “The people who drops out from the Internet, drops out of history”... When Shaimiev saw this phrase, he gathered the Commission, and encharged it with a task to introduce the Internet in every village, in every school, not to put schools into service*

for social programs for the villagers. FABs built — medical stations — every head of municipality was provided with Niva [an off-roader car — the author’s note]. School buses run as well. Gas was wired everywhere”<sup>44</sup>. The second President of Tatarstan, as well as the first, develops large agricultural holdings, while small businesses and farms are struggling to survive: “*Small business is dying, and the number of farmers is decreasing. Under Shaimiev’s rule, there were agricultural giants, the land is neither needed, nor cultivated. I have a piece of land I rent out. Prices of milk have fallen, feed is expensive. Business in the village is developing quite badly.*”<sup>45</sup>

However, on the other hand, Minnikhanov implements the cadre and internal policies, different from his predecessor’s. He is more ready to accept young people and city residents to government positions (more often than the middle level with limited freedom of decision, but nevertheless): “*Minnikhanov is not so committed to ethnic values, and not so committed to gerontocracy. He has appointed many young and urban persons... He has mastered the Open Government.*”<sup>46</sup>

“*Times are different, political things have faded into the background, and not much emphasis is made on cultural things either. In any case, people do not walk around with slogans and posters. And he implements economic activities in a very efficient manner, he has a good and young team... These are young active people, who implement tourism projects, new economic projects, trendy things, these are only young people around there.*”<sup>47</sup>

The professional level of a government official and, consequently, his or her work experience, as well as personal loyalty, become equally decisive in the career advancement of the middle-level bureaucracy. Since 2010, the leadership structure of key ministries has significantly rejuvenated. People of urban origin and with non-Tatar surnames (the current Prime Minister, and in the past the head of one of the districts of Kazan A. Pesoshin, the Minister of Youth and Sports V. Leonov, the former Minister of Economy of the Republic of Tatarstan A. Zdunov) were recruited. Interestingly, the current political leadership of Tatarstan hears criticism: thus, in the mid-2010s, he was often accused of the fact that all the key positions of the republican level had been given to men, and women in the upper echelons of power were absent. Recent personnel appointments (L. Fazleeva — the Deputy Prime Minister, I. Aiupova — the Minister of Culture) suggest that women, especially of younger generation, return to power to play symbolically important roles:

“[Question:] *Is the elite being renewed?*

[Answer:] *Finally women have appeared in power, previously there were nearly no public women. And now they are Fishman, Baltusova, the Minister of Culture, the Minister of Justice. Some balance has been established.*”<sup>48</sup>

R. Minnikhanov inherits the Shaimiev’s strategies and claims foreign policy influence through building cooperation with the countries of the Middle East, Central and East Asia.

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*without the Internet, a computer class. Therefore, when our schools are put into service, now under Minnikhanov, in earlier times of Shaimiev, a computer class is firstly shown. At the same time, optical fiber was carried out throughout the country, and digital phones were completely switched to”. The expert interview with R. Khakimov, Advisor to M. Shaimiev. June, 2018.*

<sup>44</sup> Interview with a sociologist, researcher of ethnic and religious policy. May, 2018.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with a sociologist, researcher of ethnic and religious policy. May, 2018.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with an expert political scientist, a member of the democratic movement in the 1990s. June, 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with a sociologist, specialist in ethnic and national policy. May, 2018.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with a sociologist, researcher of ethnic and religious policy. May, 2018.

*“But in addition, Minnikhanov himself is developing a lot of activity in relation to the Eastern States, and, of course, he reports to the Federal Center, now it is impossible without it. But, in my opinion, this is very important, and it is also essential from the point of view of the fact that relations are being developed. For example, with Saudi Arabia, with which, you know, Russia, even the Soviet Union, previously had no frequent contacts, we believed that this country was an American satellite, but now in the Russian Federation as a whole, and in Tatarstan there are other values, and for some things we know that we can sell up a lot of things, even military equipment... so why not do it.”*<sup>49</sup>

R. Minnikhanov leads the Strategic Cooperation Group “Russia - Islamic World”. It was created in 2006 by E. Primakov and M. Shaimiev, at the turn of 2000–2010 it fell into decay and was recreated in 2014 on the initiative of the Russian President Vladimir Putin, entrusting it to R. Minnikhanov. Using this mandate and relying on his own foreign policy contacts built by Tatarstan earlier, the leadership of the Republic establishes economic relations with Arab countries, Muslim countries of East Asia. There are representative offices and consulates of Turkey, Iran and Kazakhstan in Kazan. Currently, economic relations<sup>50</sup> with China are actively developing, and a representative office of this country has been opened. *“At present, emphasis is placed on bringing investment not so much from Europe, but from the Arab world, the Caucasian countries, and there is an active cooperation with Kazakhstan. The consular agency has been opened, now the consular agency of China is due to be opened ...”*<sup>51</sup>

If in the first years of sovereignty Tatarstan positioned itself as a politically independent actor of international politics, now the policy of Minnikhanov is coordinated with the federal government.

*“The situation has changed, and if in the 90s we saw some independence, today we do not see this independence. A large delegation goes, for example, to Germany, and this delegation consists of a number of heads of regions and that’s it.”*<sup>52</sup>

In almost all of these areas, the leadership of Tatarstan acts in accordance with the common political line of the federal center, but sometimes in relations with the most strategic partners it is entitled to have its own position. For example, during the conflict with Turkey, Tatarstan did not stop cooperation with this country, again upon consent of the federal center: the consular agency worked quite intensively, Turkish businessmen felt safe, and the Tatar-Turkish relations were not interrupted. *“Work with Turkey is also performed through Tatarstan. When the plane was downrf, it was not particularly brutal here, and Putin also allowed to survive... enterprises were not kicked out of here, and the Turks understood this very well”.*<sup>53</sup>

Tatarstan is actively building business and cultural relations with Western countries. Such

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with an expert political scientist involved in the analytical support for political decisions. June, 2018.

<sup>50</sup> *“China is very active. We are looking forward to the Xinjiang — Europe transport corridor, which will pass through Tatarstan anyway. We have already built our part, Russia remains. Kazakhstan has built, China has already built five highways from China to Kazakhstan. And Kazakhstan has built up to the Orenburg region... And this is a completely different infrastructure, but here we are building a logistics center, warehouses, Sviiazhsk transshipping point as well, that is, we are preparing for the fact that if suddenly this road runs here, we will capture part of the market, and will take away, as a convenient geographical location. Here, in the Middle Volga there is just a center. And our own transport vehicle is the same KAMAZ”.* Expert interview with R. Khakimov, Advisor to M. Shaimiev. June 2018.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with a sociologist, researcher of ethnic and religious policy. May, 2018.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with an expert political scientist involved in the analytical support for political decisions. June, 2018.

<sup>53</sup> Expert interview with R. Khakimov, Advisor to M. Shaimiev. June, 2018.

active foreign policy work, of course, strengthens the position of the current president of the republic, and the status of the president of the republic, guaranteed by V.V. Putin until 2020, is undoubtedly beneficial to him in international negotiations.

R. Minnikhanov also creates the image of Tatarstan as an innovative region, investing in IT-sphere (Innopolis, Technoparks), the digitalization of governance and public services, the development of advanced technologies, the creation of infrastructure:

*“At present, the president puts a great emphasis on the technologies... IT Park, Innopolis — a new city in the open field”<sup>54</sup>; “At the same time, we have created the entire infrastructure, because we have realized that the market economy without roads, the Internet, a digital phone is impossible, so we are the first in Russia to have introduced all these things. Understanding that the market is, first of all, infrastructure. But, unfortunately, many good roads end on the border of Tatarstan”<sup>55</sup>.*

In the field of urban development, Minnikhanov is famous for having co-opted the representatives of social activists fighting for the preservation of the cultural heritage of the city into the administrative ranks, thus providing a direct channel of communication with constructively minded opposition circles. He also adopts the Moscow’s successful experience in strengthening the urban environment, supporting the development of parks and recreational spaces not only in Kazan, but also in other cities of the republic (Naberezhnye Chelny, Nizhnekamsk).

As a result, unlike M. Shaimiev, R. Minnikhanov enjoys legitimacy from a wider social base, that is not only the residents of or people originating from rural areas, but also the urban residents, young people who see new possibility of social mobility, residents of neighboring regions coming to Tatarstan as an economically attractive center.

The head of Kazan I. Metshin, despite the connection through family ties with the group of M. Shaimiev, follows the same strategy as well of hiring urban Russian-speaking youth, “but he creates the Executive Committee mainly from the Russian-speaking persons, apparently, on purpose, because they go to Moscow, to other regions. If he shows only representatives of the titular nationality, he can, as I understand, receive a reprimand from the Kremlin. And he is aiming for the post of the President”<sup>56</sup>.

This enlargement of the social base gives the modern Tatarstan’s elite the opportunity to rebuild the symbolic and ideological content of the Tatarstan project that is not only Tatar culture and Islam, or a dialogue of cultures and religions traditional for Tatarstan, but also modernity, technological development. Today, all three images of the region are equally used to build public agenda.

The previous project of regional identity based on the formation of a quasi-national identity of a *tatarstanets* /resident of Tatarstan/ (the project developed by the Shaimiev’s adviser R. Hakimov) is on the decline not only among the Russian population, but also among Tatars. Thus, in the 2001 study, it was in demand among Tatars: more than half of them felt themselves exclusively Tatarstan citizens, and another third — both Tatarstan citizens and Russians. Among Russians, dualistic civic identity dominated at that time: 47 %, just over a third identified themselves only as Russians. In 2001, every tenth Russian called himself or herself a Tatarstan citizen. After 16 years, the situation is changing radically: Tatarstan identity alone remains in demand with only 10 % of the Tatar population, and 1 % of Russians (which is even lower than the sampling error). At the same time, the determination of themselves as Russians

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with a sociologist, researcher of ethnic and religious policy. May, 2018.

<sup>55</sup> Expert interview with R. Khakimov, Advisor to M. Shaimiev. June, 2018.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with an expert political scientist involved in the analytical support for political decisions. June, 2018.

has doubled in Russian to 62 %, and Tatars — to almost a fifth. Today, more than half of Tatars still call themselves Tatarstan citizens and Russians, and among Russians — a third.<sup>57</sup>

**Table 1. Changes in national identity in Tatarstan**

	Tatars		Russians	
	2001	2017	2001	2017
Self-identification with Tatarstan citizens	<b>53 %</b>	<b>19 %</b>	<b>10 %</b>	<b>1 %</b>
Self-identification with Russians	<b>7 %</b>	<b>19 %</b>	<b>36 %</b>	<b>62 %</b>
Self-identification with both Russians and Tatarstan citizens	<b>35 %</b>	<b>52 %</b>	<b>47 %</b>	<b>31 %</b>
Other	<b>1 %</b>	<b>7 %</b>	<b>2 %</b>	<b>3 %</b>
Undecided	<b>4 %</b>	<b>5 %</b>	<b>5 %</b>	<b>4 %</b>

Neither symbolic parity of cultures and two ethnic groups (as described below), nor changes in cadre policy can reverse the general situation with the growth of national self-identification among Russians and their greater readiness, in comparison with Tatars, to support primarily the federal center: “Russians have higher federal aspirations than Tatars”<sup>58</sup>. This is also confirmed by the survey data. Thus, in response to the direct question “Who do you think defends the interests of your people to a greater extent?” Russian and Tatars made different assessments — the first was more focused on the federal authorities (every third Russian), and the Tatars in half of the cases on the regional authorities. However, the eighth part of the Russian population sees the republican authorities as a reference point, which together with half of the Tatar population is the basis of the legitimacy of the existing political elite. Nevertheless, a significant part of the population (half of Russians and 37 % of Tatars) does not support any level of power, or has difficulty in giving any answer, that is, completely refuses to support any authorities.

**Table 2. Orientation of the population of Tatarstan to different branches of government in 2017**

Who do you think is most effective in defending the interests of your people?	Tatars (613 respondents)	Russian (665 respondents)
Republican leadership	<b>53 %</b>	<b>16 %</b>
Federal authorities	<b>7 %</b>	<b>31 %</b>
Local government authorities	<b>2 %</b>	<b>5 %</b>
None of the listed	<b>17 %</b>	<b>22 %</b>
I find it difficult to answer	<b>20 %</b>	<b>26 %</b>
Other option	<b>1 %</b>	<b>0 %</b>

<sup>57</sup> Here and elsewhere in the report we use the results of three mass surveys on ethno-cultural and ethno-linguistic problems. The first survey was conducted in 2001 under the project “Russian Language and Culture in the Language and Cultural Policy of the National Republics of Russia (in terms of the Republic of Tatarstan)”, the second — in 2010 under the study “Dynamics of Ethno-cultural and Civil Identities in the Context of Strategies of Ethno-national Development in post-Soviet Russia: in terms of the Republic of Tatarstan” — the head of both studies is G. I. Makarova. The third research project led by O. A. Maksimova “Generation Continuity and Gap in the Information, Multi-ethnic, Multi-confessional Society (based on the material of the Republic of Tatarstan)” was implemented with the support of the Russian Foundation for Basic Research in autumn 2017 immediately after the aggravation of the ethno-linguistic conflict in Tatarstan. The scope of all three samples are comparable: in 2001 — 905 people, in 2010 — 1002 respondents, in 2017 — 1480 respondents

<sup>58</sup> Interview with a sociologist, researcher of ethnic and religious policy. May, 2018.

Being, as he is called, an “experienced manager”, easily and quickly addressing issues of the business environment, R. Minnikhanov does not pay much importance to the symbolic achievements of his predecessor and often withdraws from decisions in the field of ethnic and cultural policy, providing the representatives of the Shaimiev clan with the opportunity to solve them. “*Minnikhanov is more pragmatic. He has always been said, even being the Prime Minister, that politics is not for him*”.<sup>59</sup>

For example, he did not support the extension of the Treaty for the Delimitation of Powers expired in 2017, working under other so-called small agreements concluded with the federal center on specific issues. Minnikhanov stayed away from debates on the abolition of the President’s status for the Head of Tatarstan (although this status is beneficial to him).<sup>60</sup> He and his team of technocratic and young government officials are fully integrated into the administrative and bureaucratic system of the federal-regional relations. The experts note that his main task in the current environment, which he solves very effectively, and for which deserves the support of both the population and the elite, is to provide a return flow of funds from the federal level.

Tatarstan directs most of the collected taxes to the federal budget, but effectively returns them<sup>61</sup> through the implementation of various projects — in 2013 it was the Universiade, in 2018 Kazan hosted the FIFA World Football Cup. At the same time, it is important that **Tatarstan not only raises funds from the Federal budget, but uses them in such a way as to demonstrate the result, and in general to get the approval of people.**

*“Minnikhanov is rather an economic lobbyist, he thinks through the economy, has different way of thinking, and it is unlikely that he will lobby for any cultural values only if the State Council [the Parliament of the Republic — the author’s note] orders him to do the same, but this is hard to imagine... Here, on the contrary, the President orders the State Council to do something, the system operates in such a manner. In terms of the lobbying capabilities there must be a demonstration of the Tatarstan’s achievements, come and see. It is one of the few regions in which some new production facilities are constantly launched.”*<sup>62</sup>

Many experts note that **the strength of the republic leadership is the ability to effective financial reporting and active PR of its achievements.** And although they are often simulation projects and “Potemkin villages” (such as the restoration of facades without real improvement of yards), it works for a positive image of Tatarstan.

## 4. Security forces as part of a consolidated project

Minnikhanov, in general, continues the predecessor’s relations with representatives of

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<sup>59</sup>This expert has put it in more detail as follows: ‘And Shaimiev was pragmatic.. like Minnikhanov... they are treading the ground. Shaimiev says: “Well, there are no preferences. We pay tax like everyone else. Yes, do we, so what, why do we need an agreement?” But he has not understood the politically symbolic role. Minnikhanov is even more down-to-earth. He is such an economist by nature, because his head is a computer, he calculates everything and works quickly. There is some fear of politics, or misunderstanding of the meaning of politics.” Expert interview with R. Khakimov, an Advisor to M. Shaimiev. June 2018.

<sup>60</sup> Expert interviews. May-June, 2018.

<sup>61</sup> For example, in Tatarstan, 70 % of the collected tax and other contributions go to the Federal budget, and this is one of the largest donor regions after Moscow and St. Petersburg. However, the leadership of Tatarstan manages to return up to 48% of contributions to the budget of Russia for specific projects or under inter-budget transfers. <https://realnoevremya.ru/articles/67340-reyting-regionov-rossii-po-nalogovym-otchisleniyam>

<sup>62</sup> Interview with an expert political scientist involved in the analytical support for political decisions. June, 2018.

federal law enforcement agencies, according to the researcher G. Guzelbaeva, the security forces make up 10% of the political elite of the Republic.<sup>63</sup> The right hand of the President and the chief of staff in charge of internal policy, former minister of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Tatarstan Asgat Safarov, lost his post in the Security Department after the scandal with torture in the Police Department (Dalnii), but retained informal influence in the power circles.<sup>64</sup> One of the brothers of the President of the Republic of Tatarstan R. Minnikhanov headed the State Traffic Safety Inspectorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Tatarstan until 2016 and could have continued to hold this post, if not for his age exceeding the limit for that post.<sup>65</sup> Currently, he heads the state budgetary institution of the Republic of Tatarstan “Road Traffic Safety”, which distributes funds for the development of the road network. And the former head of the security service of R. Minnikhanov R. Gumerov is the head of the territorial administration of the Federal National Guard Troops Service (by analogy with the Federal Center, where the Head of the Federal National Guard Troops Service V. Zolotov had provided protection to V. Putin for a long time).

All appointments of senior positions in law enforcement agencies in the region are negotiated with the local leadership, and any conflicts between the regional political establishment and the “alien” heads of law enforcement agencies in Tatarstan are impossible because the security forces in most cases are recruited from “the inner circle”: *“People are let go — they are transferred, agreed upon. The Department of Internal policies... is a regulator, the Ministry of Ethnic Affairs, control, regulation. It works with security forces.”*<sup>66</sup>

Prosecutor’s offices act independently very rarely. Such a clear confrontation has recently become the position of the Prosecutor’s Office on the issue of teaching of the Tatar language in schools in 2017; and a direct order from Vladimir Putin and a visit of Prosecutor General Chaika to Tatarstan with direct pressure on the local Prosecutor’s Office have been required to strengthen this position. If such pressure had not been exerted, the Prosecutor’s Office would not have found violations, as it had not found them for two decades, despite numerous complaints from Russian-speaking parents.

## 5. Export of elites

One of the specific features of the leadership of R. Minnikhanov is a different principle of export of the elites. If for M. Shaimiev sending political figures to the federal level was a means to get rid of the intra-elite opposition (see the case of K. Iskhakov described above), for the current leadership of Tatarstan it is a means of expanding his influence to the federal level. Thus, many government officials who had distinguished themselves at the regional level such as N. Nikiforov, M. Khusnullin were appointed at the federal level or to the top leadership in

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<sup>63</sup> Guzelbaeva G. Ya. *Formation of the Political Elite under the Transformation of the Social Structure of Modern Russian Society. Thesis for PhD in Social Sciences on specialty 22.00.04. Kazan, KSU, 2005.*

<sup>64</sup> However, over time, due to resignations in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, this influence has been weakened. Thus, in February 2019, Vladimir Putin dismissed the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Tatarstan R. Gilmanov, a person who had worked for many years under the leadership of A. Safarov. After the resignation Gilmanov was immediately appointed the Secretary of the Security Council of the Republic of Tatarstan ([https://news.rambler.ru/politics/41694995/?utm\\_content=rnews&utm\\_medium=read\\_more&utm\\_source=copylink](https://news.rambler.ru/politics/41694995/?utm_content=rnews&utm_medium=read_more&utm_source=copylink), <http://tatcenter.ru/news/sekretarem-sovbeza-tatarstana-stal-rafail-gilmanov/>)

<sup>65</sup> Rifkat Minnikhanov: *“I don’t say farewell, I say goodbye”*. <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/319180>.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with a sociologist, researcher of ethnic and religious policy. May, 2018.

Moscow. The export of technocratic government officials is presented as an achievement of the region and is used to increase its lobbying potential, as well as to promote the interests of Tatarstan business. For example, according to experts, the construction business of the region has benefited from the appointment of M. Khusnullin to the administration of Moscow.

Export of the best practices has not always been successful. Thus, in 2014, after the annexation of the Crimea, a group comprised of the republican politicians, experts and religious leaders was sent to negotiate with the Crimean Tatars. However, the Crimean Tatars have refused political cooperation. Today, only one academic project developed by the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan is being implemented in Crimea aimed to study the history of the Crimean Tatars<sup>67</sup>, and support for this region is carried out through economic cooperation and infrastructural support of Tatarstan to some Crimean Tatar villages.

The export of elites in Dagestan and the group of Artem Zdunov, sent there to take up the leadership positions is seen by the republican elite as a step to increase influence at the federal level and as recognition of the efficiency of Tatarstan's model, which today has a completely different design than in the 1990s. However, other experts believe the appointment of A. Zdunov in Dagestan is not associated with the lobbying capacity of Tatarstan:

*“I had known him prior to the meeting with the Minister of Economy, a very rational person, but he left the Federal Security Service. He developed all sorts of economic projects, then I look..., Artem has soared up to the post of Minister of Economy. The moment is such that representatives of law enforcement agencies have gradually followed him to Dagestan... Thus, when they say: “Min-nikhanov has negotiated this...” its the Federal Center, exclusively Moscow<sup>68</sup>.*

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<sup>67</sup> Expert interview the historian, participant of the Tatar national movement. May, 2018.

<sup>68</sup> Abstract from the interview with an expert political scientist involved in the analytical support for political decisions. June, 2018.

## II. PRESERVATION OF ETHNO-CULTURAL IDENTITY

In the late Soviet period (late 1980s — 1990s), the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic fought for its recognition as a union republic, and the mass national movement among the Tatars was then an important argument in the negotiations with Moscow. In the late 1980s and then during the early years of the Russian state (in the early 1990s), the Tatar ethnocratic elite insisted on the special status of the republic and managed to achieve it under special contractual relations both politically and economically.

### 1. The Tatar national movement

In the late Soviet period (the end of the 1980s) the Tatar national movement was massive: Tatar activists brought large crowds of people into the squares, demanding from the USSR the recognition of Tatarstan as a union republic and economic independence. The requirements of sovereignty, special status and ethno-cultural rights of the Tatar people were more clearly formulated after the collapse of the USSR in 1991 in the process of establishing new relations with Moscow.

The regional political elite (first of all, the first President of Tatarstan Mintimer Shaimiev and the late Soviet party nomenclature bureaucracy closest to him) used activism and mass support of the Tatar national organizations and movements<sup>69</sup> for their political purposes and to achieve independence of the region.

This process resulted in the establishment of special relationships with Russia, when the republic identified itself as a state having contractual relations with the Russian Federation, which conducted an independent foreign and domestic economic and ethno-cultural policy. The image of strong Tatarstan, which has proclaimed its sovereignty, has become desirable, but unattainable goal for other national regions of the country.

However, at the very beginning of the 1990s, there was already a split between the national bloc of Tatarstan policy and political elites, actively engaged in privatization and building the administrative vertical within the Republic. For example, the Supreme Council included the heads of the districts loyal to M. Shaimiev, who blocked the initiatives of not only the democratic public, but also friendly, but radically-minded Tatar activists who demanded tougher policies than those adopted by the authorities. After making attempts to forcibly seize the Supreme Council in October 1991,<sup>70</sup> the leadership of the republic, which had already begun to realize the threat, suspended close cooperation with the nationalists. This process of divorcing the political elites and the radical nationalist wing had intensified by the mid-1990s (immediately after the signing of the Treaty for the Delimitation of Powers with Moscow in 1994).

At the same time, the mass character of this movement was a weakening —the basic re-

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<sup>69</sup> *Sergeev S. A., Salagaev A. L. New Masks...; Beliaev V. A. Political Governance and Public Policy of the 21st Century. P. 205-218; Farukshin M. H. Political Elite...; Salagaev A. L., Sergeev S. A. Regional Elite*

<sup>70</sup> *Participants and witnesses of those processes confirm to the acts of violence committed against the guards and the inability of security forces either to prevent them or to initiate the process of criminal prosecution: "In 1991, on October, 15-16, when the security forces of the Republic took the stage of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Tatarstan with*

quirements, albeit in a moderate form, were formally achieved as the political elite declared nation-building and addressing the ethno-cultural demands of Tatar activists as its goals. People ceased to take to the streets without additional mobilization “from above” and in the conditions of economic instability of that period were engaged in the resolution of their family and economic issues:

*“In the 1994 after the conclusion of the Treaty the national movement as such simply rotted. Some elements remained, but just individual babays [old men, in Tatar] who did nothing, they were nominal organizations... the active phase cannot last for so long. The majority thought that the main goal had been achieved, especially since people had to invest great efforts just to survive, the people escaped into the private sphere of everyday life, enrichment, consumption of material wealth”.*<sup>71</sup>

The collapse of the mass character of the nationalist movement was also facilitated by the fact that the majority of moderate nationalists were either co-opted by the political authorities into the civil space controlled by it (GONGO — the All-Russian Tatar Public Center, the World Congress of Tatars), or involved in institutions providing nation-building: academic institutions (the Institute of Tatar Language and Literature, the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of Tatarstan, The Institute of Tatar Encyclopedia, Tatar Language Departments in Universities, Tatar-language media, etc.).

The radical Tatar national organizations (Tatar Public Center in Naberezhnye Chelny, Youth Union “Azatlyk”), which have lost mass character, but remained a strong media factor in Tatarstan politics, have been under pressure since the late 1990s, which in 2000-2010 grown into criminal prosecution of their leaders.

The Tatar national movement (including both the radical and integrated moderate spectrum) has developed several themes since the late 1990s.

- Redefinition of Tatarstan’s achievements in ethno-cultural policy. The trend towards the formation of the image of Tatarstan as a space of peaceful existence of the two ethnic groups (Tatars and Russians), two cultures and two religions was disputed. The radicals continued to insist that in Tatarstan Tatars must have privileges and some of the leaders thought that Islam should have priority. This was expressed not only in discussions: in the early 2000s, there were several protests and conflicts against the construction of Orthodox churches (the most famous case took place in Naberezhnye Chelny) or acts of arson of the existing temples.
- The problem of “bashkirization” of Tatars in the neighboring Bashkortostan in the context of educational policy and “aggressive” policy of re-identification of the Tatars into Bashkirs under the two census campaigns (2001 and 2010).<sup>72</sup>
- Since 2000, the decisions of the federal authorities on educational and ethno-cultural policies have been challenged. The first issue was the transition of the Tatar language to the Latin script. The decision to transfer to Latin alphabet was taken in Tatarstan

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*the requirement to give them permission to arrest, not with allegations of criminal offence and with the permission of the Supreme Council — to arrest the instigators of mass protests, which by analogy with Chechnia stormed the Supreme Soviet, wounded 17 policemen, one of them very heavy, and one old woman who ran to the store... I stood like a fool, some spears were flying past me, and I did not realize that they would score a hit. And the policemen of low height and plump are running because they are all wearing body armor” (Expert interview. June, 2018).*

<sup>71</sup> Interview with the historian, participant of the Tatar national movement. May, 2018.

<sup>72</sup> Khodzhaeva E. *Census as a Challenge: Analysis of the All-Russian and Tatarstan Russian-language Press in 2002 and 2010 // Ab Imperio. 2010. No. 4. P. 349-370.*

in 1999, but “the Law on the languages of peoples residing on the territory of the Russian Federation”, obliging them to use Cyrillic, adopted by the State Duma in 2001 suspended this process.

- Closure of Tatar-Turkish lyceums in the second half of the 2000s, in which the federal authorities saw the threat of spread of the Turkish influence. Some educational institutions were able to defend themselves, but their curricular and teaching staff were seriously changed.
- Since the late 2000s, the policy of consolidation of small rural schools and, consequently, the closure of those where teaching was conducted in the Tatar language have been strongly criticized. And although the policy was implemented by the Republican Ministry of Education, activists perceived this as the orders of Moscow.
- The decision to establish the Kazan Federal University by merging several universities of the capital was strongly criticized by the Tatar national circles. The inclusion of the Kazan Pedagogical University, in which they saw great potential for creation of the Tatar National University in the future, destroyed this hope. The lack of practical opportunities to get higher education in the Tatar language nullifies the achievements of Tatar-language secondary education, as it reduces the chances of career advancement for graduates of Tatar schools.
- Another important issue for the Tatar national-oriented public was the language of the Unified State Exam, which has been introduced in Russia everywhere since 2009. The obligation to conduct it in the Russian language raised legitimate questions: Tatar schools have been forced to teach senior pupils in Russian to give them a chance to receive the Certificate of Basic General Education.

Thus, all the achievements of Tatarstan in the language policy, including most importantly, the creation of a system of secondary education in the national language, have been nullified by subsequent political decisions since the mid-2000s. Thus, by the end of 1990, as a result of the enactment of the Law on Languages of the Republic of Tatarstan (1992) and the Law on Education (1993), schools teaching in the Tatar language (170 schools) began to be created again or repurposed: and at the peak the number of schools, where at least some subjects were taught in the Tatar language, had reached 1,220. The share of pupils being taught in the Tatar language in the first decade of sovereignty almost doubled: from 12.9 % in 1990 to 23.7 % in 1999. However, in the early 2000s, the impossibility to get higher education in the Tatar language determined the choice of pupils in favor of the Russian language or at least a mixed program mode.<sup>73</sup> The republican authorities actually did a lot, and not only on paper<sup>74</sup>, for the development of education in the state and native languages<sup>75</sup>, and the use of the Tatar language

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<sup>73</sup>Mukhariamova L. M., Morenko B. I., Petrova R. G., Salakhatdinova L. N. *Problem of Access to Higher Education for Pupils of National Schools: Ethno-social Aspects // Sociological Studies*. 2004. No. 3. P. 58-66.

<sup>74</sup>Since the beginning of 2000s, Tatarstan has consistently approved the two document for the preservation, studying and development of state languages and other languages for the years 2004-2013 and for the years 2014-2021.

<sup>75</sup>By the end of 1990, as a result of the enactment of the Law on Languages of the Republic of Tatarstan (1992) and the Law on Education (1993), schools with teaching in the Tatar language (170 schools) began to be created again or repurposed: and at the peak the number of schools, where at least some subjects were taught in the Tatar language, had reached 1,220. The share of pupils being taught in the Tatar language in the first decade of sovereignty almost doubled: from 12.9 % in 1990 to 23.7 % in 1999. See: Makarov G. I., G. F. Gabdrakhmanova *Language Policy of the Republic of Tatarstan (1990-2000) // State Languages of the Republic of Tatarstan: Plurality of*

in the media sphere.<sup>76</sup>

Tatar national movements could partly communicate these and other issues to the authorities both through informal connections with political leaders and the channels of involvement in state institutions and GONGO, the MPs in the Supreme Council and the State Duma. At the same time, the republican authorities during the presidency of M. Shaimiev were generally, at least, symbolically supportive of the most moderate demands, but when R. Minnikhanov came to power, even the symbolic support of the nationalist discourse by the authorities largely weakened.

It is erroneous to think that the national movement has not given rise to internal contradictions. For example, new lines of confrontation emerged largely due to the fact that the Tatar national movement usurped the right to speak of all Tatars as a homogeneous group, and the political elites did not dispute this. In the second half of the 2000s - early 2010s, the Kriashen movement (Tatar-Kriashen, traditionally adopted Orthodoxy) was actualized, which postulated themselves under the 2010 census campaign as a separate ethnic group.<sup>77</sup> At first, it met with a tough reaction of Tatar nationalists and political administration, the census of Kriashens as a separate sub-ethnic group was essentially disrupted (people were recorded by Tatars). However, later many demands were heard: the department for the study of the Kriashen history and culture was created at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan, the support for the Kriashen culture (holidays, national ensembles) increased, which generally reduced the degree of this confrontation.

Currently, the Tatar national movement is represented by three groups.

1. Suppressed radical minority — those who today regularly go to rallies supporting the Tatar agenda, no more than 100 people.<sup>78</sup> This movement and its leaders are weakened, in emigration or under the threat of criminal prosecution.
2. Moderate and incorporated Tatar nationalists who have chosen not overt struggle, but grassroots work, primarily through the media, extra-curricular education, cultural and academic institutions to maintain and strengthen the Tatar identity: “*In this situation, many of my friends and personally I tend to take the following position: let the tank go, lie down at the bottom of the dugout and see what happens further. We should not resist, but pretend that we support everything, and mind our own business...in the meantime build up as much as possible, create the Tatar system... maintain a certain niche, and wait a little for what happens in Russia itself*”.<sup>79</sup>
3. Official national organizations are Tatar organizations supported at the Republican

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*Measurements. A collection of essays / Under the editorship of G. F. Gabdrakhmanova, G. I. Makarova. Kazan, 2014. P.7.*

*At the same time, schools and separate classes of other peoples were opened and operated in the Republic, mainly in rural areas — Chuvash, Udmurt, Mari, etc.*

<sup>76</sup> *The information space in Tatarstan is bilingual. The Republic subsidizes the production of Tatar-language television and radio broadcasting, as well as the press. Thus, in the media holding of Tatmedia JSC, printed media are published in Tatar, Russian, Chuvash and Udmurt languages. Sagitova L. V. Reflection of the Language Situation in the National Media and Internet Resources// State Languages of the Republic of Tatarstan: Plurality of Measurements ... P. 62.*

<sup>77</sup> *Khodzhaeva E. Census as a Challenge: Analysis of the All-Russian and Tatarstan Russian-language Press in 2002 and 2010 // Ab Imperio. 2010. No. 4. P. 349-370.*

<sup>78</sup> *No more than 50 people came to the rally in support of the Tatar language in May, 2018.*

<sup>79</sup> *Interview with the historian, participant of the Tatar national movement. May, 2018.*

level (All-Tatar Public Center, World Congress of Tatars), under which the most publicly active is the youth wing. Interestingly, this youth movement emerged in the early 2010s as self-governing and independent initiative under the promotional event “Usebes” (“Ourselves”), later renamed to “Min tatarcha soilyshem!” (“I Speak Tatar”) aimed at promoting the Tatar language in the urban environment, conceived and implemented by a group of young activists. Supported by business (for example, the mobile companies MTS and Beeline even began to compete for who will be the main sponsor of the action as they were interested in expanding their market) and the administration, the movement was gaining momentum, and in the end its core was co-opted by the World Congress of Tatars, where one of the activists, T. Yarullin, headed the youth track (Forum of Tatar Youth).

Mild criticism of the government authorities was acceptable. Thus, every year various organizations, including government, were awarded the anti-prize “Tatar is difficult”. Today, this group is engaged in active mobilization of Tatars in general and the Tatar youth in particular both in Tatarstan, and outside its territory, softly bypassing sensitive political issues and offering a positive, non-conflictual modern image of the Tatar culture, business, and identity. According to expert, this image contrasts with the image of a politician-fighter, putting forward radical demands of political actions, and is based on ethnic and cultural identity, including the whole range of cultural representations — from traditional symbols to modern youth music and theater.<sup>80</sup> However, such a moderate position, as well as being part of the political establishment, did not save a young Tatar leader Yarullin from losing his official status: in June 2019, T. Yarullin, who had successfully won primaries in the “United Russia”, resigned from all his posts.<sup>81</sup>

Interestingly, even some radically-minded young people (from the first category) use the same strategy. For example, the leader of youth movement “Azatlyk” N. Nabiullin, who a few years ago dissociated from the soft and non-political forms of propaganda, today (in the context of the threat of criminal prosecution) uses mainly them — distributes calendars with portraits of distinguished Tatar figures of the past, arranges flashmobs, participates in marathons, etc.<sup>82</sup>

## 2. The Russian national movement

The Russian movement, unlike the Tatar one, has never been a mass or political force, despite the significant share of the Russian population in Tatarstan. Until recently, the Russian movement leaders had been the leaders of the Russian Culture Society (RCS) A. L. Salagaev and M. Yu. Shcheglov, who replaced him.

In fact, these individuals had been publicly formulating the agenda of the Russian-speaking population since the early 2000s. They did it being part of the Association of National and Cultural Societies “National Cohesion Centre”, i.e. having some institutional support. The

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<sup>80</sup> According to the interview with T. Yarullin. July, 2013, May, 2018.

<sup>81</sup> Defeat of “Mladotatar” or Voluntary Resignation: Why does Tabris Yarullin leave?. <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/427827>

<sup>82</sup> According to the interview with N. Nabiullin. May, 2018.

peculiarity of the personality of the first Chairman of the Russian Culture Society left its mark on the methods of work — it was, first of all, a restrained publicist discussion in the press or academic publications, as well as attempts to have a constructive conversation with the republican authorities to defend the ethnic and cultural rights of Russians.

The relations with some representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church, including participation in intellectual clubs in the churches, were established as well. Having used the growth of Russian rationalism in the 2000s, the Russian Culture Society tried to rely on a small circle of unorganized Russian nationalists and even made attempts to conduct preventive work with their most radically-minded part incorporated in 2011–2012 as the movement of Russian youth “Russian Alliance”. In the early 2010’s, relations with radical Russian organizations from other regions were also established.<sup>83</sup>

However, the movement received the most massive support in the first half of 2010, when it managed to organize mass rallies for the protection of language rights, redefining the discourse about the native language in favor of Russians (see below).

Since 2013, the leaders of the movement were under pressure of the authorities. The Russian Culture Society was expelled from the Association, replacing it with the organization which was loyal to the Republican government. The RCS leaders, in turn, have undergone criminal and administrative prosecution, as a result the movement is currently very fragmented and marginalized. If Tatar activists (a moderate part of them) are included in various GONGO structures, the Russian wing of the government opponents is completely deprived of government support.<sup>84</sup>

At the same time, the Russian movement does not always have a political and organizational structure in Tatarstan. These are largely ethno-cultural grassroots initiatives, often supported by the Orthodox Church and only then provided with a Republican spin and incorporated into the general political discourse on parity of Tatar and Russian culture. Such is, for example, the fate of almost all Russian folk festivals (the most famous — Karavon) and ensembles (the most famous — “Obereg”), the organizers of which have found a way and manner to fit into the agenda of the political elite without support of the RCS, and relying on their own ties. Thus, for example, the ensemble “Obereg” received organizational resources and premises first from an active ascension of the Russian Orthodox Church, and later managed to get a historic building thanks to the activists of the city protection movement co-opted in government<sup>85</sup>.

**Thus, although the regional authorities used the Tatar national movement in the early stages of the republic formation, they almost immediately dissociated themselves from support of exclusively Tatar culture. By the 2000s, a political course for symbolic support for both Russians and Tatars had been developed that became the hallmark of Tatarstan as a space of peaceful dialogue between Tatars and Russians, Islam and Orthodoxy.**

The President of the Republic of Tatarstan congratulates both Tatars and Russians with holidays, the birthdays of writers, participates in national festivals, etc. Various cultural initiatives are supported from the republican budget. At the same time, grassroots activities of both Tatar and Russian activists are welcome and supported, if they do not have a political compo-

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<sup>83</sup> 20th anniversary of the Russian Culture Society in Tatarstan: it is time for Russians to unite in national regions. <https://regnum.ru/news/1673772.html>

<sup>84</sup> Interviews with leaders and activists. May, 2018.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with one of the top singers of the ensemble. May, 2018.

ment and do not disturb anyone.

*There are still a lot of coordination inside, and it all depends on the adequacy of all parties. For example, I cannot take the group called “Ikruna” to the festival, because it has a pagan name... Or another example, Tina Kuznetsova is going to give concert here, she is from Kazan and sings very well, but I am asked to send the text of her songs in advance, just to be on a safe side.<sup>86</sup>*

Those who publicly form the political agenda in a nationalist way are now persecuted and excluded from the political dialogue.

Public sentiment generally supports the current course, and both the Tatars and Russians respond that the Tatars should not have advantages in the region.

**Table 3. Support ethno-cultural policy of the Republic of Tatarstan (according to the 2017 survey, %)**

<b>In Tatarstan, it is possible to maintain interethnic harmony, thanks to the competent policy of the authorities</b>	<b>Russians</b>	<b>Tatars</b>
Fully agree	<b>26,5</b>	<b>37,1</b>
Rather agree	<b>39,5</b>	<b>39,5</b>
Rather disagree	<b>9,7</b>	<b>6,6</b>
Disagree	<b>6,1</b>	<b>4,5</b>
It's hard to say	<b>18,3</b>	<b>12,3</b>
Total	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 4. The level of support for the preferential position of Tatars in Tatarstan (according to the 2017 survey)**

<b>Tatars in Tatarstan should have more rights and privileges than representatives of other nationalities</b>	<b>Russians</b>	<b>Tatars</b>
Fully agree	<b>2,3</b>	<b>4,5</b>
Rather agree	<b>1,2</b>	<b>8,5</b>
Rather disagree	<b>10,3</b>	<b>25,5</b>
Disagree	<b>74,2</b>	<b>50,7</b>
It's hard to say	<b>12,0</b>	<b>10,8</b>
Total	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Social support for the Tatar national movement has weakened, and the Russian one has not developed sufficiently.** According to surveys, people who even partially share national-oriented positions are not ready to take to the streets. They are more concerned about other issues, primarily social and economic. This is also shown by observations at the rallies: observers and experts recognize that the most massive public actions are social and environmental protests, as well as the movement associated with A. Navalnyi and the Anti-Corruption Foundation. For example, the meeting of the Tatar public in support of teaching the Tatar language gathered no more than 50 participants in May 20, 2018. On the same day more than 700 people came to the rally against the construction of an incineration plant. Thus, the image of Tatarstan as a region with a developed national movement no longer corresponds to reality. In the same way

<sup>86</sup> Interview with the organizer of Russian festivals. May, 2018.

as in other regions, Tatarstan authorities are faced with an expanded social, economic, environmental protest agenda.

### 3. Language policy in Tatarstan

In 1990s, the famous phrase of Boris Yeltsin “Take as much sovereignty as you want”, addressed to the then leadership of Tatarstan, became the slogan of not only political and economic, but also ethno-cultural reforms in the region. The idea of the right of the Tatar people to self-determination, to their own statehood, preservation and development of culture and language was used as the main resource of legitimization of the special status of Tatarstan. And although official documents and legislation in this area and even ethnic and cultural policy implemented since the early 2000s (the first reference point — the celebration of the 1000th anniversary of Kazan in 2005) consistently declare the parity of cultures of the two most numerous peoples representing the majority of the population of the region — the Tatars and Russians<sup>87</sup>, in the language sphere Tatarstan has implemented a policy giving priority to the development of the Tatar language as the state and native one.

This has led to a series of political and organizational decisions and, consequently, to changes in various spheres of public life. For example, the requirement to a candidate for the position of President of the Republic of Tatarstan is a good command of two languages — Tatar and Russian, has become enshrined in law.<sup>88</sup> A program to promote the knowledge of the Tatar language among employees of the public sector (a 15 percent increase in wages) has been implemented for a long time.

In the education system, the “new” post-Soviet language policy means the following:

- The Tatar language, along with the Russian, has been recognized as the state language in the republic, and a number of adopted laws and programs have declared the right to receive education in the native language and equal learning of the state languages;<sup>89</sup>
- the study of the Tatar language as the state language has become mandatory for all students of secondary educational institutions,
- the system of “national education” in the Tatar language, that has almost completely curtailed in the late Soviet period (see historical background) has been strengthened. There was also a debate on the establishment of a university teaching in the Tatar language.

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<sup>87</sup> According to the 2010 census, the majority of the Republic population is people, who identify themselves as Tatars — 53 %, and Russians — 40 %, among the urban population the proportion is comparable — 48 %. For more information about parity in ethno-cultural policy, see: Makarova G. I. *Ethno-Cultural Policy of the Federal Center and the Republic of Tatarstan: Integration Strategies*. Kazan, 2009.

<sup>88</sup> According to Article 91 of the Constitution of the Republic of Tatarstan, the President must speak both official languages.

<sup>89</sup> According to Article 8 of the Constitution, both Tatar and Russian are declared equal state languages and shall be used by state bodies and local authorities on equal terms. The equal teaching of the Tatar and Russian languages is also enshrined in Article 9 of the Law on State Languages of the Republic of Tatarstan and Other Languages in the Republic of Tatarstan (1992).

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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Since the 1920s, along with the “collapse” of the autonomy of the Tatar-Bashkir population in the Middle Volga and the Urals, the language policy against these groups tightened in line with the policies of the Imperial Period. In the late 19th — early 20th century, officials in the Kazan province opposed enlightenment movements in Tatar education, which was almost completely private and had a significant religious component: in 1913 in the Kazan province there were 967 Tatar schools and madrassas with more than 50 thousand students. After the Great October Socialist Revolution of 1917 and the first years of the Civil War in the region, schools were placed under control of the local authorities. Only some Tatar-language madrassas managed to preserve themselves in this new status. Without eliminating completely cultural originality, the Soviet authorities gradually took a course on the russification and urbanization of the Tatar population. In 1929, the Tatar script was transferred from Arabic to a specific variant of the Latin alphabet (yanalif), and in 1939 — to the Cyrillic alphabet. This was not a specifically Tatar issue — almost all non-Slavic national languages have undergone a similar transformation. It is also important that since 1934 the Tatar language has gradually been contained to the sphere of everyday communication, while the language of business conduct has been exclusively

Russian. Since the beginning of 1960s, along with the reform of secondary education, in the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic schools with Tatar as the language tuition had been gradually abolished. This was in line with the policy of formation of a unified Soviet people, speaking the Russian language. Not having the status of a union republic, but only of an autonomous republic within the RSFSR, the region was forced to reduce not only the number of schools, but also the volume of subjects taught in Tatar. “The national character of school was reduced to teaching subjects (the number of which was also reduced) in the native language, and as a result, by the 80th of the 19th century, national schools had been preserved only in rural areas of Tatarstan. In Kazan, in the 1989-1990 academic year from 166 secondary schools only one was Tatar, and not urban children, but boys and girls from rural areas studied in it” (Gibatdinov M., Murtazina L., Biktimirova T. System of National Education of Tatars: the Past and the Present // Kazan Federalist. 2006. No. 4). As a result, the Tatar language did not have the status of an interethnic communication language, as did Russian, and was contained mainly to the domestic sphere and mainly in the rural areas. In this regard, the demands of national activists regarding priority of revival of the Tatar language in the 1990s were understandable.

Since the early 2000s, the status and sovereignty of Tatarstan have been significantly weakened by the efforts of the federal government, including a number of decisions in the language sphere. For example, in 2002, amendments were made to the Law on the Languages of the Peoples of the Russian Federation, requiring the use of Cyrillic graphics for the languages of the indigenous peoples of Russia, which led to protests of the ethnic and political elite (primarily in the representative branch of government) of Tatarstan, which legislated the adoption of the Latin alphabet as the basis for the development of the Tatar language one year earlier.<sup>90</sup>

In the 2000s, and especially since the early 2010s, the language issue has been causing protest activity from both poles of the national spectrum of regional policy. Against the background of other elements — cultural, religious and even everyday life, where parity between the Tatar and Russian languages is observed, the language issue in the education system is perceived today as the most acute one.

In 2017, the language issue in Tatarstan was again politicized in the form of the so-called ethno-linguistic conflict<sup>91</sup>, but it is wrong to believe that this issue has become particularly acute only recently. It is more correctly to mention that the ethno-linguistic conflict has moved from the latent phase to the open. The problem of the Russian-speaking population in the Republic of Tatarstan in connection with the introduction of compulsory teaching of the Tatar language began acute in the mid-1990s (almost a few years after the Tatar language was introduced in 1993 as mandatory and enshrined in law), but it reached the greatest intensity of debate in the early 2000s, when representatives of the Russian Culture Society managed to meet with the

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<sup>90</sup>One of the experts in language policy has mentioned the slowness of the decision to switch to Latin and the moment missed in the early 1990s: “...while we have argued for twenty years as to what Latin to choose, the Federal Center here has raised a concern” (the expert interview. May, 2018).

<sup>91</sup>Salagaev A. L., Sergeev S. A., Luchsheva L. V. *New Problems of Socio-Cultural Evolution of Regions / Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, Kazan National Research Technological University. Kazan, 2011.*

then President of the Republic of Tatarstan M. Shaimiev and defend the right to create schools with a Russian ethno-cultural component. In the early 2000s, there was also a trial initiated by S. Khapugin, a well-known lawyer and father of the Kazan schoolboy defending the right to voluntarily learn the Tatar language. The decision of the Constitutional Court of 2003 could not radically change the principles of studying the state languages in the Republic, as it recognized the constitutionality of the status of the Tatar language as the state language.

In the late 2000s — early 2010s, the activity of opponents of the mandatory Tatar language became visible and incorporated mainly under the auspices of the Russian Culture Society (RCS), although the movement also involved Russian-speaking ethnic Tatars. Thus, the Internet community “Russian Language in Schools of Tatarstan”<sup>92</sup>, moderated by the RCS leadership, was created in 2008. In 2010-2012, activists held a series of mass and public actions in Kazan and Naberezhnye Chelny (the largest cities in the region) with the demands to ensure the voluntary choice of the native languages in schools.

The fact is that according to the federal state educational standard approved in 2009, schools have been given the opportunity to choose between different curricula, including a different amount of learning their native language. As a result of a compromise between republican and federal ministries of education, the equality of volumes of the study of the Tatar and Russian languages has been achieved by the fact that in all Tatarstan schools (regardless of what language — Russian or Tatar — the training was conducted in) the choice has been made in favor of a third “basic plan” developed for the national school that is, the Tatar language has been formally recognized as non-native for all students in the region.

Exceptions have been schools with other native language — Chuvash, Mari, Jewish and others. Here, Tatar has been taught as the state language, and other national languages — as native. However, the fact that all other Russian-language schools operate according to the third basic plan has been interpreted by parents and the RCS activists as the infringement of the right of Russian-speaking children in Tatarstan to learn their native language in full<sup>93</sup>.

Initially, the initiators of the protests advocated the voluntary study of the Tatar language, but then the requirements were adjusted — the activists began to insist not on the abolition of the voluntary choice of the native language, but on reducing the volume of the Tatar language learning for students whose native language is Russian (that is, Tatar should be studied only as a state language), as well as changes in the principle of teaching, that is, to abandon the grammatical bias in favor of teaching communicative, primarily conversational, skills. More specific issues were raised as well: the quality of the Tatar language teaching methodology and the principle of introducing Tatar language lessons in the first grade, when, according to the Russian public, it was necessary to give the child basic knowledge of the native language, were criticized. An important element of Russian activists’ rhetoric at that time was the support of Tatar national education, which had lost its position through the policy of closing small rural schools (mainly for Tatar-speaking children), implemented in the same years by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Tatarstan.

Against the background of Russian-speaking protests, the street activity of Tatar activists defending the right of Tatars to learn Tatar as a native language not only in Tatar gymnasiums, but also in Russian-speaking schools increased. Their main argument was that the majority

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<sup>92</sup> <http://my.mail.ru/community/filologia111/journal>

<sup>93</sup> *Interviews with the RCS representatives. 2013, May, 2018.*

of children of the Tatars studied in Russian educational institutions and the elimination or reduction of the amount of teaching of the Tatar language would lead to the infringement of their rights. In addition, it was argued that, since other subjects were taught in Russian in Russian-language schools, Russian children should not consider themselves to be disadvantaged in terms of education in their mother tongue. It should be further noted that Tatar activists (especially the most radical part of them — the Naberezhnye Chelny Tatar Public Center, the Union of Tatar Youth “Azatlyk”) actively appealed to the past and proved that the Tatar people had been deprived of statehood in the 16th century and the Tatars had not received the development and support of their culture both during the Russian Empire and in Soviet times.

The post-Soviet ethnic and cultural policies of the Republic of Tatarstan was interpreted by them as a compensation, giving the opportunity to restore historical justice and overcoming the language assimilation policy of the late Soviet times (after the 1960s), when Tatar-speaking children were forced to study Russian language in order to give the possibility of vertical mobility, usually at the cost of losing connection with the mother language and abuse of ethnic feelings.

A separate group of demands of Tatar activists related to the elimination of national schools in rural areas of Tatarstan under the program of consolidation of rural schools. A separate important issue in the debate of both Tatar activists and specialists-linguists and politicians who had supported their requirements was the need to ensure the right to take tests and exams in various disciplines under the Unified State Exam in the Tatar language. Since 2009, all graduates of Russian schools must take this exam only in Russian (until that time, the regions had the right to regulate the possibility of taking the exam in national languages). This requirement kills the motivation of Tatars to send children to Tatar-language schools, in addition Tatarstan has not established a system of higher education in the Tatar language, thus Tatar language, according to the Tatar activists, does not receive its development and equal place in public life.

*“You know that our higher education system should be in Russian only. And even we have to prepare Tatar philologists in Russian, this is a complete insanity... Although we are being told that your parents themselves do not choose [the Tatar language]. But we could have said this if parents had a real choice — they had a Tatar school, a Russian school, a Tatar university or a Russian university. But that’s not the case... When the Unified State Exam is only in Russian, when universities are only in Russian, this, accordingly, leads to a situation where there is no real choice”.*<sup>94</sup>

Both Russian and Tatar activists in those years could not avoid aggressive rhetoric both in street protests and on the Internet. Since 2012, their radically-minded representatives on both sides have been subject to severe pressure from the official authorities. Organizations have been refused registration and deprived of their status. Criminal cases were instituted against their leaders. Thus, the Russian Culture Society lost its status of a public organization under the

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<sup>94</sup> Interview with a historian, expert in language policy. May, 2018. The same expert continues: “I think it is a big mistake to consolidate the [Tatar] Humanitarian University, which trained specialists. And when the Pedagogical University was merged with the current Federal University, it was a complete destruction of the system of training specialists, because whatever we say, the Federal University has other prospects and priorities, and the Federal University needs neither the Tatar language nor the Tatar education system at all. Yes, Tatarstan is trying to make support in some way through grants, but this is a palliative. This cannot change the situation. To do this, it is necessary to fully restore the system of training specialists, when specialists will be trained not only in language, but also in all subjects taught in their native language... If there is no science, if there is no education in the language at

National Cohesion Center (its place was taken by a new Russian public organization, which was “puppet” and loyal to the authorities). Criminal case was instigated against the then Head of the Russian Culture Society A. L. Salagaev (only death from severe disease “rescued” from the repression). The Deputy Head of the Russian Culture Society and other activists were subject to administrative prosecution.<sup>95</sup>

The most radical Tatar organization that is Naberezhnye Chelny Tatar Public Center, operating since the early 2000s almost illegally, was recognized in 2017 as an extremist and prohibited organization. Two years earlier its permanent leader R. R. Kashapov faced prison terms under Part 2 of Article 280 and Part 1 of Article 282 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, and after his release on parole, burdened with the obligation not to carry out political activities, left Russia due to fears of provocation. The union of Tatar youth “Azatlyk”, also informally operating, was expelled from the premises of the All-Tatar Public Center in Kazan, and its leader N. Nabiullin in 2017 was convicted for false charge of organizing an attack on himself by the Kazan skinhead S. Zhuravlev, and received a criminal record and conditional sentence. In this case, the attack itself that actually did take place, has never been investigated until now. Currently, Nabiullin continues his political activities as an activist, but he has to control every step, fearing provocations from the security services. The activists on both sides talk about their persecution in the workplace or at the place of study<sup>96</sup>. At the same time, unlike Dagestan, **security forces in Tatarstan have tried to avoid violent practices against activists and act within the scope of the existing law, albeit interpreted very widely, trying not to provoke civil confrontation in the republic.**

In general, the years 2014-2016 can be considered as a lull in public national activity; the language problem again passed into a latent phase. In the spring of 2017, Russian activists again tried to hold a rally and demanded a solution to the problem of mandatory learning of the Tatar language in schools, but it did not gain the same number of participants as it was in November 2011 (then about 300 people took part in the rally). However, in June 2017, the language policy in Tatarstan again became one of the topical issues on the Republican political agenda. It was triggered by the words of the Russian President V. Putin, pronounced on July 20, 2017 in the neighboring Republic of Mari El at the visiting meeting of the Council on interethnic issues: *“Forcing a person to learn a language that is not his native is just as unacceptable as reducing the level and time of teaching Russian. I would like to draw special attention of the heads of regions of the Russian Federation to this issue.”*<sup>97</sup>

While some regions (for example, the neighboring Republic of Bashkortostan) actively began to introduce a voluntary option of learning the Bashkir language immediately, in August 2017, in Tatarstan, the head of the Ministry of Education E. Fattakhov publicly stated that V. Putin’s words about the situation with the teaching of the Tatar language do not concern Tatarstan, where the status of the Tatar language as the state ensures its mandatory learning.<sup>98</sup> At the same time, in August 2017, Russian-speaking parents massively self-organized on social media, both on a platform created earlier by the Russian Culture Society, and on their

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*all levels, then whatever we do, no matter how many financial resources we invest, it will all be an imitation of some activity and the trend will be negative.”*

<sup>95</sup> From interviews with the RCS representatives. 2013, 2018.

<sup>96</sup> Interviews with representatives of the movements. July, 2013, May, 2018.

<sup>97</sup> <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55109>

<sup>98</sup> “We have the Constitution of the Republic of Tatarstan, the law on languages, the law on education, we

own platforms. However, this time the Russian Culture Society failed to consolidate this parental protest under the special Committee of Russian-speaking parents that it created after the meeting.

Many parents refused to support the political demands of the RCS, and activists created their own resources and communities. For example, the initiative to promote this problem was adopted by the Parent Community of Tatarstan — ROST:

*“This Committee of Russian-speaking parents was established after the rally on April 22, 2018... But our interests did not match. It is no coincidence that we then became a “Parent Community” — our interests are to have our children educated. But the Committee had a lot of politics. And we had the following principle: “We do not go into politics, as long as politics does not interfere in our affairs.” We were interested in other things. We were not interested in the Russian idea, etc, but we were interested in our children”<sup>99</sup>.*

Frustrated parents chose not street protests as traditionally offered to them by the Russian Culture Society, but official appeals to federal agencies (primarily the Prosecutor General’s office and the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation), as well as to deputies of the State Duma through the head of the Republican authorities as the main way to push for their agenda in 2017.

*“I had to submit a lot of requests to the Prosecutor’s Office. And we wrote these letters to school for a purpose. One lawyer from Chelny gave us a clue, we wrote the letters not only to the school principal, but to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Tatarstan, the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, to the Prosecutor’s Office and the Prosecutor’s Office of the Russian Federation, including Chaika. Losing such letters was impossible. Because we have just faced /the issue of ‘loosing’/ When it started in other schools, a lot of letters were lost.”<sup>100</sup>*

Parents have massively shared the forms of such appeals, as well as statements that they choose for their children the first plan of education (the one that does not involve teaching a native language at all).

At the end of August, Vladimir Putin instructed to conduct a Prosecutor’s check of compliance with the principles of voluntariness in the republics which in Tatarstan caused a flurry of protests on the one hand, and mass support, on the other. Since the end of August and the whole of September, on the instructions of the Republican Ministry of Education, directors of schools had to collect statements from parents regarding the plan of education they want to choose for their children. According to the general opinion of the activists-parents, they were pressured to choose the mandatory Tatar language. Thus, one of the members of the community has told the story of an activist from another community: *“Volga region, a new school, the director was determined to make it national... But the parents protested, and the school received the status of polylingual, but the director remained convinced that it was national. And they do everything with moans and groans. While in our school, there were no ands or buts: they*

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*have two state languages — Russian and Tatar. Teaching in the state languages is conducted in the same amount. We work in the form of the Federal Standard. In this regard, we have no violations. All our actions are coordinated with the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation. We are the executors, we comply with the law”* (<https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/352543>)»

<sup>99</sup> Interview with a parent, active participant in the movement against the teaching of the Tatar language. May, 2018.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with a parent, active participant in the movement against the teaching of the Tatar language. May, 2018.

*gave parents the opportunity to choose. And 20 people in the class chose Russian, 8 people — Tatar. It's okay. But in the above mentioned school they began to put pressure on children to choose Tatar, without any additional consideration. And this by the way, was done in many schools. And she has struggled, appealed to Prosecutor's Office for long... And eventually she transferred the children to family education.*<sup>101</sup>

Such cases mobilized parents further to make a stand against the decision adopted above. The visit of the Prosecutor General of Russia to Kazan in September 2017 contributed to the understanding of the Republican Prosecutor's Office that such checks should not end with formal replies. Local prosecutors issued orders to school principals and, in some cases, imposed fines on them. These rapid developments led to an active phase of the conflict: publications in media, aggressive debates on the Internet — all this added fuel to the fire. The main victims were school principals and teachers of the Tatar language, who lost the workload and were urgently transferred to teaching other subjects. The media actively covered the cases of dismissal of both teachers of the Tatar language and other subjects, to whom the load of former teachers of the Tatar language was transferred. At the same time, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Tatarstan actually blamed school principals, not giving them, on the one hand, any support for a rapid response, and on the other — demanding to locally resolve this conflict by means of administrative resources and informal pressure on parents.

The only director who did not act on the instructions of the Ministry of Education, was the director of the school “Solntse” Pavel Shmakov, who did not fire the teachers and preserved the teaching of the Tatar language contrary to the instructions of the Prosecutor's Office. According to him, the current situation of rapid changes in the rules created a need for directors to break the law — the curriculum and the load had already been approved, and their change during the school year was unacceptable. The school “Solntse” was subjected to thorough Prosecutor's checks concerning not only the language component in the schedule.<sup>102</sup>

Despite the hidden opposition of the Republican Ministry of Education in many schools, parents-activists have managed to create a situation where children were given the opportunity to choose whether to attend Tatar language lessons and other subjects. In some schools, directors acted exclusively by the rules, fulfilling the wishes of the parents. However, many parents say that informal pressure on those, who refused to study Tatar and choose Rhythmic Gymnastics or the subject “Native Speech”, remains. Thus, a resident of Kazan told us that one boy, a “straight A student” who won the Olympiad in the Russian language, started to receive low grades in the additional subject “Native Speech” (introduced instead of the lessons of the Tatar language). The problem was addressed after the child was transferred to the Tatar group - the grades improved:

*“Russian was introduced as a native language, but is taught by Tatar-teachers. And they create problems to children. For example, my son studies in the physics-math school; in the third grade there are all A-students, who have only one B in Native Russian. But this boy gets only excellent marks in Russian, and has won the Republican Olympiad. In our class there are only three students who chose Russian as their native, because they get Cs that spoil the Transcript of Student's Academic Progress and Behavior because of one bad mark... It is an ill-considered subject, they do*

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<sup>101</sup>Interview with a parent, an active participant in the movement against the teaching of the Tatar language. May, 2018.

<sup>102</sup>According to the materials of an interview with P. Shmakov, May, 2018.

*not know what to teach, but downgrade students' performance. The class master has promised to negotiate, because the children are strong in Russian... Thus, my son changed for the Tatar group, and according to our statistics, 32 students from 35 in our class study Tatar".*<sup>103</sup>

Many Russian-speaking parents, both Tatars and Russians, who have not protested, have found themselves in a situation of free-riders - they have been satisfied that Tatar is now taught in their schools, even if it is a mandatory subject, but not 6, but 2-4 lessons a week. For example, one of the interviewed mothers from Kazan noted the positive consequences for her Russian-speaking children — she has managed to transfer her children to the group of learning Tatar as a non-native language that has greatly facilitated their studies. Prior to that, for several years, the study of the Tatar language had been in a group for native speakers, which created problems in their workload and motivation. Previously the mother's requests to transfer her children to the Russian-speaking group had been declined, because her children have Tatar surnames:

*"I had a problem that I could not transfer my son to a Russian-speaking group, we do not speak /Tatar/ at home... And he was enrolled to the Tatar group, and I have not been able to transfer him for four years. In the Russian-speaking group, there are a lot of students, and he has been enrolled to a Tatar-speaking group as Tatar, and we were unable to transfer him because the Russian-speaking group was overcrowded...His father is Tatar, he is a native speaker of Tatar, but when he is given five pages of literary text to translate and then answer questions that are impossible to answer because of their philosophical nature... And when this revolution happened, we transferred our son to the Russian speaking group — and as a result he began to get only good marks".*<sup>104</sup>

At the same time, some ethnic Tatars are extremely frustrated by the fact that their native language has ceased to be a compulsory subject in the curriculum. Thus, a 27-year-old resident of Kazan, who came to the capital to study from a small town with a predominantly Tatar population, has shared his feelings:

*"I studied in a national gymnasium, in the second gymnasium in Nizhnekamsk. Until the seventh grade all training was in Tatar. In the national school atmosphere was like at home and there were very high requirements for order. None of the graduates of national schools has ever joined any organized /criminal/ groups.*

*This environment helped to become dignified people. Education was not better, but our positions were better there... I am bilingual, and Tatar might be the first language. I was sent to the village for certain time periods, I knew Tatar well. And now it is easier for me to discuss some intimate topics in Tatar... I have perceived [amendments to the law] painfully, I want to cry whenever I read such news. This is a failure of state policy and national policy... I don't think the elites should not have resisted... but they are reluctant to enter a confrontation. The Tatar-speaking population has a strong identity and this [decision] largely demoralizes them..."*

This fact is also understood by a part of the Russians, such as the aforementioned Pavel Shmakov, and by some youth activists. They believe that respect for the neighbor and their language is the key to inter-ethnic peace:

*"Why, in fact, should the Tatars prove to the Russians that their language is worth something? Why don't the Russians through their participation preserve it just because it is a threatened lan-*

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<sup>103</sup> Interview with the Russian-speaking parent of a student from Kazan. May, 2018.

<sup>104</sup> Interview with an ethnic Tatar, Kazan. May, 2018..

*guage... Here rather than elsewhere, globalization leads to the transition to Russian...*"<sup>105</sup>

In November 2017, without public discussion, the State Council of Tatarstan voted for the voluntary study of the Tatar language, thus subjecting itself to criticism from the Tatar national circles. Then Tatar-speaking community mobilization followed: the number of public actions in favor of the Tatar language (the most famous of them was presenting MPs of the Tatar Parliament with textbooks of the Tatar language), open appeals and letters increased. A group of parents ("Tatar ATA-Analary") requiring mandatory and equal teaching of the Tatar language in all schools was created in the social network "Vkontakte".

The government media has thrown its weight behind the compulsory Tatar language, sometimes indulging in the strong language. After the autumn of 2017 and high-profile Prosecutor's inspections, the acuteness of the problem gradually decreased, except for a couple of public scandals with some Russian parents, whose children refused to attend Tatar language lessons, or those who brought legal proceedings against the Ministry of Education.<sup>106</sup>

In May 2018, the rhetoric of the State Council deputies gradually changed: opinions that the decision on voluntariness was wrong and premature were voiced. Experts considered it a pre-election move as the trust of the Tatar part of the voters to the MPs, who had not allowed themselves even criticism, was undermined. The Tatar-speaking community found a way to convey its position to the federal level, representatives of Tatar organizations, along with representatives from other national regions of the country, were included in the discussions of the new law on native languages (while no Russian-speaking representatives from the Republic were invited to this discussion, and they acted through appeals to the deputies of the State Duma).

The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Tatarstan invited a representative of the Ministry of Education of Russia to the Congress of teachers of the Tatar language in the summer of 2018 and reported on the achieved understanding.<sup>107</sup> In the context of the adoption of a new version of the Law on Native Languages of the Russian Federation, the problem of obligatory Tatar language is seen by the republican leadership as already solved with the help of an administrative resource: R. Burganov, the new Minister of Education of the Republic of Tatarstan in a recent speech again has publicly hinted that teachers can persuade parents to do what they need: "*We needn't say that we can do nothing. If necessary, one class master can bring any parent to his or her knees. On their knees!*"<sup>108</sup>

Obviously, this position has been met by opponents of mandatory Tatar language with hostility. In addition, according to expert estimates, the number of parents who have transferred their children to home schooling in other regions is growing. Such transfer gives them the freedom of choosing the curriculum and the opportunity not to depend on the education system of the Republic of Tatarstan:

*"We have many students who have transferred to home [schooling] in other regions... They get registered at the school of a different region and study without the Tatar language. But you have to teach the child yourself. In Kazan there is a /social media/ group "Home Schooling in Kazan",*

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<sup>105</sup> *Ethnic Russian resident of Kazan. Interview. June, 2018.*

<sup>106</sup> *Interview with a parent, an active participant in the movement against the teaching of the Tatar language. May, 2018.*

<sup>107</sup> <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/388290>

<sup>108</sup> <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/393469>

*“Home Schooling in Nizhnekamsk”, each group consists of 200-400 students... and they mainly escape from the Tatar. Last year I even saw an advertising of one Kazan school registered in Moscow, with a curriculum as a Moscow school and without the Tatar language. They even posted advertising on their site...: “Please, come to our school, we have no Tatar language”... Part of the families, living on the border with the Kirov region,... by some hook or crook, have sent their children to schools in the Kirov region...”<sup>109</sup>*

At the same time, the Tatar-speaking side in favor of the preservation of the native language, is seriously afraid of full assimilation, and is pessimistic. According to a young activist from Kazan, *“A tough national state uses tough and crude methods. And an extreme scenario is likely to occur: they will leave Tatars, [who] sing songs and organize sabantuy, with tambourines. Tatar will not have the status of the state language, it will be impossible to demand its support from the federal center or the republican authorities... Maybe there won’t even be a republic... But the republic consolidates, crystallizes the Tatars. For people it is a symbol, an ethnic marker...”*

The experts note that in the new conditions of reducing the volume of teaching the Tatar language, the popularization of its study, carried out both “from the top” by the efforts of the republican authorities, and “from the bottom”, by activists, is increasing. Language courses for adults are being opened, the Internet resources have been created (including those under the international system EF Corporate Language Learning Solution)<sup>110</sup>, activists are developing network and video methods of studying Tatar on the Internet, including through social media and messengers (telegram channels). The leadership of the Spiritual Boards of Muslims of Tatarstan has been involved in the organization of Tatar language courses — free Tatar language courses are organized at mosques.<sup>111</sup>

It is interesting to know who of the political actors have suffered the greatest losses, and who has managed to stay on the sidelines. The Parliament that is the State Council of the Republic has taken the main blow: by a unanimous decision taken without public discussion, it has shown that it acts in favor of the political situation on orders from the top and does not reflect the views of voters, in this case — of their Tatar part.

The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Tatarstan and personally ex-Minister E. Fattakhov, who has for many years ignored the problem and the growing discontent of the Russian-speaking population and strengthened their mass movement due to his rough language, has paid for his career: he had to return and head the administration of his native district. However, he has acquired the image of a fighter for his native language among a part of the Tatar public (no one remembers that a part of rural Tatar schools was closed under his leadership). It should be noted that the development and implementation of communicative, rather than grammar-oriented methods of teaching the Tatar language in primary school (textbook “Saliyam”) has started under the ex-Minister of Education of Tatarstan E. Fattakhov.<sup>112</sup>

The Prosecutor of the Republic I. Nafikov has lost in his image as well. He had long supported the language policy in the region and had not responded to numerous complaints received until the autumn of 2017, guided by the Constitutions of the RT and the Russian Fed-

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<sup>109</sup> *Interview with a parent, an active participant in the movement against the teaching of the Tatar language. May, 2018.*

<sup>110</sup> [http://mon.tatarstan.ru/ana\\_tele.htm](http://mon.tatarstan.ru/ana_tele.htm)

<sup>111</sup> [http://dumrt.ru/ru/news/news\\_20910.html](http://dumrt.ru/ru/news/news_20910.html)

<sup>112</sup> *Testing of a Tatar textbook “Saliyam” for Russian-speaking children comes to an end! See.: <https://www.tatar-inform.ru/news/2019/04/02/647019/>*

eration and the decision of the Constitutional Court (2003). Subsequently, being compelled to perform the task of the Federal Centre, he was forced to arrange inspections and act against the school principals and be quite irreconcilable. The current President of Tatarstan, trying to stay away from the conflict, who only once publicly asked the Prosecutor of the Republic to reduce the pressure on teachers on the eve of the elections, shown himself as a leader who plays the role of a peacemaker.

## 4. Results of post-Soviet language policy

What are the results of the post-Soviet language policy and why do we argue that the ethno-linguistic conflict has not arisen recently, but has been developing in the latent phase for a long time. The survey data show that despite all attempts to revive the knowledge of the language, there is a steady decline in the level of Tatar-language fluency due to the change of generations: in general, the self-assessment of the Tatar language is reduced, and this is especially noticeable among the youngest respondents.

*Table 5. Self-assessment of the Tatar language proficiency by the Tatars( %)*

How fluent are you in the Tatar language?	2001	2010	2010 (young people from 16 to 24)	Autumn 2017	Autumn 2017 (young people from 16 to 24)
I speak, read, write fluently	<b>70.2</b>	<b>73.4</b>	<b>69.9</b>	<b>65.3</b>	<b>49.4</b>
I speak fluently, but read and write with difficulties	<b>18.5</b>	<b>15.2</b>	<b>11.5</b>	<b>17.1</b>	<b>19.5</b>
I speak with difficulties	<b>5.6</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>11,5</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>10.3</b>
I understand, but don't speak	<b>3.8</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>16.1</b>
I have no command of this language	<b>1.9</b>	<b>1.1</b>		<b>1.1</b>	<b>4.6</b>
No answer		<b>1.1</b>	<b>1.8</b>		

At the same time, Russian residents of Tatarstan have not mastered the Tatar language on a massive scale. Moreover, during the open phase of the ethnolinguistic conflict, the number of both Russians and young people in general considered that they did not speak Tatar language increased compared to 2010. Although, as a whole, we can say that the results of the mandatory study of the Tatar language for the Russians is an increase in the proportion of those of young people who speak Tatar with difficulties or understand, but are not proficient in it. This consequence of the language policy was recorded by the polls in the early 2010s, but is almost not used as an argument in the political debate.

**Table 6. Self-assessment of the Tatar language proficiency by the Russians(%)**

<b>How fluent are you in the Tatar language?</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2010 (young people from 16 to 24)</b>	<b>Autumn 2017</b>	<b>Autumn 2017 (young people from 16 to 24)</b>
I speak, read, write fluently	<b>2.9</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>
I speak fluently, but read and write with difficulties	<b>3.2</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>15.2</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>3.0</b>
I speak with difficulties	<b>8.7</b>	<b>11.5</b>	<b>34.2</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>21.8</b>
I understand, but don't speak	<b>17.4</b>	<b>23.0</b>	<b>19.0</b>	<b>21.6</b>	<b>36.6</b>
I have no command of this language	<b>67.8</b>	<b>51.2</b>	<b>22.8</b>	<b>65.7</b>	<b>38.6</b>
No answer		<b>4.8</b>	<b>1.3</b>		

Russian continues to be the dominant language of interethnic communication: according to the respondents' answers, only 30% of Tatars spoke Tatar at work in 2001 (79% of them lived in rural areas). In 2010, the share of such respondents among Tatars decreased to 17 % (while among them the share of rural residents increased accordingly — to 86 %). In the 2017 study, the use of the Tatar language in the workplace became even less popular: only 7 % of Tatars indicated that they communicated in the workplace only in the Tatar language.

Based on the survey data, we can also state a gradual decline in the role of the Tatar language as a means of intra-family communication. Although the shares of Tatars speaking Russian in the family remained virtually unchanged during the 2000s (17-16 %), by 2017 27 % of Tatars had indicated that they communicated exclusively in Russian at home. At the same time, during the 2000s, the share of the Tatar population speaking Tatar at home began to decrease: in 2001, the share of such respondents was more than half (55 %), and in 2010 — 44 %, and in 2017 — only 35 %. Today, as in 2010, almost 40 per cent of Tatars speak both languages at home, compared to only 26 % in 2001. However, for the Tatars, the language remains the most important identity marker: 76% called it their native language in 2017, which is 11 % higher than the share of those who speak Tatar fluently.

**Thus, the survey data show that in 20 years real bilingualism has not been achieved in Tatarstan.** Although the arguments of the Russian public that few of the Russian-speaking students speak the Tatar language are groundless. The 2010 survey has shown that only one fifth of the Russian youth do not know the Tatar language, and in 2017, this share, however, increased to 38 %. Most of the others have indicated their command of language (albeit low level — passive understanding or limited speech). The arguments of Tatar activists about the growing Russification of those, who have called themselves Tatars (regardless of language policy), are supported by the sociological data: at the moment, Tatar as the only language of business communication remains relevant only in rural areas in places of compact settlement of Tatars. In 2017 50.5 % of Tatars (31 % — in 2001) and almost all Russians (98 %) made business communication in Russian only. The Tatar language is gradually losing ground in intra-family communication as well.

As for the efforts of the authorities to support the teaching of the Tatar language in schools, the attitude to this among Tatarstan citizens at the end of the first and second decades differs significantly. In 2010, less than half of the Tatars (44 %) and only 14 % of the Russians supported the requirement to study the Tatar language along with Russian on an equal basis (see

Table 7). In 2017, only a quarter of the respondents and only 4% of the Russians supported the mandatory study of the Tatar language by everyone and in the same volume (see Table 8). Consequently, the share of those Tatars who support the optional choice of the language of instruction has increased.

Table 7. Attitude towards teaching the Tatar language in schools (according to the 2010 survey, %)

Do you think it is necessary to teach the Tatar language in Tatarstan schools? If yes, in what forms?	Tatars		Russians	
	People in the survey	Young people: < 30 years	People in the survey	Young people: < 30 years
It should be a compulsory subject for everyone	44.4	50.6	14.1	26.6
It should be a compulsory subject, but it should be given a smaller number of hours	24.9	22.9	28.5	22.7
It should be voluntary, only for those who want to study it	15.9	13.5	42.3	36.7
It should be mandatory only for Tatars	10.8	9.4	10.5	8.6
It should be absent in schools of Tatarstan	0.5	6	1.2	8
I find it difficult to answer	4.2	4.1	4.8	4.7
Other	0.6		0.5	

Table 8. Attitude towards teaching the Tatar language in schools (according to the 2017 survey, %)

How do you feel about the problem of teaching the Tatar language in educational institutions of Tatarstan?	Tatars		Russians	
	People in the survey	Young people: < 30 years	People in the survey	Young people: < 30 years
Tatar language should be studied by all students, regardless of their nationality	24.9	20.9	4.2 %	3.5
Tatar language should be compulsory for all, but in a smaller volume than now	22.8	23.8	15.8 %	16.8
Tatar language should be studied by Tatars mandatory, and by other nationalities – optionally, as an elective course	22.3	20.9	27	24.3
Tatar language should be studied only as an elective course, regardless of the nationality of students	23.8	26.2	46.9	50.3
Other	1.1	0.6	1.3	0,0
I find it difficult to answer	5.1	7.6	4.4	5.2

Thus, the social base for the development of protest ethno-national activity among the Russians and the Tatars, it can be noted that the actual attitude towards preservation of bilin-

gualism in education is quite weak: half of the interviewed Tatars and a fifth of Russians support the obligation to study the Tatar language to a greater or lesser degree. By comparison, in 2010, support for the mandatory learning the Tatar language for all schoolchildren was 69 % among the Tatars and 42 % among the Russians. Among the Tatars, the share of consenting to the voluntary choice of the Tatar language at school has increased from 16 % to 24 %.

## **5. Conclusion**

The specific characteristics of the Tatarstan model were connected with an attempt to maximize the opportunities of the federal framework for de facto construction of a nation-state within the Russian Federation. Consolidated elite, formed on the principle of loyalty and informal personal ties, and largely authoritarian style of governance in the region, that unlike the rest of the country has hardly ever known the democratic freedoms of the 1990s, have enabled Tatarstan to successfully fit into the established administrative and bureaucratic model of governance in contemporary Russia. Many of Russia's current features were characteristic of Tatarstan long before the strengthening of the power vertical, undertaken by V. V. Putin in the first two terms of his rule. The efficiency of the Tatarstan model is also based on the fact that here the elite is able to offer the residents of the republic a fairly high standard of living and attractive to a large part of the population, ideologically and symbolically appealing projects of the republican statehood. Due to the rootedness of the Tatarstan elite, its business interests being located on the territory of the republic, its representatives did not act as temporary visitors, on the contrary, they aimed to create a comfortable and safe environment in the republic, including for themselves and their children. Even the security forces deliberately did not spin the flywheel of violence in order to avoid civil confrontation. This is their serious difference from Dagestan of the last decade.

Since the beginning of V. V. Putin's third term, the political and national independence of the region has been finally exchanged for guarantees of property rights for elites. For the years of the application of the special model, Tatarstan has largely restored the status of national culture and language, but has not achieved real bilingualism. Social support of the Tatar national movement has weakened, and the Russian one has not developed sufficiently.

Today the Tatarstan elites still have relative independence in the sphere of administrative and technocratic decisions, security services, social development of the region based on large business, developed production, attractive investment policy.

At a time when the country is building a model in which an increasing number of regions are managed by external managers, the Tatarstan's experience of public governance and management can be increasingly in demand at the federal level for export to other regions. As will be shown below in the experience of Dagestan, the senior executives of the Republic do not lose touch with their homeland and promote the interests of Tatar business and management technologies in their new contexts.

# THE REPUBLIC OF DAGESTAN

Dagestan is the largest of the seven constituent entities of the North Caucasus in terms of territory (50.3 per thousand sq. km) and population size (3 million people<sup>113</sup>). Dagestan is the only national Republic within Russia that does not have the so-called titular ethnic group, but nevertheless acts as a national republic uniting the Dagestan peoples into political autonomy<sup>114</sup>.

Dagestan is the most multinational region of the Russian Federation. It is home to more than 30 indigenous peoples, 14 of them have the status of titular. This is a socio-cultural space, unique not only in Russia but also in the world. Even in ancient times, the mountain Dagestan was called not only “the country of mountains”, but also “the mountain of languages”. The Dagestanis speak the languages of the Nakh-Daghestanian language group, Turkic, Iranian and Slavic languages. The vast majority of the Dagestanis (96 %) consider themselves Muslims, 4 % — Orthodox Christians.

The unique demographic features of Dagestan, as well as the socio-economic and political processes that took place here (as well as throughout the country) in the 1990s, formed a special system of power relations, which until 2006 differed significantly not only from most regions of the Russian Federation, but also from other North Caucasian republics. The federal relations have made it possible to institutionalize existing characteristics and to create an additional system of representation and checks and balances for small ethnic groups.

## I. DAGESTAN ELITES AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

In 1991-1993, the residents of Dagestan three times rejected the presidential form of government in referendums. The chief executive became the Chairman of the State Council, a special body approved by the Resolution of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Dagestan (RD) dated August 16, 1994. The State Council consisted of 14 representatives of the main ethnic groups, no more than one from each nationality, elected by the Constitutional Council of the Republic of Dagestan for four years.<sup>115</sup>

The principle of proportional representation was also introduced in the Dagestan Parliament — the People’s Assembly. “*This was made possible thanks to the relatively large composition of the Parliament, 121 people. In the cosmopolitan cities and districts the elections based on quotas*

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<sup>113</sup> [www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/population/demo/PrPopul2019.xls](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/population/demo/PrPopul2019.xls)

<sup>114</sup> <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/19736/>

<sup>115</sup> <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/802038545>

were held to ensure the proportionality of national representation. Until the mid-2000s, Dagestan existed under such “multicomponent democracy”, —the former Minister for Ethnic Affairs, political scientist Eduard Urazaev told us.<sup>116</sup>

Table 9 illustrates this practice quite clearly.

**Table 9. Distribution of national districts and national representation in the People’s Assembly of the Republic of Dagestan in the elections in 1995 and 1999<sup>117</sup>**

National group	Number of districts assigned to this group	Number and proportion of representatives of this group in Parliament	The group’s share in the total population
Avars	12	33 / 27,3	28
Dargins	7	21 / 17,4	16,2
Kumyks	12	15 / 12,4	13
Lezgins	4	14 / 11,6	12,5
Russian	10	10 / 8,3	7,1
Laks	3	6 / 5	5
Tabasarans	5	6 / 5	4,7
Azerbaijanis	5	5 / 4,1	4,3
Chechens	4	4 / 3,3	4,5
Nogais	1	2 / 1,7	1,6
Aguls	0	1 / 0,8	0,8
Rutulians	0	1 / 0,8	0,8
Tsakhurs	1	1 / 0,8	0,3
Tats	2	2 / 1,7	0,4
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>121 / 100</b>	<b>100</b>

Since 1994, when Magomedali Magomedov was elected Chairman of the State Council for the first time, a system of proportional national representation was implemented in the formation of executive and legislative branches of government, not only at the highest republican level, but also to a large extent in ministries, departments, municipal authorities, as well as in the appointment of heads of territorial bodies of the federal structures and large enterprises.<sup>118</sup>

Magomedali Magomedov came from the highest echelons of the Republican party bureaucracy,<sup>119</sup> which continued to adhere to either moderate nationalist or internationalist positions. The continuity of the elites, which preserved almost until the 2010s, served as a mitigating factor for the powerful national movements that entered the political arena.

Dagestan has never advocated secession from Russia, but within the republic supported the ethno-political movements, making demands related to political and cultural autonomy, representation in government and land disputes. Some of them have raised the issue of seces-

<http://www.dslib.net/konstitucion-pravo/sistema-organov-gosudarstvennoj-vlasti-respubliki-dagestan-na-sovremennom-jetape.html>

<sup>116</sup> Interview with the former Minister of National Policy, political scientist Eduard Urazaev. Makhachkala. May, 2019.

<sup>117</sup> Table citation on: Tsutsiev A. Dagestan: Socio-economic Processes: <http://kumukia.ru/article-9013.html>

<sup>118</sup> <http://www.gumilev-center.ru/avarec-darginec-kumyk-bermudskij-treugolnik-dagestanskij-vlasti/>

<sup>119</sup> Magomedali Magomedov has held key positions in the Republic since 1983, when he headed the Council of Ministers of the Dagestan ASSR. Four years later he headed the Presidium of the Supreme Council (Parliament) of the DASSR. In 1990-1994, Magomedov was the Chairman of the Supreme Council.

sion from Dagestan. Thus, the Cossacks have intended to become part of the Stavropol Territory, Lezgin, Kumyk and Nogai movement have demanded their republican or intra-Dagestan autonomy.

During these years, Dagestan was cut off from the main transport lines that connected it to other regions of Russia through the territory of Chechnya; the industrial production drastically reduced, the struggle for resources and influence started. The economic war was for residential real estate in Makhachkala and other cities of the republic, urban markets and other infrastructure, the Golden Bridge on the border with Azerbaijan, the Makhachkala port, Dagneft, the cascade of hydroelectric power plants and power grids, pension and salary funds of the federal budget, poaching caviar and tie-ins into the oil pipeline. In this struggle all the methods were used — from the government ties of the old nomenclature and criminal networks to armed groups, formed from relatives and co-villagers.<sup>120</sup>

## 1. Birth of «clans»

At that time, control over the processes taking place in the republic was divided among several influential groups. These were, on the one hand, “dynasties” of Soviet officials, whose representatives remained in high positions in the 1990s, and on the other — “members of unofficial organizations”, who had emerged during the years of chaos due to the influence in the national movements or business, including the well-known at that time “power entrepreneurship”.<sup>121</sup>

The examples of the former are Gaji Makhachev, who became the Director General of “Rosneft — Dagestan”; Sharapudin Musaev, who was the head of the Pension Fund of the Republic of Dagestan; Magomed Khachilaeв, the owner of shady fisheries, appointed as the Deputy Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Dagestan; Ruslan Hajibekov — the mayor of Kaspiisk, Sirazhutdin Yusupov, killed in 1998,<sup>122</sup> who was the head of the Makhachkala seaport<sup>123</sup> and, of course, the mayor of Makhachkala Said Amirov.

Each of these leaders was supported by strong groups of *zemlyaks*<sup>124</sup>, relatives and friends. Dagestani scholar Enver Kisriev calls such groups “ethnic parties”, describing the complex process of forming economic niches for “feeding” groups formed on an ethnic or sub-ethnic, local community basis.<sup>125</sup> According to the expert, ethno-territorial organizations (“levashinskiy”, “mekeginskiy”, “gumbetovskiy”, “sogratlinskiy” etc.) possess “all the structural attributes of political parties that is the ability to mobilize; organizational structure, consisting of one or more authoritative leaders and sufficient for carrying out mass actions, the number of activists; financial support from the representatives of the highest financial elite and mass support of certain segments of the population.”<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> <https://republic.ru/posts/89621>

<sup>121</sup> <https://meduza.io/feature/2018/02/14/klany-realnost-obscherossiyskaya-a-ne-kavkazskaya>

<sup>122</sup> [http://www.ng.ru/events/2001-11-28/7\\_nahodka.html](http://www.ng.ru/events/2001-11-28/7_nahodka.html)

<sup>123</sup> <https://chernovik.net/content/politika/pravyashchaya-elita-dagestana-ni-voyny-ni-mira>

<sup>124</sup> People originating from the same locality

<sup>125</sup> Kisriev E. F. *Nationalities and Political Process in Dagestan. Makhachkala, 1998.*

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

However, the term “ethnic party” is disputed. Firstly, within the so-called ethnic parties there were separate groups that pursued their interests and even sometimes killed competitors. Secondly, the principle of grouping was not only and not so much ethnic. According to political scientist and journalist Khanzhan Kurbanov, “*ethnic party*” is not a party formed on clan grounds. *Take the Avars: charodins are their own “party”, they acted individually. Khunzakhtsy, gunibskie acted separately. They can sit together, sing in Avar, but the mechanism of unification has not been based on with ethnicity.*”<sup>127</sup>

Indeed, it is important to note that the Dagestan clans have nothing to do with ethnic or historical tribal formations of the Dagestanis. The modern form of clanship is a clientelist network, united by political and commercial interests. Clan members can be interconnected by kindred, ethnic, religious, territorial relations; clans can unite friends, classmates, colleagues, and the principle of their organization differs from the clans of the Moscow elite only in so far as the social texture of the Dagestan society differs from the average Russian one.<sup>128</sup>

An important element of all clans during the 90’s was people in uniform and criminals. According to a Kumyk public figure, “*at that time, everyone tried to form a personal army. Any slightest parvenu developed his patron-client relationships.*”<sup>129</sup>

The protection from them can be found only in other clans or in the Jamaat (community). Jamaats in Dagestan are rural societies, sometimes numbering several tens of thousands of people, settled in the mountains, in the cities of the republic and far beyond, which have formed translocal and even cross-border networks claiming political sovereignty and recognizing the informal jurisdiction of their council and/or Islamic religious leaders.<sup>130</sup>

In the urban space, the leaders of rural societies, security forces, post-Soviet nomenclature, criminals and businessmen, who had moved there, formed political clans based on both state institutions and on the “infantrymen” from rural societies. Both in the village and the city, law enforcers, criminals, religion, kinship and state authorities are intertwined at such a depth, which cannot be reached by any fight on corruption.

In this chaos, Magomedali Magomedov chose a strategy of co-optation of leaders of ethnic groups into authorities, the transfer of control over financial flows to them and the conclusion of informal agreements with them. According to an expert, “*he did not create his own internal army, but around the national movements there had already been armed groups. Using force against them was impossible as it would lead to civil war. That’s why he made concessions, used diplomacy. He created the corruption system, for which he was criticized, but he had to do it, he had to maintain the balance of power, the distribution of spheres of influence, the division of property.*”<sup>131</sup>

The barons spoke to the republican authorities from a position of strength. According to another expert, “*During Magomedali’s time, one had to bargain. You should have had power, criticize him, and then he would give you a pacifier.*”<sup>132</sup>

With the help of such concessions Magomedali tried not to lose control in an environment where the central government could do little, while in neighboring Chechnya was torn by

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<sup>127</sup>Interview with Hangaram Kurbanov. Makhachkala. May, 2019.

<sup>128</sup>[http://www.counter-point.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/sokiryanskaya\\_counterpoint11.pdf](http://www.counter-point.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/sokiryanskaya_counterpoint11.pdf)

<sup>129</sup>Interview with Kumyk public figure. Makhachkala. May, 2019.

<sup>130</sup><https://republic.ru/posts/89621>

<sup>131</sup>Interview with Eduard Urazaev. Makhachkala. May, 2019.

<sup>132</sup>Interview with an expert, Candidate of Historical Sciences. Makhachkala. May, 2019.

wars. In Dagestan people really did not want to slide into war. According to the same expert, *“Magomedali knew Dagestan well, he started as a teacher, from the bottom, then headed communist structures. Clans were his system of stability, the whole country was plundered, we all became the victims of this system”*.

However, even the leaders incorporated into the establishment challenged the republican authorities. The deepest crisis occurred in September 1998, when supporters of the Lak leaders the brothers of Nadirshakh (Deputy of the State Duma and leader of the Union of Muslims of Russia) and Magomed (Deputy of the Parliament of Dagestan, leader of the Lak people’s movement “Kazi-Kumukh”) Khachilaevs seized the building of the State Council and the Government of Dagestan and held it for 24 hours. The brothers were supported by the Avar authority, Gadji Makhachev. Magomedali Magomedov managed to eliminate a coup attempt with the help of the leader of the Dargin movement, the mayor of Makhachkala Said Amirov and Avar Adilgerey Magomedtagirov (who headed the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Dagestan). After the murder of mufti Saidmuhammad Abubakarov in August of the same year the Republican administration managed to bring under its umbrella also the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Dagestan. Thus, after the attempted coup, Magomedali was able to consolidate power to some extent.

The government of Magomedov not only stroke a balance while taming rappeasing the barons, but also enabled the society to live and make money, ensuring its support. According to the expert, *“[Chairman of the Government] Abdurazak Murzabekov practiced the principle of full loyalty to the organization of trade and services. Business was supported as well. People had to survive, and the decline in living standards in Dagestan was more significant than in other republics.”* The shadow economy of the Republic developed rapidly. As a result, according to experts, despite the strong economic decline and transport isolation, the transition of the Dagestan society ended without a hitch. *“Magomedali, following his interests to preserve his resources and power, managed to preserve Dagestan as well.”*

Moscow was aware of the problems related to the strengthened clans. In 1998, a large team of law enforcement officers headed by the then First Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of Russia Vladimir Kolesnikov came to Makhachkala, that was tasked to restore order in Dagestan. Minor officials were arrested, but in the end all cases were closed with the help of administrative and power resources and, according to local experts, corruption component.<sup>133</sup>

It was easier for the internal policy department of the Presidential Administration and the various departments, from the Ministry of Finance to the Pension Fund, to negotiate with the leaders of political groups, using economic methods and force.

Thus, Magomedali Magomedov, unlike Mintimer Shaimiev, has not managed to build a power vertical, politically and economically consolidate the republican property and power in the hands of the elite loyal to him, on the contrary, he has used political economic levers and positions to bribe and conclude pacts with the leaders of groups. Unlike Tatarstan, Dagestan’s industry could not be preserved: *“All the hens laying golden eggs were immediately killed. The plants were privatized by the management, they gained control over the property, the enterprises were declared bankrupt, the lands were used for construction.”*<sup>134</sup> However, the “liberal-shadow” economy and strong family and patron-client relationships enabled the society to survive and

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<sup>133</sup> <https://www.rbc.ru/opinions/politics/02/02/2018/5a7433f89a7947c97cfb3b46>

<sup>134</sup> Interview with a public figure. Makhachkala. May, 2019.

balance on the edge of war and peace.

Being pluralistic by nature, the republic retained a significant degree of freedom: the most free media in the North Caucasus operated here, there were opposition and active political and religious life. The centers of force that were formed at that time used these mechanisms in their internal political struggle, but did not fully control them. The formation of the Dagestan quasi-feudal system was gradual and took almost a decade.

## 2. Adaptation to the growing influence of Moscow

In August 1999, armed groups from Chechnya under the command of Shamil Basaiev and Khattab invaded the Botlikhskii, Tsumadinskii, Buinakskii and Novolakskii Districts of Dagestan. Reckoning on the support of local residents was incorrect: the Dagestani militia and the Ministry of Internal Affairs with the support of the federal military gave a powerful rebuff to the militants.

The militant attack on Dagestan in August 1999 changed the situation of the ruling elite of the region, the small group of late Soviet officials, who managed to stay afloat in the 1990s. Before the Basaev attack, the regional elite, on the one hand, sought to show the Federal Center that Dagestan was under control, so as not to be a subject of great concern to the Kremlin against the backdrop of the crisis in Chechnya, on the other hand, it had to appease the “new elite”. After August 1999, such necessity ceased to exist<sup>135</sup>.

Against the background of a small victorious war in Dagestan and the rise of a patriotic wave, several Dagestan political leaders, especially those who distinguished themselves in fought against the militants, received a kind of concession to rule the republic and the opportunity to crackdown on competitors with impunity.

Now, the powerful groups faced another challenge: to jointly push away from the feeder both the insiders and outsiders (rural communities and urban residents, that is, the people of Dagestan).

By 2003, with the growth in oil prices that provided Moscow with the funds to bribe the regional elites and security services, strengthening of the federal center and the formation of the “vertical of power”, the competition for the leadership in Dagestan was reduced to the establishment of relations with Moscow. **This was an important shift in the system as the unlimited war for power and money was transformed into a competition for positions and budgets limited by unspoken rules.** Noble robbery, withdrawal of real estate, poaching caviar production gave way to the management of infrastructural enterprises, of the Pension Fund, of medical and social expertise, of the Rosselkhozbank funds, the distribution of land for construction. Investments were made in the construction of roads and gas pipelines, business and the population began to pay for gas from time to time, and the “market” cost of gas distribution networks reached 20 billion rubles.

**The strengthening federal center began to neutralize the special institutional structure of Dagestan in 2003**, when national elections of the president of the republic and the mixed system of elections of the People’s Assembly (50 % — from party lists, 50 % — from single member districts) were introduced while bringing the regional legislation in line with the federal legisla-

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<sup>135</sup> <http://carnegie.ru/commentary/61666>

tion.<sup>136</sup> After the terrorist attack in Beslan in 2004, the elections of the president by direct vote of the people was replaced by the actual appointment. Dagestan haven't had a chance to elect its leader.

The State Council was dissolved in 2006, when Mukhu Gimbatovich Aliev was appointed as the president. The unification of regions and the centralization of power met the interests of the Dagestan elites. **The national movements were weakened, the dissolution of the State Council, ethnic representation in the parliament and the government authorities went relatively easy, although many to this day believe that Dagestan needs a separate institution, aimed at harmonizing inter-ethnic relations and conflict resolution.**

According to the political scientist, editor of NNT Khanzhan Kurbanov, *“the State Council resolved ethnopolitical issues, 14 titular peoples had their authoritative representatives and dealt with the issues of cultural survival, social well-being. In fact, it is very important that the well-being of citizens does not spill over beyond the threshold of radicalization. In Dagestan there are numerous mediation resources — Elders, jamaats, masliats,<sup>137</sup> who could be involved to prevent the pot from boiling. This institution could have been changed, adjusted, because its efficiency had been proven by time, partly thanks to the State Council we were not involved in the war.”*<sup>138</sup>

According to other experts, the State Council was important for small nations, although collegiality was rather conditional:

*“There was one representative of each titular nationality with a written language, but the Head of the State Council was vested with all the authority. For small nations it was a channel of representation. For example, for the Nogais, the representative in the State Council was a liaison with the national district. Therefore, this body was always relevant for small nations, but not for large ones. Other mechanisms were used to resolve the issue with the Avars.”*<sup>139</sup>

It is obvious that the State Council played an important role: the ethnic heat cooled down, ethnicity was largely depoliticized, which happened, among other things, due to the changed relations between the government and Dagestani society.

In the 1990s, the ability to mobilize supporters was a key factor in the power struggle. For example, during the above-mentioned coup of 1998, Dargins and Kumyks-Tarkins stood up for the mayor of Makhachkala Said Amirov. These were the people who identified their interests with the interests of the leader, and their interdependence was direct and obvious. In the 2000s, the leaders of the major groups evolved. Now they were not just pragmatic businessmen with private armies, but politicians who could sacrifice their community and kinship relations for the sake of integration into the system.

Rallies in the 2000s happened less frequently, since one of the main criteria for the success of the leader was the ability to keep the population under control. The general federal trend to ban street protest activities was beneficial to local elites. Emerging protests were of media nature and aimed at demonstrating the mobilization forces to the opponents in the Republic and the Kremlin. At times, they took on ethnic overtones, for example, a rally in Khasavjurt in 2005, organized by the mayor Saigidpasha Umakhanov, was a protest of the Avars against the power of Dargins in the person of the Chairman of the State Council of RD Magomedali

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<sup>136</sup><https://regnum.ru/news/121364.html>

<sup>137</sup>*Mechanism of reconciliation, reaching agreement in the interests of all parties.*

<sup>138</sup>*Interview with Khanzhan Kurbanov, Candidate of Political Sciences, May, 2019.*

<sup>139</sup>*Interview with an expert, Doctor of Historical Sciences. Makhachkala. May, 2019.*

### 3. Mukhu Aliev: attempt to be equidistant from clans

Mukhu Aliev became the first President of Dagestan in 2006. The continuity of the Republican elites was largely preserved. Mukhu Aliev was the speaker of the People's Assembly under Magomedali Magomedov, they ruled the republic together. The Avar Aliiev was supported by the Avar politicians, particularly, the mayor of Khasaviurt Saigidpasha Umakhanov, considering him to be “their” President. Mukhu Aliev provided the Avar clans with decent access to power, while not infringing the interests of the Dargins. After the appointment of Mukhu Aliiev as the president, the speaker of the People's Assembly became the son of Magomedali Magomedov — Magomedsalam Magomedov (it was rumored that this appointment was a condition under which the senior Magomedov agreed to resign). A Dargin Said Amirov stayed in power as the mayor of Makhachkala. In general, Mukhu Aliev preserved the basic structure of power, although the old party guard began to gradually retire due to age. In the minds of people and to some extent in practice, ethnic quota arrangement remained: “Dargin”, “Avar”, “Kumyk” and other seats in the government and parliament were relevant as before. However, in fact, the republic was largely ruled by the duumvirate of Dargin and Avar groups.<sup>141</sup>

The first year of Aliev's rule was calm. It was marked only by the resignation of the Prosecutor of Dagestan Imam Yaraliiev, an authoritative representative of Lezgin, who was replaced by Igor Tkachev, holding the post of the Head of the Principal Directorate of the Prosecutor General's Office of Russia in the Southern Federal District. Imam Yaraliiev resigned voluntarily, but it was obvious that his removal from office was the result of the efforts of Aliev, who was dissatisfied with the work of the law enforcement agencies, and Yaraliiev represented the interests of the Moscow millionaire of Lezgin origin Suleiman Kerimov, the conflict between<sup>142</sup> whom and the first president of the republic arose from the first days of taking office by Aliiev and only grew over time.<sup>143</sup>

Here we should note the special role of the Moscow-Dagestan oligarchs in the system of power relations in the Republic and in the relations between the Makhachkala “White House” and the Kremlin. Dagestan's business elites fought hard for strategic objects of state property in the Republic (for example, for the port of Makhachkala)<sup>144</sup>, competed for the appointment of important officials, lobbied their candidates for the presidency, and then the head of Dagestan. The main players in this field were the above-mentioned Suleiman Kerimov, billionaire, Lezgin, who had represented Dagestan in the Federation Council for many years, and the Avars brothers Zijavutdin and Magomed Magomedovs, who headed another oligarchic group — Summa Holding. For lobbying their interests, the oligarchs used their influence on the Kremlin, as well as the local support groups, which, if necessary, could take people to streets to demonstrate the strength and “people's anger”. The conflict with the oligarchs promised problems to any republican leader.

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<sup>140</sup> Interview with Eduard Urazaev, Makhachkala, May, 2019

<sup>141</sup> The term “ethnic duumvirate” was proposed by the K. Kurbanov.

<sup>142</sup> [http://expert.ru/south/2010/06/prezident\\_iz\\_horoshey\\_semyi/](http://expert.ru/south/2010/06/prezident_iz_horoshey_semyi/)

<sup>143</sup> At that time they said that Mukha Aliiev initiated the hostilities with the oligarch by refusing Suleiman Kerimov entry the State Duma, and selecting the Avar Rizvan Isaev.

<sup>144</sup> <https://vz.ru/economy/2016/6/14/815487.html>

In the years that followed Aliev experienced difficulties with Makhachkala, Kizliar, Khasaviurt, Suleiman-Stalsk (headed by Imam Yaraliiev since 2007) and Tsuntinsky districts. Instead of making political alliances, he made enemies in the face of large Dagestan barons.<sup>145</sup> With each of these leaders, conflicts developed on their own, and at some point the number grew into quality.

The problem of rebellious territories had worsened before the elections of 2009, when it became clear that Derbentsky and the Levashinsky districts could fall into the hands of opponents of Alev, Imam Yaraliiev and Magomedgadji Magomedov, a representative of the group of the mayor of Makhachkala the Dargin Said Amirov who had been powerful by that time.<sup>146</sup> In the elections, Mukhu Aliiev and Said Amirov, a native of this district, supported different candidates. Amirov and his candidate won.

To prevent Imam Yaraliiev from becoming the mayor, Aliev had to bet on the then mayor of Derbent Feliks Kaziakhmedov. It should be noted that the position of the mayor of Derbent has traditionally been assigned to the Lezgins, and since there were no influential Lezgins in Aliev's inner circle, he was forced to accept the candidature Kaziahmedov.

The election in Derbent split the political elite of Dagestan. Aliev was supported by the mayor of Khasaviurt, an Avar Saigidpasha Umakhanov, the head of the Dagestan Department of the Pension Fund, a Lak Amuchi Amutinov, the head of the Makhachkala seaport, an Avar Abusupian Kharkharov and the Director of the Derbent Sparkling Wine Factory Avar Magomed Sadulaiev. The oligarchs and politicians of different caliber such as the Chairman of the People's Assembly Magomedsalom Magomedov, the mayor of Makhachkala Said Amirov and the head of Kizliar District Sagid Murtazaliiev were in opposition to Aliev. On the day of voting, several polling stations did not open, there was ballot-rigging, the city was filled with military and security forces. After it was announced that Kaziakhmedov won the election, Yaraliiev's supporters staged a rally and filed lawsuits in court on the facts of violation of electoral rights. As a result, three months later, when Aliev's presidential term expired, the court annulled the results of the vote in Derbent, and a little later Yaraliiev finally became the mayor of Derbent.

Mukhu Aliev was quite independent vis-a-vis Moscow, being engaged in a controversy on the issues of appointments to the federal positions in Dagestan and other matters.

The culmination of the confrontation between Aliev and Moscow was the abduction and subsequent release of Vladimir Radchenko, the head of the Federal Tax Inspectorate for Dagestan, in February 2009. Radchenko, who had previously worked in Karachaevo-Cherkessia, was invited in spite of rallies against the appointment of external official – a “*varyag*” to the “Lezgin” position. In the fight against Radchenko the Lezgins were supported by the “Northern Alliance” of the Avar clans. It was a continuation of the game of the president of the republic Mukhu Aliev and the Moscow oligarch Suleiman Kerimov, who promoted Radchenko.

The warnings about the lack of security were sent to Radchenko, one of the first Varyag who had been sent to the Republic even before he crossed the border with Dagestan. On the way, Radchenko was called by a high-ranking security officer, who declared that the building of the Federal Tax Service Directorate in Makhachkala had been mined and safety was not guaranteed. Radchenko nevertheless, arrived and tried to start doing his job, however on Feb-

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<sup>145</sup> Such as Sagid Murtazaliiev, Magomedsalom Magomedov and Said Amirov, Imam Yaraliiev, Atai Aliiev, Alimsoltan Alkhamatov (when he was alive), Khizri Shikhsaidov and Hajimurad Omarov.

<sup>146</sup> <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/249025/>

ruary 6, he was kidnapped by unidentified gunmen directly from his own office. Threatening with murder, kidnappers demanded from Radchenko to leave the republic. After driving the official around the city in a taxi, the kidnappers let him go. The lawyer of Radchenko accused Mukhu Aliev's son of kidnapping, who once said that "*no Radchenko will work here*", but a person agreed upon with the President will work. Mukhu Aliev called this accusation absurd<sup>147</sup>.

Obviously, the Kremlin did not appreciate any of this. However, at that time, local clans were still able to resist the federal government in the cadre policy: Radchenko did not remain long in the position of the head of the Federal Tax Service Directorate.

It is also believed that Mukhu Aliev has ruined his situation by blocking the agreement for demarcation of the border with Azerbaijan, with which the Dagestani Lezgins, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, had an irredentist conflict. Mukhu Aliev refused to hand over Lezgin villages to Azerbaijan, saying directly to Sergei Lavrov: "*I thought you are the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, but it turns out that you are the Azerbaijani Minister*". The experts believe that it is for this statement that he has paid with his post. The next President of Dagestan, Magomedali Magomedov's son Magomedislam signed the agreement behind the scenes.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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After signing the agreement on the state border between Russia and Azerbaijan in September 2010, the two Lezgin villages (Hrakh-Uba and Urian-Uba), which had previously been part of Dagestan, were transferred under the control of Baku. The villagers said that since 2007, Azerbaijan had exerted pressure on them to force them to refuse the Russian citizenship or sell their houses and leave Azerbaijan. After several years of uncertainty, it was decided to support the

resettlement of the inhabitants of these villages in Southern Dagestan. In January 2019, during the "government hour" in the Federation Council, the Minister of North Caucasus Affairs Sergei Chebotarev informed the senators that the resettlement of Russian citizens living in the Azerbaijani villages of Hrakh-Uba and Urian-Uba had been completed, for which the Ministry allocated 200 million rubles: <http://lnka.ru/aktualnoe/19909-hrah-uba-vse.html>

Thus, **Mukhu Aliiev, whose task was to "equidistance" from clans, reduce corruption and strengthen the influence of the federal center and Russian government institutions on the territory of Dagestan, was successfully involved in political conflicts at the level of districts and sectoral corruption markets and lost most of these conflicts.** Aliev had failed to find strong political allies either in Moscow or in the republic and to consolidate them. He did not create his own clan, but other groups under Aliev had gained even more strength, deeply weaving into the social texture of the Republic. "*Mukhu was a pragmatist, who took clans for granted and worked as best he could,*" the expert explained to us.

Another expert was sure that in general, Mukhu Aliiev monitored the situation, as he continued to be supported by some Avar clans and he himself until the last moment was sure that he would remain for a second term. However, Aliiev lost in the struggle of clans for the choice of Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin.

**The strengthened leaders of clans divided the Republic into the clan-supervised territory and spheres of influence, introduced increasingly stringent local authoritarian regimes in their communities, jamaats or informal structures. Still quite soft Republican regime was combined with tough authoritarianism at the local level,** where any confrontation with the clan leaders became extremely dangerous, and it was impossible to run business or a public initiative without the consent of the baron. The political struggle in the republic continued to be bloody, assassina-

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<sup>147</sup>[http://www.ng.ru/regions/2009-02-19/1\\_Aliev.html](http://www.ng.ru/regions/2009-02-19/1_Aliev.html)

tions of political competitors, as well as blood feud for such killings became a usual practice.<sup>148</sup>

In addition to the tough internal political struggle of elites, that regularly claimed the lives of leaders of clans and of power groups, since the early 2000s, a new type of conflict has arisen – the land conflicts. With the growth of budget revenues and subsidies for agriculture, agricultural land has acquired value proportional to the value of state subsidies. A struggle over the land of distant-pastures erupted, for which subsidies could be received. At the same time, there was the mass migration of mountaineers to the plain and cities that led to a construction boom and an increase in the price of land for construction.

**The rural jamaats, that in the hungry 1990s were a powerful resource for group leaders, now, in the affluent 2000s become a hindrance, if not a threat, to the well-being of the families of the leaders who had grown rich.** Thus, the administration of Makhachkala did not need the district municipalities of Tarkin residents, which prevented trade in plots for construction – in the early 2000s, all the villages as part of the capital of the republic were deprived of self-government.

The local managers of Rosselkhozbank and the heads of agricultural enterprises (farms), who received lands of former collective farms in perpetuity or for lease, no longer intended to share the subsidies for agriculture with their communities (under the guise of the interests of which they had received the land and these subsidies). Activists, who applied to courts or organized mass protests and land grabs, were accused of extremism and subjected to pressure from the security services, sometimes literally pushing them into armed insurgency. The rollback of self-government and the annexation of suburban rural municipalities took place throughout the country, but in Dagestan this process turned into a predictable ethnic conflict.

Thus, in the 2000s, the situation changed radically. In the first half of the 1990s, it was impossible to gain and maintain access to financial flows without a micro-army mobilized on the basis of land, kinship or ethnicity. In the 2000s, large earnings were the budget, including agricultural subsidies, received due to robbing of yesterday's own "militias".

It was now possible to collect tribute from the city's retail and small wholesale markets, as the incomes of buyers and traders (those who defended the city hall with their live shield during the 1998 riots) increased. Now, they were on the other side of the barricade. How to collect these funds?

In the new reality, political leaders needed power resources to calm communities in order to maintain financial flows, for which local barons often used law enforcement agencies. The head of the Lezgin Dokuzparinskii district Kerimkhan Abasov, whom local residents accused of "plundering the district", i.e. the funds for a local school, bridge, state aid to socially underprivileged, subsidies for crops turned to OMON (the Special Designation Police Detachment) when locals went to an anti-corruption protest. The fire was open on demonstrators, two of whom were wounded, and one local resident was killed. Then the district authorities tried to present the crackdown as "*resistance to the legitimate demands of authorities*". Farid Babaiev, the leader of the Dagestan "Yabloko" ("Apple") party, who after the crackdown demanded the resignation of Abasov, was shot dead by the assassins in 2007. Anna Politkovskaia wrote about "Khanate of Dokuzpara".<sup>149</sup> One of the authors of the report visited this khanate soon after

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<sup>148</sup> For example, the former Duma Deputy Nadirshakh Khachilaev, the Vice-speaker of the Parliament Arsen Kamaev, the Deputy Minister of Industry and Transport Salam Magomedov, the head of the Khasaviurt district Alimsoltan Alkhamatov and many others died at the hands of killers

<sup>149</sup> <http://2006.novayagazeta.ru/nomer/2006/36n/n36n-s00.shtml>

the shooting of the rally and saw with her own eyes a school that looked like a barn, a missing bridge, striking poverty of local residents against a very impressive mansion of Kerimkhan Abasov behind the barbed wire.

#### **4. Elite and the Caucasus Emirate**

Active armed activity shifted from Chechnya to Dagestan in 2007, by 2009 the Republic had become the center of the armed conflict.

The armed conflict in Dagestan originally had a religious connotation: back in the 1990s, the fundamentalist trend in Islam, very heterogeneous in its ideological orientations and the degree of radicalism, which could be conditionally referred to as “Salafism”, began growing in strength in the republic. Since the late 1990’s, the security forces began to put pressure on the Salafis, as a result, the leader of their most radical wing, Bagaudin Muhammad, declared the khizhra (resettlement) to the de facto independent Chechnia. At the same time, the radicals established control over several Dagestani settlements in the Kadar zone. Shamil Basaev’s attack on Dagestan was held under the slogans of “helping oppressed brothers in the faith” in these areas, but, as already mentioned, he was defeated by the people’s militias and the Russian armed forces.

Since then, “Wahhabism” in Dagestan was legally banned by the People’s Assembly<sup>150</sup>, but the Salafi community was steadily growing. For many years Dagestan security forces have not distinguished between Salafis and terrorists, in fact, equating the fight against terrorism to the fight against Salafis. After 2003, people convicted as the accomplices of Basaev’s attack on Dagestan were released from prisons. Many of them were tortured during the investigation, and when they were released, some began to take revenge.<sup>151</sup>

The armed underground, fueled by religious intolerance and a thirst for revenge, was formed in Dagestan. In 2007, Dagestan’s insurgency joined the Caucasus Emirate proclaimed by the then leader of Chechen militants Dokku Umarov. The militants committed bombings, assassinations and attacks. The security forces fought against the armed underground, using indiscriminate violence, torture, kidnappings, extrajudicial executions of those suspected of involvement in the insurgency, radicalism or that they had information about the people who the security forces were interested in. Repressions could concern anyone who, according to the subjective assessment of the law enforcement officer, belonged to the “wrong strand” in Islam. Such pressure led to new waves of radicalization.

In 2009, the security forces lost 83 people killed and 110 wounded in the republic, in 2010 — 159 killed and 233 wounded.<sup>152</sup> In total, according to the “Caucasian Knot”, in 2010 in Dagestan 685 people were killed and wounded in the armed confrontation. During this year 148 special operations, shelling of security forces and civilians, as well as shootings between law enforcement officers and members of the armed underground took place. Dagestan suicide bombers committed terrorist attacks outside the republic.

To combat the Imarat, a large number of Federal law enforcement agencies were brought

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<sup>150</sup>In 1999, the People’s Assembly adopted a law banning Wahhabi and other extremist activities in the territory of the Republic of Dagestan <http://base.garant.ru/26502658/>

<sup>151</sup>Orlov O, Sokirianskaia E. *New Course of Magomedov? M.: Zvenia, 2012. P. 29.*

<sup>152</sup>*Ibid.*

to Dagestan. The Dagestani Ministry of Internal Affairs was always headed by Dagestanis, however, this structure acted quite independently from the republican authorities.

Despite the fact that the republican officials also often became victims of militants, the existence of the Caucasus Emirate made their lives easier. Now, all political groups turned to Moscow for support. It became dangerous and expensive to fight openly with political competitors or to suppress protest activities in deceived communities without criminalizing them in the eyes of the federal center. Therefore, it became a practice to link political competitors and critics with terrorism and to force them out of the legal framework.

Moreover, those who could not socialize, sometimes full-fledged criminals, or representatives of protest groups and religious dissidents were forced out to the “forest”. Regional political, economic, and religious elites used both the state and militants to suppress potential competitors. Besides, the armed underground took orders for political assassinations, was engaged in security racketeering and extortions.

Security forces developed a most powerful net of agents in the insurgency; a war between them and the insurgency was fought at the lowest levels. The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Dagestan took the first blow: local police officers, personnel of the Patrol and Inspection Service were killed, motive of personal revenge for the killed comrades and relatives, fueled their hatred not only to fighters, but also to Salafis as a whole. Ordinary militants had lived on the average for four - six months. But warlords, sometimes privy to top officials, for years, could lead almost a legal life. They imposed a “tax on jihad” on officials and businessmen (many people paid this tax). For example, the leader of the Gimry group, Ibrahim Gadzhidadaiev, known for his good relations with Dagestani high-ranking officials, made great fortunes in the collection of tributes. The Caucasus Emirate has become a common dangerous game of security forces, regional elites and criminalized underground leaders, which they played for nearly 10 years.

**The activity of the Caucasus Emirate justified the special conditions for the Dagestan elites, expressed in the opacity of financial flows, the permitted arbitrariness of law enforcement agencies and the judicial system serving the interests of the ruling elite.** If Tatarstan was bargaining with the Kremlin from the standpoint of efficiency, expressed in the criteria of strict accountability, in Dagestan the elite played on the fact that they were the only possible force that could deter the region from slipping into chaos. Arguments for bargaining were as follows: if not us, then nationalists, Islamists or al-Qaida.

**Dagestan elites could not and did not try to offer the residents of the republic a project aimed at the future, which would have a symbolic and ideological appeal. For young people, the ideological vacuum was filled by the non-systemic leaders, often the radical ones.** Many perceived them as more honest and certainly no more criminal than the local elites.

The rest of the youth got either incorporated in the corrupt and criminalized environment while adopting the existing rules, or to leave Dagestan *en masse*. This somewhat reduced the tension in the labor market and ensured the flow of funds to the republic. However, in general, the negative processes associated with the combat on armed insurgency, ever egregious corruption, rivalry between clans and political groups, lack of resources and other rootcauses, were growing in intensity.<sup>153</sup>

Thus, Mukhu Aliev, a project of equidistant bureaucratic governor outside of clan system, has failed, leading to an acute political conflict, loss of control over the elites by the president

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<sup>153</sup>In 2011–2013, the negative balance of migration increased from 12–13 thousand to 22–23 thousand people,

of the republic, and intensified armed confrontation.

In February 2010, the federal government removed him from his post. Mukhu Aliev failed to cope with the intrigues of the Moscow Dagestanis<sup>154</sup> and the republican political groups. The influential Dargin clan from the village of Levashi came back to power. The son of Magomedali Magomedov, Magomedislam Magomedov, became the next president.

## 5. Return of the «levashintsy» and attempt at a civil dialogue

Magomedislam Magomedov has come with new tasks: to reconcile political opponents, to achieve economic growth and civil peace in the country, to prevent a full-scale war. The two new directions in the federal policy on the North Caucasus in general and on Dagestan in particular can be associated with his presidency.

The first is a focus on the economic development of the republic, being synchronous with the development institutions such as KRSK (North Caucasus Development Corporation) and NCR JSC (North Caucasus Resorts) established under the leadership of the first plenipotentiary representative of the President for the North Caucasian Federal District Aleksandr Khloponin. The Chairman of the Board of Directors of NCR was a cousin of the Moscow-Dagestan oligarchs the Magomedov brothers, Ahmed Bilalov. Magomedislam Magomedov came on the wave of “investment agreement” concluded with some Moscow oligarchs of Dagestan origin.<sup>155</sup> The support of Magomedislam Magomedov by Dmitry Medvedev was connected with the promises of Suleiman Kerimov to invest in the economy of the region, including the construction of a glass-manufacturing plant, to help with privatization and reconstruction of the Uytash Airport and the Sea trade port in Makhachkala, as well as to develop a tourist cluster at the Caspian Sea. The brothers Zijavutdin and Magomed Magomedovs expressed readiness to invest in the Matlas Ski Resort in the Khunzakhsky district.

The second direction was an attempt to rebuild the social infrastructure of the republic, weakening the influence of criminalized and corrupt clan groups, constantly playing with the fire of ethnic, land and religious conflicts, and to promote civic projects that could bring the Dagestan social order closer to the average Russian one.

The second Congress of the Peoples of Dagestan was held, which was broadcast live, and different participants: from the people’s writer Fazu Aliyeva to an Islamic scholar, a representative of Muslim fundamentalists, Abbas Kebedov, addresses the Congress.

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*which by specific values (per 10 thousand population) corresponds to an increased outflow of residents of the region. <http://old.memo.ru/d/161980.html> , <http://www.respublic.net/2015/08/18/%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BF%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%8B-%D0%B8-%D0%BC%D0%B8%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%BA-%D0%BE%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%BB%D1%8B-%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%BF%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B0/>*

<sup>154</sup>According to Eduard Urazayev, however, in general, Mukhu Aliev controlled the situation, as he continued to be supported by some Avar clans and he himself until the last moment was sure that he would remain for the second term. However, Aliev lost in the struggle of clans for the choice of Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin. Interview with Eduard Urazaev, Makhachkala, May 2019.

<sup>155</sup>In Moscow, after the defeat of YUKOS and interception of the main financial flows by representatives of Putin’s team, a new type of ‘oligarchs’ was formed during a few years — a clientele of security forces and senior administrators, who had received enormous political power. Such authorized entrepreneurs became an integral part of all major regional projects — be it the APEC Summit or the North Caucasus Development Corporation. Moscow Dagestanis (Suleiman Kerimov, the Magomedov brothers (the group “Summa”), the Bilalov brothers (North Caucasus Resort Development Corporation) are one of them.

Much was done to reconcile the Sufi and Salafi strands in Islam. For this purpose, the public organization “Association of Scholars of Akhlu-Sunn in Dagestan”, including several dozen representatives of the Salafi communities of the republic, was established that maintained contact with the republican officials.

The second initiative for reconciliation was the establishment of “Commission to assist persons who had decided to stop terrorist and extremist activities on the territory of the Republic in adapting to peaceful life” in November 2010. The commission was headed by the first deputy prime minister of the republican government Rizvan Kurbanov, and included representatives of Akhlu-Sunnah, such as the above-mentioned Abbas Kebedov.

Its activities became a challenge for the federal security forces, especially for the Investigative Committee, which was interested in convictions and solved cases, and the commission asked for leniency for those involved or assisted in the insurgent activities (real militants did not actually apply to the commission), raised challenging issues and became both a cause and a platform for interdepartmental conflicts.

As a result, the peace initiatives were stopped by the murder of Said Afandi Chirkeiskii, a leader of the official Sufi Islam in the republic, the most influential Sheikh of the Naqshbandi and Shazili tariqahs in Dagestan, the spiritual and political leader of the Dagestan’s Spiritual Board of the Muslims in August 2012. In the same year, the deputy mufti of the Dagestan Spiritual Board of Muslim Ahmed-Haji Tagaiev was killed; and a member of the Supreme Court of Dagestan Magomed Magomedov was killed in early 2013.

Most of the members of Akhlu-Sunnah in the following years were arrested or expelled from the country, some of them were killed. The adaptation commission under Magomedov’s presidency lost its effectiveness and was discredited in the eyes of the public. In addition, the policy of the federal center in relation to religious radicalism in 2012 sharply tightened, and in the second half of 2014 it finally turned into repressive.

The “economic” initiatives came to an end along with the presidential term of Dmitrii Medvedev, often with corruption scandals, for example, with the NCR and the brothers Ahmed and Magomed Bilalov. Funding was reduced, most investment projects were stagnated.

Putin was unlikely to understand all the complex configuration of forces in Dagestan. He consulted with his inner circle, which was “fed” by the Moscow oligarchs of the Dagestan origin and local Dagestan barons.

*“They [the clan leaders — the author’s note] had access to influential people getting along with Putin. Sagid (Murtazaliiev) “fed” someone, Saigidpasha (Umakhanov) “fed” someone. Having an access to the first person is a very important thing, so they feed their contact, provide the information he needs, regularly check the extent to which this person really has access to him.”<sup>156</sup>*

The governance model of Dagestan during this period was a “hourglass”: at the top there are the Moscow-Dagestani oligarchs, Kremlin groups related to them, the ministries and departments of the federal center, in the center — the republican government, and at the bottom, under it, there are the authoritarian neo-feudal Dagestani groups, which have divided up the spheres of influence and territories, and which build the relationship between themselves, with the republican and the federal center in the background of war of security forces and the Caucasus Emirate, using both of them for their own purposes. And although many groups of influence ensured support directly from the federal center, working relations with the republican

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<sup>156</sup>Interview with an expert, Makhachkala. May, 2019.

government became part of the curved vertical of power in Dagestan.

The system of power relations rooted in Dagestan was endangered, when before the Olympic Games in Sochi Moscow needed silence in the region. Security forces began a powerful operation to destroy the armed insurgency. At the same time, the so-called Islamic State emerged in the Middle East, that recruited hundreds of Dagestan radicals. The armed conflict in Dagestan has significantly quieted.

**The Dagestan government had to such an extent distanced itself from the population that it could not count on their support. The political leaders of Dagestan were no longer supported by numerous zemlyaks and ethnic communities, ready to defend their interests as their own, they could only count on a limited inner circle, who fed from their hands. Moscow finally wanted and was able to mobilize financial and organizational resources to begin dismantling the existing political system of Dagestan.**

## **6. First attempt to eliminate clans**

In January 2013, Magomedislam Magomedov gave place of the head of the republic to the Avar Ramazan Abdulatipov, a professor of philosophy, who in the past held the positions of the deputy prime minister of Russia (1997-1998), and the first chairman of the Council of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation. Abdulatipov, who had spent most of his life outside the republic, was sent by Moscow to Dagestan, not for reconciliation or equidistance, but for crackdown of local clans, even though at that time some media claimed that he himself was brought to office by the powerful clans of the Moscow Dagestanis.<sup>157</sup> In any case, Abdulatipov came with scathing slogans calling for the fight against Dagestan's feudalism, corruption, and advocated the legalizing Dagestan's shadow economy.

In the first half of 2014, prosecutors revealed more than 3.3 thousand corruption offenses, more than 700 state and municipal employees were brought to various types of responsibility.<sup>158</sup> Convictions were handed down against the heads of districts, city administrations and ministers. However, many cases were suspended and did not reach trial (or sentencing).

Between 2013 to 2015, the Caucasus Emirate was virtually eliminated in Dagestan. When in March 2013 a prominent leader of the Gimry' group, Ibrahim Gadzhidadaev was blocked and killed in Semender, many of his ties in the political establishment came into the spotlight.<sup>159</sup> This was followed by arrests of officials and deputies. After the death of the insurgency leader of Doku Umarov, the emirs of the Caucasus Emirate were Dagestanis - Aliaskhab Kebekov and Magomed Suleimanov, but both of them were quickly killed.

By 2015, the financial flows supporting the existence of the Caucasus Emirate, including payments by heads of municipal districts and enterprises, had been intercepted. The criminal economy of the underground had been undermined. Many members of the armed insurgency had been killed, a small number had been able to move abroad, including to Syria. The resulting ideological competition between the Caucasus Emirate and the Islamic state exacerbated the internal crisis of the North Caucasian militancy and accelerated its elimination.

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<sup>157</sup><http://expert.ru/south/2013/06/riskovannyij-obmen/>

<sup>158</sup>[https://www.riadagestan.ru/mobile/news/security/prokuratura\\_dagestana\\_s\\_nachala\\_2014\\_goda\\_privlekla\\_k\\_otvetstvennosti\\_bole\\_700\\_chinovnikov/](https://www.riadagestan.ru/mobile/news/security/prokuratura_dagestana_s_nachala_2014_goda_privlekla_k_otvetstvennosti_bole_700_chinovnikov/)

<sup>159</sup> <https://chernovik.net/content/inye-smi/ibragim-gadzhidadaev-boevik-ili-robin-gud>

The defeat of the terrorist networks created due conditions to start the process of dismantling the clans, which began with high level authorities. Abdulatipov's task was to provide political support to the anti-corruption policy of the federal center.

At the first stage, large Dagestan's grands and "feudal lords" left the political stage. With the advent of Abdulatipov's rule, the powerful Dargin clan of Magomedovs, which Moscow had relied on, from the date of the USSR collapse, left the political stage. This clan left with honor: Magomedislam Magomedov was transferred to the service of Presidential Administration of Russia, and Magomedali Magomedov was got an award from the President Putin for strengthening the unity of the Russian nation.<sup>160</sup>

In 2013, the Head of the National Bank of Dagestan Sirazhutdin Iliasov was dismissed (officially retired).<sup>161</sup> Iliasov was one of the main old identities of the Dagestan elite — he headed the republican branch of the Central bank since 1992. Iliasov's retirement was preceded by a series of banking scandals, the most notable of which was the bankruptcy of Express CB which was the largest in Dagestan and close to the Magomedov family, in January 2013.<sup>162</sup>

The situation with other leaders was developing more dramatically. Detained in 2013, the mayor of Makhachkala and chief political heavyweight Said Amirov, received a life sentence in 2015. These events did not cause any significant resistance from his supporters, as they decided to adapt to the new reality.

During the term of Abdulatipov, one of the strongest representatives of the Northern Alliance, the former head of the Pension Fund Sagid Murtazaliev, who left the country after the arrest of the former head of Kizliar district and his colleague Andrei Vinogradov, was put on the international wanted list. They were charged with financing terrorism and organizing several murders.<sup>163</sup> The supporters of Murtazaliev and Vinogradov organized the gathering in support of them in Kizliar, at which, according to "Caucasian Knot", about 2 thousand people were presented, but that was all.

Another leader of the Avars, Gaji Makhachev, died in a car accident on Kutuzovskii Prospekt in Moscow in December 2013.<sup>164</sup>

The third heavyweight of the Avars, the mayor of Khasaviurt Umakhanov Saigidpasha, left his office and formally promoted — became the Minister of Transport, Energy and Communications of Dagestan. He still has a great influence in his district, as the head of the city of Khasaviurt has become the person who is close to Umakhanov.

In 2015, the head of Buinak district Daniyal Shikhsaidov, the son of the Chairman of the People's Assembly of Dagestan, a Kumyk Hizri Shikhsaidov, was arrested. He was suspected of "*organizing and financing illegal armed groups, as well as repeated financing of terrorism*". The father himself has managed to remain in power, but became more compliant.

Another grand of the Dagestan politician, Imam Yaraliiev (Lezgin), a former Prosecutor

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<sup>160</sup> <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3119541>

<sup>161</sup> <https://iz.ru/news/551463>

<sup>162</sup> <http://expert.ru/2013/06/6/dagestan-bez-finansovogo-arhitektora/>, *The story with Express CB also casted a pall over the name of the Deputy Chairman of the Federation Council of the FS of the Russian Federation Ilias Umakhanov, who together with a group of relatives was the owner of this Bank. Being close to the Magomedov family and being a relative of Mukhu Aliiev, he was considered as the candidates for the post of head of the Republic.*

<sup>163</sup> [http://www.kavkazoved.info/news/2015/08/04/centr-menjaet-pravila-igry-na-severnom-kavkaze.html?utm\\_source=politobzor.net](http://www.kavkazoved.info/news/2015/08/04/centr-menjaet-pravila-igry-na-severnom-kavkaze.html?utm_source=politobzor.net)

<sup>164</sup> [https://www.gazeta.ru/auto/2013/12/20\\_a\\_5811861.shtml](https://www.gazeta.ru/auto/2013/12/20_a_5811861.shtml)

of Dagestan and then the mayor of Derbent, who had a great influence in southern Dagestan, resigned on August 11, 2015. Five days prior to resignation the Central Investigation Department of the Investigative Committee of Russia for the North Caucasian Federal District had initiated against Yaraliev criminal case into exceeding of official credentials. In April 2017, the case was referred to the court, but at the request of the lawyer it was sent for revision to the Prosecutor's Office; the court decision on it was not reported.<sup>165</sup>

By 2015, it had become obvious that Abdulatipov could not cope with the functions of the head of the Republic, his ratings collapsed, corruption continued to flourish, only now the financial flows were transferred to new people from the inner circle of the head, who by that time had already managed to put together and place all the key positions of representatives of his "Mekegin'sky clan."<sup>166</sup>

The situation in the republic under the rule of Abdulatipov was aggravated by the growing economic crisis in the country, the elimination of the semi-criminal financial cluster in the republic<sup>167</sup> and the stagnation of the construction sector, the lack of hope among young people for social mobility and ban on any legal political projects for religious Islamic activists and the continuing abuses by law enforcement agencies.

This resulted in the mass departure of Dagestan youth to Syria, a high level of labor migration from the republic and the outflow of entrepreneurs and middle class representatives as the most important indicator of the socio-economic disadvantage of the region. In 2017, Dagestan became the largest recipient of subsidies from the federal budget for the third year in a row. The unemployment rate in the republic was about twice as high as the national average. More than 72 % of families in the region (and according to some estimates, up to 90 %) spent more than 50% of their income on food every month. At the same time, the level of consumption of basic food products was at the level of 3-12 % of the existing medical standards in Russia. Business in Dagestan was forced to pay a "tax on corruption", amounting to 30 - 50 % of the cost of production.<sup>168</sup>

Scandals in the elections of 2016, discussed both in the Central Executive Committee and in the federal media, a sharp surge of public protests (land, protests of developers and against developers, etc.), and the tension of national relations showed that Abdulatipov not only disappointed Dagestanis and managed to form a coalition against himself within the Republic, but also let himself to be discredited by the Moscow Dagestanis and forced migrants, who created a great negative rating of the then President in public opinion. Abdulatipov regularly made abusive remarks, and even direct insults, including remarks about the ministers, that also contributed to an unprecedented decrease in his support, even among the elites.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> <https://regnum.ru/news/2304333.html>

<sup>166</sup> *The officials, who had agreed to the terms of the monopoly of the Abdulatipov's clan, managed to get the "plum jobs". One of them was the former Minister of Finance of the RD under the rule of Magomedov and Mukhu Aliiev, the Chairman of the Government of RD Abdusamad Hamidov, who recruited representatives of the "Mekegin" clan.*

<sup>167</sup> *Dagestan was a leader in the number of banks per capita in the country, the main business of these banks was the conversion of budget and corporate finance into cash.*

<sup>168</sup> <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2018/02/06/kak-dagestan-stal-vnutrennim-zarubezhem-blagopoluchie-elit-na-dengi-moskvy.html> However, the average life expectancy in Dagestan exceeded the Russian average and in 2017 reached, according to the Federal State Statistics Service, 78 years. <https://riaderbent.ru/dagestan-ostaetsya-v-chisle-liderov-v-rossii-po-prodolzhitelnosti-zhizni.html> The observers attribute this to the fact that about 55 % of the population live in rural areas, eat food from own farms and seldom drink alcohol.

<sup>169</sup> <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/imperskaya-metla-kak-zachischali-daghestan/29036517.html>

The corruption schemes of the leadership of Ramazan Abdulatipov were revealed after the arrest of the head of the Directorate of the single customer-developer Shamil Kadiiev in August 2015. The fact that Abdulatipov had no control over his inner circle, was also illustrated by the kidnapping of the Dagestan's minister of construction Ibrahim Kazibekov, from whom a large amount of money was extorted. The persons close to Ramazan Abdulatipov were implicated in this kidnapping.<sup>170</sup> It had become clear that it was necessary to leave immediately, and on October 3, 2017 he resigned.

During the prolonged pause between the signing of a statement of resignation by Ramazan Abdulatipov and the decision on the new head of the region, experts named different candidates. They talked about a Kumyk Shamseddin Dagiroy, a Lezgin Sergei Melikov, a Lak Abdurashid Magomedov, a Russian Aleksandr Khloponin and an Agul Zulkaid Kaidov.<sup>171</sup> However, a different decision was made.

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<sup>170</sup> <http://2017.vybor-naroda.org/stovyborah/104086-putin-slomal-smenu-avarcev-i-dargincev-vo-glave-dagestana-polnaya-diskreditaciya-dagestanskoy-elity-po-itogam-provalnogo-pravleniya-abdulatipova-moskva-reshilas-na-smelyy-eksperiment.html>

<sup>171</sup> <http://2017.vybor-naroda.org/stovyborah/104086-putin-slomal-smenu-avarcev-i-dargincev-vo-glave-dagestana-polnaya-diskreditaciya-dagestanskoy-elity-po-itogam-provalnogo-pravleniya-abdulatipova-moskva-reshilas-na-smelyy-eksperiment.html>

## II. «EXTERNAL GOVERNANCE»

Contrary to the traditions, but in the spirit of the emerging practice of unification of regional bureaucracies, Vladimir Vasiliev, a native of another region, with no fraternal or kinship ties with the political, religious and ethnic groups of Dagestan was appointed as the Acting Head of Dagestan. For the first time in the history of post-Soviet Russia, an Orthodox Christian with a Russian surname and the absence of any previous experience in the region had become the Head of a national Muslim republic.

The reason for such change was the catastrophic state of governance in the region, loss of trust in local staff and the Kremlin's unwillingness to allow Dagestan society to launch self-purification mechanisms (such as fair, competitive elections).

*"The situation has reached an extreme, but while the situation permits, the federal government does not pay attention till the last moment, but here it was necessary to react,"* the resident of Makhachkala said.<sup>172</sup>

It would be logical to ask why this purification was initiated so late, because for almost ten years journalists and public figures, and many officials had talked about the catastrophic quality of governance in the republic. **Probably, the Kremlin decided to try a model of direct external governance, because the failure of the old concept based on local clans, which the authorities had followed for almost two decades, became too obvious.** In addition, the suppression of the armed insurgency has made it possible to focus to other tasks. The new approach is aimed at increasing tax collection, reducing losses from corruption, recovering debts, improving financial discipline and strengthening the vertical of power. In a nutshell, it means to bring Dagestan closer to the rest of Russia. No wonder that in his solemn presentation of the People's Assembly of the Republic of Dagestan Vasiliev said: *"I have come to you not alone, the whole of Russia has come with me"*.<sup>173</sup>

Immediately after the appointment of Vasiliev, a new stage of an unprecedented anti-corruption campaign was launched. In mid-January, a landing force of seconded law enforcement officers under the leadership of deputy prosecutor general Ivan Sydoruk arrived from Moscow in Dagestan: 38 prosecutors, 40 consultants and experts in various fields of economics and law. In January, 19 ministries and departments, as well as the administration of five municipalities were covered by the inspection of the Prosecutor General's Office.

The government of Dagestan was dismissed in the evening of February 5. This was preceded by the arrest of the Acting Prime Minister of Dagestan Abdusamad Gamidov, his Deputy Shamil Isaev and Rudin Yusufov, the former Minister of Education and Science of the Republic Shahabas Shakhov, the mayor of Makhachkala Musaiev and a chief architect of the city Magomedrasul Gitinov.<sup>174</sup>

On February 8, the Chairman of the Investigative Committee of Russia Aleksandr Bastrykin arrived in Makhachkala, on February 10 — the Prosecutor General of Russia Yurii Chaika. Violations of the law were so obvious that the Commission in a short time revealed

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<sup>172</sup>Interview with a resident of Makhachkala. May 2019.

<sup>173</sup> [http://midag.ru/news/events\\_and\\_facts/vladimir\\_vasilev\\_ya\\_prishel\\_ne\\_odin\\_k\\_vam\\_prishla\\_rossiya\\_-22284/](http://midag.ru/news/events_and_facts/vladimir_vasilev_ya_prishel_ne_odin_k_vam_prishla_rossiya_-22284/)

<sup>174</sup> <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2018/02/05/75394-arhitektor-mahachkaly-poshel-pod-snos>

2431 criminal episodes, of which more than 350 were related to the violation of anti-corruption legislation. 71 criminal cases and 433 cases of administrative offences were initiated.<sup>175</sup>

**Vasiliev has formulated a new approach to the regional governance: rejection of balance of ethnic representation in power.** “*We will recruit personnel not according to the national quota, but according to talent and abilities,*” he said during his presentation in the People’s Assembly of the Republic<sup>176</sup>. Putin’s decision to abandon the informal ethnic quotas was announced on Russia 24 TV channel in the report on the appointment of Vasiliev.<sup>177</sup> Thus, Dagestan had lost its last federal specificity.

An official from Tatarstan, former Minister of Economy of the Republic of Dagestan Artem Zdunov was appointed to the post of Prime Minister. Zdunov arrived with his team of advisers from Tatarstan. The Administration was headed by Vladimir Ivanov. One of the deputy chairmen of government was Vladimir Lemeshko, a colonel of the Federal security service. A 36-year-old native of Sevastopol, Muscovite Ekaterina Tolstikova was appointed as the minister of land and property relations and deputy prime minister; the new prosecutor of Dagestan was Denis Popov, who had moved from Khakassia; the chair of the Supreme Court was Sergei Suvorov, who worked as the chair of the Tver Military Garrison Court between 2006 to 2018; the head of the federal tax service was Gazinur Apsaliyev, who had previously headed the inter-district inspection of the Federal tax service in Tatarstan, etc. In fact, the external governance has been introduced in the region.

It cannot be said that the Dagestani elites completely accepted the loss of power in the republic, but they could not organize effective resistance. Initially, only a few persons took the liberty of voicing criticism.

One of these few people was the owner of the popular football club “Anji” in Dagestan Osman Kadiev, criticizing the deputies of the People’s Assembly, who had agreed with the appointment of Zdunov as the Prime Minister:

*“Who is this? What made this official from Tatarstan famous in to our beloved motherland, what are his heroic deeds and great achievements for the benefit of Dagestan that no one has noticed?!. Don’t we have a single distinguished person from three million that we have to be imposed the head? This, I believe, the humiliation and insult of Dagestan!”*<sup>178</sup>

The crackdown under the rule of Vasiliev affected not only the highest echelons of the republican power, but also the lower layers of the patron-client system. There were hundreds of criminal cases, both in the capital and in remote areas, dozens of revealed facts of theft, fraud, abuse of authority, embezzlement; and the ministers and ordinary officials, employees of medical and social expertise, lawyers turned to be on the wrong side of the bar.<sup>179</sup> The amount of the damage incurred ranged from stratospheric to quite modest. The absence of a predictable pattern in the anti-corruption campaign keeps everyone under stress. So far the crackdowns have not affected security forces, the federal center does not dare to do this in the region with a high risk of resumption of armed activity.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/316399/>

<sup>176</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/310633/>

<sup>177</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=li1Uj-WexiA>

<sup>178</sup> <http://dagestananticorruption.ru/2018/05/10/%D0%BE%D1%82-%D1%83%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B7-%D0%BA-%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%81%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%BC/>

<sup>179</sup> [https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/category/Staff\\_Clean-up\\_Dagestan](https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/category/Staff_Clean-up_Dagestan)

<sup>180</sup> [https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/category/Staff\\_Clean-up\\_Dagestan](https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/category/Staff_Clean-up_Dagestan)

Apparently, the total crackdown on political elites in Dagestan conceived by the Kremlin is not aimed at the deep modernization of the Dagestan's economy and political system, its goal is to optimize the cost of maintaining the republic. These are budget expenditures and debts to state corporations. The budget expenditure in Dagestan is constantly growing, and the desire of the Moscow authorities, if not to reduce these costs, then at least to control financial flows, looks natural. This can explain all the "optimization" initiatives of Vladimir Vasiliev and the distribution of key positions related to the financial flows among representatives from other regions not associated with the Dagestan patronage networks.<sup>181</sup>

Dagestan has a problem of debts. Only Gazprom has estimated the debt of Dagestan at more than 9 billion rubles as at December 1, 2018.<sup>182</sup> The republic also has large debts for electricity. It is not surprising that one of the main goals of the crackdown on regional elites is to get the opportunity to address or at least improve the debt situation.

The legalization of the shadow economy has become another important task.

According to an expert, *"Dagestan was an all-Russian black hole: off-the-books cash, tax evasion. There were powerful people with great financial opportunities comparable to the rich Muscovites."*

Vasiliev has declared a war on the rapublican markets, the owners of which do not pay taxes. The law enforcement agencies have been tasked to liquidate illegally established commercial facilities in 48 markets of the republic. Illegal or half-shadow markets are demolished, traders are offered to move to new premises, but this significantly increases their costs. They plan to demolish part of the markets and give the land for the construction of hypermarkets of large international networks. These steps cause resistance on the part of market traders as this directly affects their income.<sup>183</sup>

The strengthening of financial and administrative discipline is another critical task for external governance.

*"Vasiliev immediately realized that there is a permanent mess here: gasoline stations, public transportation, retail trade. It is easier for them to bring large chains to be able manage all this. We have a lot of sectors with complete archaism, he hopes for some optimization at the expense of large companies"*, an expert said.<sup>184</sup>

In this case, many Dagestanis say that the "legalizing of the economy" and increasing the collection of taxes are important tasks, but they fear that these measures will lead to a sharp decline in the standard of living in the republic. After all, corruption and tax evasion compensated for dysfunctional institutions. Shadow business also partially compensates for the ugly quality of public administration: people do not pay taxes, but they take care of villages, including construction of roads, purchase of fire engines, gasification; they themselves support disabled people and orphans.

*"If your wife comes to a maternity hospital, she is immediately asked: "Who are you coming from? Who have you made your arrangement with? With nobody? Well, here's an intern, give birth with her assistance." If you collect taxes, let them your wife be able to give birth free of charge, but in*

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<sup>181</sup> *The Government of the Republic was headed by the former Minister of Economy of the Republic of Tatarstan Artem Zdunov, the Federal Compulsory Medical Insurance Fund - the former Head of Territorial Compulsory Medical Insurance Fund in Crimea Andrei Karpeev. <https://regnum.ru/news/2549037.html>*

<sup>182</sup> <https://otr-online.ru/news/gazprom-ocenil-dolg-za-gaz-v-138-milliardov-rublej-118948.html>

<sup>183</sup> <https://kavkaz.versia.ru/v-xasavyurte-torgovcy-veshhevogo-rynka-vyshli-na-akciyu-protesta>

<sup>184</sup> *Interview with experts. Makhachkala. May, 2019.*

*a dignified manner, or the child will be enrolled in a kindergarten without a bribe. But if taxes and levies are introduced by state institutions, and even the wholesale market, where you have a point, is closed and rent is tripled, then it becomes difficult to survive.*"<sup>185</sup>

The Dagestani journalist and lawyer Rasul Kadiev suggested that the state officials look at notebooks with lists of debtors, which are maintained in almost every rural grocery store, — the list of families that take food for credit. Many Dagestanis, according to him, barely make ends meet.<sup>186</sup>

According to former state officials, kickbacks to the federal center have amounted to 20 % of the total amount of corruption funds. According to the experts,

*"The guys who have arrived in Dagestan do not understand one thing: Dagestan has been shaped for corruption. It has been profitable for everyone, so they turned a blind eye on this. And people have been given the opportunity to survive. Take a young family, they have no jobs. The parents apply for a child's disability benefits, and then get 20 thousand, which can provide for the family. The woman gets the maternity allowance<sup>187</sup>: buys the cheapest land and makes carcassing. Her husband begins to work as a taxi driver. He has managed to save a little bit of money, then puts it in construction of their house, then he creates the finishing team, works, you will see, he has got on feet".*

It is obvious that along with the whitewashing of the economy, the most important task of restoring Dagestan is a sharp improvement in the quality of the institutions of state power. The state institutions today are still largely in a state of decay. However, there are encouraging signals that entrepreneurs are increasing financial discipline, business is more serious about paperwork (before it has been unnecessary, it was easier to bribe).

Some of our respondents from the urban intelligentsia have noted positive changes in the work of institutions:

*"Some public services have become available to people, they are now afraid to openly demand bribes. It is risky, when a hand has reached out to such people, as [a brother of the former Head of the Republic. — the author's note] Rajab Abdulatipov. A city has become cleaner, we are now part of all-Russian problems, the federal agenda has become relevant. The fault lines are becoming the same with the rest of the country."*

The majority of other respondents were less optimistic. A resident of Khasaviurt told:

*"I do not feel any improvement in medicine. A child should be sent to a kindergarten — it used to be twenty or thirty thousand, and now there are fifty thousand /bribe — author's note/, the amount has increased. Taxes are collected, you pay everywhere, and what is done with this money? What does the government do? What things useful or beneficial for the people are done? They allocate funds from the budget of the republic to put up a tent on the central square and hold a forum. After holding a forum and signing contracts, they allocate funds for different projects, but an ordinary man can't benefit from these funds, and they cannot offer anything to this ordinary man in the street..."*

New PR projects, such as the Ferris Wheel attraction in Makhachkala and the glass bridge over the Sulak Canal, have caused heated debates on social media. Some believe that the development of the entertainment industry is important, others — that it is unnecessary until

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<sup>185</sup> Interviews with residents of Khasaviurt, Makhachkala. May, 2019.

<sup>186</sup> <http://kavpolit.com/blogs/kadievrasul/37374/>

<sup>187</sup> One-time subsidy for a second child.

the most pressing problems of the population are addressed.

The native of Makhachkala is telling:

*“I go with children to the clinic and see: moms and dads are sitting for hours in queues, as they did before. There are no jobs. And why on earth do we need a glass bridge? We can live without the glass bridge! A Ferris Wheel in the park.. We have so many pressing problems unsolved! They are lacking in feedback. We need to communicate with people and monitor their feelings.”*<sup>188</sup>

It is important that these projects are associated with the interests of Tatarstan business elites who visit Dagestan together with Zdunov.

*“There is information that the Tatars will build a “Ferris Wheel”, that they will build a large market in Khasaviurt. They will build a glass bridge as well. Land plots will be given to them as investors without an auction,”* the Dagestan information blogger said.<sup>189</sup>

Zdunov not only came to Dagestan with a group of advisers from Tatarstan and provided some officials from this republic with government positions.<sup>190</sup> In October 2018, all government and municipal purchases were transferred to Tatarstan, and the Republic of Tatarstan Government Order Agency JSC became a single aggregator of trade.<sup>191</sup> The Agency was created by the Government of Tatarstan. According to Rasul Kadiev, in order to participate in the auction, it is necessary to pay an amount of earnest money, which amounts to about 20 %, respectively, in order to participate in the auction, the Dagestan companies will have to take out of the regional economy and send 6-19 billion rubles a year to Kazan. Dagestan was designing its own trading platform, but visiting managers did not develop it, but simply transferred flows to Tatarstan.<sup>192</sup>

The contract for the development of design and estimate documentation for the overhaul of the central square of Makhachkala and adjacent territories has been concluded with SDE-Inter LLC, the owner of which is a 90% native of Tatarstan Rinat Mukhamadeev.<sup>193</sup> According to the information provided, public hearings on the project of reconstruction of the central square named after V. Lenin, for which the Moscow government allocated the inter-budget transfer of 350 million rubles, have been held in violation of the procedure and have failed to provide the residents of the city with the opportunity to participate. The competition has been neither publicly announced nor transparently held<sup>194</sup>.

Artyom Zdunov has also supported the construction of a world-class tourist complex with extreme entertainment in the area of the Sulak Canyon, the main element of which will be the above mentioned glass bridge overhanging the canyon, made in the form of a parabola. The Perm businessman of Tatar origin Rashid Habibullin will make investments in this project. According to the republican newspaper “Novoe Delo”, the TV news broadcasted on the state

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<sup>188</sup> *Interview with a resident of Makhachkala. Makhachkala. May, 2019.*

<sup>189</sup> *Interview with a blogger. June, 2019.*

<sup>190</sup> *For example, Igor Gubaidullin, a former employee of the Ministry of Economy of the RT was appointed as an assistant of Artem Zdunov. Ramil Kadyrov, an individual entrepreneur from Kazan, was appointed as an assistant of the Prime Minister of Dagestan. Gazinur Apsaliyev, the former Head of the Inter-District Inspectorate of the Federal Tax Service No. 10 in the Republic of Tatarstan, was appointed as the Head of the Federal Tax Service of Russia for Dagestan.*

<sup>191</sup> [http://dagestan.roskazna.ru/upload/iblock/10a/prikaz-komiteta-pogoszakupkam-3437\\_128\\_27\\_11\\_2018\\_ver1\\_.pdf](http://dagestan.roskazna.ru/upload/iblock/10a/prikaz-komiteta-pogoszakupkam-3437_128_27_11_2018_ver1_.pdf)

<sup>192</sup> <http://kavpolit.com/blogs/kadievrasul/37715/>

<sup>193</sup> <https://ndelo.ru/makhachkala/ploshad-mahachkalinskaya-dengi-moskovskie-shema-tatarstankaya>

<sup>194</sup> <https://ndelo.ru/makhachkala/ploshad-mahachkalinskaya-dengi-moskovskie-shema-tatarstankaya>

channel has stated that 1 billion rubles from the republican budget will be allocated to the construction of the complex<sup>195</sup>.

Experts note that decisions on these projects have also been taken in a non-transparent manner, no proper discussion and explanatory work with the residents of the republic were carried out, as a result many in Dagestan have the impression that Artyom Zdunov channels financial flows to himself and lobbies the interests of business of Tatarstan origin. It is difficult to confirm or deny this fact. However, it is clear that the government has been unable to effectively ensure the information support for their decisions, designed to dispel people's doubts. It is obvious that the leadership of the Republic does not give the information work a high profile: since March 2018, there has been no head of the press service of the Executive Office and the Government of the RD, and other officials communicate rarely or in the format of mandatory reports.

*“At first the Dagestanis perceived them as new people sent to bring order here, and now it is clear that they are the same ... just more subtly pursue their interests,” a resident of Khasavyurt said.*<sup>196</sup>

The attitude to the current government for a year and a half has changed significantly for the worse. “External governance” is becoming annoying, especially against the backdrop of unresolved economic, land and territorial issues. According to a closed sociological survey conducted for the Executive Office of the President of the Russian Federation, the Head of Dagestan Vladimir Vasiliev has entered the top ten outsiders, whose rating from October 2018 to March 2019 decreased the most significantly.<sup>197</sup>

The situation with the “Varangians” was particularly evident in the territorial dispute with Chechnya, where the assertive, aggressive and well-grounded position of the Chechen leadership contrasted with the behavior of Dagestani officials, who, in the words of Dagestan bloggers, looked like “outside observers”.<sup>198</sup>

The conflict erupted in the evening of June 10, 2019, when a group of the Dagestan young men dismantled the sign between Kizliar and Shelkovskoi district of the Chechen Republic with the inscription “Chechen Republic. Shelkovskoi District” newly installed by the Chechen authorities. The young people felt that the neighbor illegally increased its area. In the morning, the speaker of parliament of Chechnya Magomed Daudov accompanied by a special motorcade of the camouflaged off-road vehicles and trucks carrying a crowd of the armed people entered Dagestan. Daudov publicly scolded the head of Kizlyar district Aleksandr Pogorelov, and then entered into a quarrel with an elderly local resident. Soon after the departure of Daudov, the critics from the Dagestan side received threats from Kadyrov “*to break their fingers and pull out their tongues*”, and Daudov threatened the Dagestan KAMAZ driver, who knocked down the second road sign: “You will go home in your mixer, spinning in a drum”.<sup>199</sup>

The behavior of Chechen officials caused an outrage among the Dagestanis and a storm of criticism in social media. Special emphasis is placed on the fact that the Dagestan officials have kept silent, without reacting to rudeness and provocations of the Chechen officials, and have

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<sup>195</sup> <https://ndelo.ru/obshchestvo/nado-entot-most-rukami-poshupat>

<sup>196</sup> Interview with a resident of Khasaviurt. Khasaviurt. May 2019..

<sup>197</sup> <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/13/05/2019/5cd833c69a79473d96e31d96>

<sup>198</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMIZyXhWY9w>

<sup>199</sup> <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/kadyrovtsy-v-kizlyarskoj-lavke/30003811.html>

allowed unauthorized entry of the Chechen security forces to Dagestan; they say that there is no one to represent and protect Dagestan as the Varangians' are dying to solve the problems of Dagestan.

A wide resonance was caused by the statement of Vasiliev about one of the most sensational cases of recent years — the shooting by security forces of the two brothers Gasanguseinov, young shepherds in a mountain village of the Goor-Hindah, the youngest of whom was not yet eighteen. Having shoot the shepherds dead, the security forces tried to present them as terrorists, putting camouflage on the dead bodies. *“As I understand it, there was a tragic mistake. ... Imagine: a counter-terrorism operation, night, people coming down from the mountains. And someone couldn't stand the nerves, and he started shooting. It is a tragic accident, I'm sure,”* - said Vladimir Vasiliev in an interview with the newspaper “Novoe Delo”, published on its website on January 26, 2019. He also noted that to qualify this murder as deliberate is the same injustice as what had happened to the shepherds. *“... Yes, there was a tragic accident, children died. But who are these boys from the special task forces? They are also children, who are in a very difficult situation. I'm sure they genuinely didn't realize that those people were shepherds. And maybe not shepherds?..”*<sup>200</sup>

The social media outraged that Vasiliev tried to justify the security forces shooting down the boys, and then trying to hide the crime, presenting them as militants that he had not found time to meet with their father, who sought a meeting with him for a year and picketed the government building, as well as he is doubtful about the fact that the civilians were really peaceful. In addition, according to the father of the victims, the case contains circumstances clearly indicating that the murder has been planned.<sup>201</sup> Against the background of the continuing violations of human rights and the understanding of the fact that no one intepurge security ervices from corruption and crime, such statements harm the image of Vasiliev, representing him as a security officer who protects not ordinary people and grief-stricken parents, but primarily the corporate interests.

Since Dagestan's “Varangian index” is probably the highest in the country, conflicts between officials and subordinates are often perceived through the ethnic prism. Part of the external appointees has entered into a clinch with the local counterparts, sparking public protests. Thus, the staff of Mezhrefiongaz held several protests against the general director of Gazprom in Dagestan, Vladimir Anastasov, appointed in October 2017. Anastasov was announced as the anti-crisis manager to combat corruption, but Anastasov's subordinates complained that he fired experienced employees, and instead took “his own people”. On December 15, 2018, Vladimir Anastasov was detained in St. Petersburg. He was charged under Article 159 of Part 4 of the Criminal Code with the theft of natural gas on a large scale.<sup>202</sup>

A number of conflicts with subordinates and a wave of complaints were associated with the Head of the Ministry of Property Relations Ekaterina Tolstikova.<sup>203</sup> In particular, the media published an open letter of the staff of the Ministry of property relations to the attention of the Acting head of Dagestan Vladimir Vasiliev, in which the Ministry staff said about the “*extremely negative and biased attitude*” of the head of Ekaterina Tolstikova. The letter was signed by 40

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<sup>200</sup> <https://ndelo.ru/interv-iu/kogda-vasilev-poedet-v-botlih>

<sup>201</sup> <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/tragicheskiy-tsinizm/29739904.html>

<sup>202</sup> <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3833574>

<sup>203</sup> <https://ndelo.ru/politika/ocherednoj-konflikt-tolstikovoj>

people, including two Deputy Ministers. An open letter against Tolstikova was also initiated by the staff of the Dagestan Institute of Development. Tolstikova repudiated all charges.<sup>204</sup>

In this context, in Dagestan, people openly express their dissatisfaction: they say that the people are not allowed to choose talented and committed from their own environment, moreover, officials are installed who are no better than the corrupt local elite, and show arrogant attitude to the Dagestanis.

Things have come to such a pitch that the deputy director of the Republican State Broadcasting Company “Dagestan” Zaurbek Gaziyev and a number of journalists in the project “Dinner of Scoundrels” of the newspaper “Free Republic” talk seriously about individual external officials: “...*these people don’t love us, they hate us... In what way are they better than those they kicked out? They /should let us/ replace those who want to work and love Dagestan*”,<sup>205</sup> — noting that the people trust Vasiliev and Ivanov.

It should be noted that the different attitude to Vladimir Vasiliev and Artem Zdunov was evident in all our interviews about the system of governance of the republic. If the first is perceived as an official who is experienced, friendly, equidistant from clan interests representing the federal government, the second — as insufficiently qualified for his post, speak arrogant with the locals and directing to Dagestan business interests of his *zemlyaks*.

Here are a few common opinions of experts:

*“People have expected that at least the Prime Minister will be Dagestan. Zdunov is too young to govern Dagestan, he does not give the impression of a strong personality, and has no deep knowledge. He says the right things of a general nature, and his understanding of issues is superficial. By now, he should have got an insight into socio-economic life, but somehow his knowledge is not particularly manifested in practice.*

*“Vasiliev is a good old man, but Artem Zdunov, an effective manager, is responsible for the economy. But the effective manager Zdunov has shown no results. Vasiliev looks beneficial compared to Abdulatipov: he does not speak nonsense. People expect Zdunov to take actions and he does nothing.”*<sup>206</sup>

**At the same time, all the respondents interviewed answer that no one now dares to openly and brazenly extort bribes in Dagestan.** However, the fact that external governance has not destroyed the clans is also clear. **Clans have weakened, regrouped, but retain networks and economic resources. Some leaders who are on the run retain the possibility of indirect political influence on what is happening in the Republic,** including its power structures.<sup>207</sup>

It is obvious that it won’t be possible to get rid from embezzlement too quickly.

*“A Russian minister has been appointed, and it is impossible to agree with him. Now his deputy takes bribes less frequently, but does not share. An honest senior official is a benefit to the next level of officials, if they are not shy. Those who are afraid behave more cautiously. This year Dagestan has underspent 10 billion from the budget, because officials are scared, afraid of taking the initiative, because there is additional detriment, but no interest. Therefore, it is better for them to do nothing,”*

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<sup>204</sup> <https://ndelo.ru/novosti/ekaterina-tolstikova-otvetila-na-pretenzii-rabotnikov-respublikanskogo-minimushestva>, <https://kopomko.com/otkryitoe-pismo-kollektiva-dagestanskogo-instituta-razvitiya-obrazovaniya-vladimiru-vasilevu/>

<sup>205</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-khJTc6ndU>

<sup>206</sup> Expert interviews. Makhachkala. June, 2019

<sup>207</sup> Interview with a lawyer working on criminal cases, defending including former high-ranking officials. Makhachkala. May 2019.

a Makhachkala-based activist claims.<sup>208</sup>

According to experts, the funds were spent also due to the lack of effective organization of tenders and competitions. Dagestan had never had such large unspent amounts of the federal budget by the end of the year.<sup>209</sup>

**Residents of Dagestan feel a great distance between themselves and the authorities, and emphasize the fact that the external officials do not know the specifics of the republic.** In the words of a political scientist Hanzhan Kurbanov, the “Varangian index” is not reducing, its going up. “*Vasilevtsy have their team of non-native counselors who don’t share the comprehensive understanding of the republican challenges*”.<sup>210</sup> Many respondents have also noted that they do not understand the development strategy and the direction, in which Dagestan is moving.

A senior researcher of the Problems of Market Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences Mikhail Chernyshov, a former economist in the government of Dagestan, sees the rootcauses of the problems and the current cadre policy in the absence of a clear development strategy:

*“First, it is necessary to determine where exactly Dagestan is moving, to articulate the main tasks and then to recruit a team for performing these tasks... If all the tasks of the RD government are to jail the maximum number of officials and get as many benefits as possible from the owners of banquet halls, gas stations, brick and tile factories... they need one category of specialists. If serious work on infrastructural projects and real support of entrepreneurs are planned, then it is necessary to attract professionals of another direction and qualification”.*<sup>211</sup>

**So far, the new elites have not been able to give Dagestan a new vision of the development of the republic, to offer, as in Tatarstan, an ideological and symbolic project of the future.** “*There are still two central ideas in Dagestan: return to the legal framework and bringing order, law-enforcement and integration into the average Russian /management/ model. It is still impossible to offer the society other ideas,*” —a resident of Makhachkala told us.

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<sup>208</sup> Interview with an activist, Makhachkala. May 2019.

<sup>209</sup> <https://chernovik.net/content/lenta-novostey/v-2018-godu-dagestan-ne-osvoil-rekordnye-10-mlrd-rublej-vydelennyh-federalnym>

<sup>210</sup> <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/29942163.html>

<sup>211</sup> <https://ndelo.ru/politika/ot-perestanolki-slaemyh>

### III. PRESERVATION OF ETHNO-CULTURAL IDENTITY

Multilingualism, multiculturalism, deep traditions of people's diplomacy, skills of harmonious living of different peoples developed for centuries make Dagestan a unique region not only in Russia but globally.

At the same time, polyethnicity requires compliance with a complex system of balances of social and political forces. The tragic history of colonialism, the complex process of integration into the Russian state, mass Stalinist repressions, forced resettlement, voluntary migration from the mountains to the plain, legal pluralism, high birth rates and rapid urbanization create a tangle of issues that acquire ethnic or inter-ethnic overtones in Dagestan. In the public space, these problems have for many years been raised by national movements and national-oriented activists, who at different times had different degrees of influence on the minds of their fellow countrymen.

#### 1. National movements and conflicts

The powerful national movements — the movement of the Avar People's Front named after Imam Shamil, the Kumyk "Tengelik", the Nogai "Birlik", the Lezgin "Sadval", the Lak "Kazi-Kumukh", the Darghin movement "Tsadesh", the Nizhneters Cossack army and others moved to the front of the political scene in the early 90-ies. Land issues, the problems of ethnic territories, the rehabilitation of repressed Chechens and the contradictions accumulated for many years and even decades were almost immediately exacerbated. The land issue in Dagestan has always existed. The problems have been local, but have had serious resonance, and mobilization have occurred around them.

Initially, the movements were led by the national intelligentsia, but then they were joined by people using the national theme for their political purposes.

An active participant of the Kumyk movement in the 90s recalled:

*"At first, it was a democratic movement. Initially, the movement was headed by cultural figures and historians. But all knew that they were supported by the Kumyks — "red directors", the nomenclature. It turned out that they wanted to get government positions. Besides them, semi-criminal power entrepreneurs-barons, who used every opportunity, any passing by transport to get to the Square [the Government House], were insistently promoted into the movement. As a result, for many reasons, the movement has fallen into primitivism. Quite a serious part of the activists, who were the backbone of the movement, narrowed the Kumyk problem to the issue of autonomy, the requirements to create their own republic. "Tengelik" was pushed into the nationalist field, labeled as intra-Dagistani separatism. Internal conflicts, which had been primitively planned, split and discredited movement."*<sup>212</sup>

The national leaders were either co-opted into power, or radicalized and killed in the subsequent conflicts, or retired.

By the end of the 90's, the national movements had noticeably declined, and young people

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<sup>212</sup>Interview with one of the leaders of the Kumyk movement in 1990. Makhachkala. May 2019.

had become more interested in religion and taken more radical positions than their parents. Some of them believed that their fathers had not achieved anything using legal methods, so they took up arms and joined the Caucasus Emirate.

Since then, the national activity has centered round land conflicts, disputes and cultural and ethnographic and language activism. Although some people still have ambitious agenda and dreams to recreate their autonomy.

*“We have a sacred dream to have our own autonomous republic within Russia. Before the deportation of the Chechens in 1944, the Nogais had had one area of settlement, the Nogai steppe. And since 1957, when the Chechens came back, the Nogais were divided among three regions: the Nogai district of Dagestan, Neftekumsk district of the Stavropol territory and the Shelkovskoi district of Chechnya. This issue was raised in the 90s, but we could not push it through. We understand that now it is almost impossible to create such autonomy, but we do not abandon this dream”, — said the press secretary of the Union of Nogai youth in Surgut Radmir Nuraliev*”.<sup>213</sup>

In the last few years, national movements have largely changed their format. The national organizations that emerged in the 90s, went off the scene. In most cases, they still exist on paper, the leaders of the older generation take part in important events, but the main activity is not concentrated there. The movements are a set of initiatives, mostly youth, organized through the Internet and messengers. The mobilization capacity of such networks is quite serious.

If in earlier times the main activity was the protest activities in the historical homeland, now a significant role is played by youth organizations in the cities of Russia and even abroad, where there are large ethnic diasporas. Diasporas are characterized by romanticization of their people and fear of loss of national identity and language. Internet and messengers have enabled to unite divided peoples and unite activists in the diaspora and in their historical homeland in the same groups. If in earlier times organization of an event or reaction to important events required ringing up all the acquaintances, now it is enough to send one message and instantly receive a response.

An activist of the Nogai movement in Makhachkala told us:

*“The younger generation has grown up. It looks at many things differently. Before Nogais closed themselves and now as if we have to come out of the reservation. Odnoklassniki, WhatsApp, other social media, Instagram, videos, podcasts, pictures, photos — a lot of different formats. Young people have a need to preserve the national things, before our people have been ignorant and had not travelled far from their village. And now the young people have lived in Moscow, in the North, learned to defend their rights.”*<sup>214</sup>

The same activist has explained why national movements attract even more young people in the diaspora than in Dagestan:

*“Some years ago, I had no need for activism, I grew up in the national district, among my people. And then I went to Moscow, and because of the Asian appearance, I was stopped by the police, there were many unpleasant moments. Having faced with discrimination, I became interested in the movement. The national movements are also a reaction to the propaganda of the Russian spirit, the Russian idea, and Russian weapons. Emphasis on nationalism, the imposition of their cultural code on other people. Artificial barriers are created for the development of national languages. The Nogai movement stands for the preservation of language, culture and land. Our formula is: “Eelde,*

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<sup>213</sup>Interview with Radmir Nuraliev on the phone. June 2019.

<sup>214</sup>Interview with an activist of the Nogai movement. Makhachkala. June 2019.

*tilde, dinde, birlik (motherland, language, religion, unity)”*.

At the same time, as a member of the Lak movement has told us, along with a fairly active diaspora, very local initiatives and funds of the Laks are developing in Dagestan. These initiatives most often occur in mono-ethnic Lak villages and are aimed at improvement, restoration of memorable places, building of water-pipes and sewage lines. Such initiatives are completely devoid of political content, but in fact take on the functions of local self-government and gain invaluable experience of activism, ethnic socialization, horizontal ties with similar local groups<sup>215</sup>. The same activism is reportedly seen in the Kumyk villages, for example, in the village Chagarotar of Khasaviurt district.

The nationally oriented youth activists also say that one of their main issues is lack of social mobility. *“Vasiliev is trying to fight the glass ceiling. But the corruption system has become entrenched in the society. His life will not be enough to solve these problems”*.

In general, national initiatives have several overlapping areas: support for national culture, language activism, political projects and ethno-oriented information sites. Usually they are not organized into a single structure.

*“There is no Kumyk national movement, it is not necessary. There are problems that need to be solved, but there are no tools and resources to address them, and the society is not ready to solve these problems. Formal structures cause irritation and attract attention, and profane internal issues. As soon as we have gathered in a tight group, we’ll be crushed. And certainly some group of influence will try. To dominate in the movement, people will be disappointed”*.<sup>216</sup>

At the same time, inter-ethnic disputes remain a part of everyday reality. Inter-ethnic tensions in Dagestan have traditionally been exacerbated by the two factors related to land issues. The first is the uncompleted process of justice restoration for the repressed peoples, to whom the 1991 law guarantees “territorial rehabilitation”. The second is land disputes arising as a result of the law on distant-pasture cattle rearing, which has accelerated the mass migration from the mountains to the plain.

A number of problems associated with rehabilitation involve four peoples: the Chechens-Akins, Avars, Laks and Kumyks repressed by Stalin. In 1991, the Congress of People’s Deputies of the republic adopted a decision on the restoration of Aukhovskii district inhabited by the Chechens before the Stalinist deportation of 1944, and after their eviction the Chechen houses were forcibly populated by the Avars and Laks.<sup>217</sup> As a result of this decision, the Laks agreed to relocate from Chechen homes to new territories, and the Avars agreed to live together. Since then, the government of Dagestan has been resettling the Laks to the allocated areas in Kumtorkalinskii district and tried to find a solution to the problem of two large villages Kalininaul (Yurt-Auch) and Leninaul (Aktash-Auch), where the Avars and the Chechens live together, but the Avars refuse to be part of the restored Aukhovskii district. A significant part of Chechen houses has not been returned to their owners. The Chechens, who managed to return, receive dilapidated housing of their ancestors, have great difficulties with employment

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<sup>215</sup>Telephone interview with Lak activist. June 2019.

<sup>216</sup>Interview with Kumyk public figure. Makhachkala. May 2019.

<sup>217</sup>In 1944, together with the tribal kinsmen from the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), the Akkin Chechens (14,901 people) were deported to Central Asia; the Aukhovskii district in which they lived was liquidated, the villages were renamed and populated with the Laks from the mountainous part of Dagestan, often by force and with numerous victims, and as a result the newly created Novolak district appeared. Three large Chechen villages were transferred to the neighboring Kazbekov district and settled by the Avars.

and representation in local government and police.

The relations between the Avars and Chechens in these villages have been tense for many years, and routine quarrels regularly escalate into mass fights involving hundreds of young men on both sides.<sup>218</sup> The resettlement of the Laks causes disagreement with the Kumyks, who believe that the Laks resettle in traditionally Kumyk territories. The Laks themselves complain of the infertility of land in the Kumtorkalinskii district, and the lack of necessary facilities in new settlements.

The second most important land problem in the Caucasus is the issue of distant pastures. In Soviet times, distant-pasture cattle rearing, based on the seasonal movement of livestock and people serving this livestock between the alpine pastures and the plain, was actively developed in Dagestan. Many mountain farms received large land plots on the plain, and seasonal housing for shepherds and their families gradually turned into real settlements (kutans). In the post-Soviet period, distant-pasture cattle rearing almost ceased to exist, but the status of land remained the same. As usual, the animal breeders-settlers (the Avars, Dargins) belong to an ethnic group different from the indigenous inhabitants of the plain (the Kumyks or Nogais); their presence exacerbates the land shortage of neighboring villages, creates a heavy load on social infrastructure and evolves into inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts. At the beginning of Putin's third term, the Ministry of Agriculture of Dagestan decided to give 199 identified kutans a legal status with the involvement of local self-government authorities in the system, which caused a protest of the plain peoples: they claimed that under the guise of land reform, their land is being expropriated. For example, in the summer of 2017, an attempt to legalize two kutan settlements on former pasture lands located in the Nogai district caused a serious surge of the Nogai protest.<sup>219</sup>

Almost all the experts interviewed for this report have said that inter-ethnic relations and national policies require more attention, and long-standing contradictions should be eventually be resolved. The lack of institutional mechanisms to harmonize inter-ethnic relations based on grass-roots initiative and the participation of ethnic communities themselves make it impossible to implement effective and smart policy in such a unique linguistic and cultural space.

*“We do not have a chamber of nationalities, where nationalities could solve their problems and help the executive authorities to voice problems. The voices of nationalities are not heard, the specifics of the region, its ethnic groups, religious differences and mental characteristics should be taken into consideration.”*<sup>220</sup>

However, as part of the general policy of harmonization, the re-establishment of such a body is unlikely. Moreover, Vladimir Vasiliev, not wishing to take risks, has postponed indefinitely the solution of land problems, including those related to distant pastures and the border between Dagestan and Chechnia.<sup>221</sup>

## 2. Preservation of national languages

Article 11 of the Constitution of the Republic of Dagestan establishes the state status of the

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<sup>218</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/305797/>

<sup>219</sup> [http://www.counter-point.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/sokiryanskaya\\_counterpoint11.pdf](http://www.counter-point.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/sokiryanskaya_counterpoint11.pdf)

<sup>220</sup> Interview with a political scientist and journalist Khanzhan Kurbanov. Makhachkala. May 2019.

<sup>221</sup> <https://ndelo.ru/interv-iu/kogda-vasilev-poedet-v-botlih>

languages of a subject of the federation. The official languages of the Republic of Dagestan are Russian and the languages of the peoples of Dagestan. This Article guarantees the right to preserve the mother tongue and to create conditions for its study and development for all peoples living in its territory is guaranteed.<sup>222</sup>

In 2014, the Republic intensified the discussion on the need to adopt a regional law on the languages of the peoples of Dagestan.<sup>223</sup> The need for such a law was declared by the head of the republic Ramazan Abdulatipov at a meeting of the Academic Council at the Dagestan Scientific Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Together with scholars the head of Dagestan discussed the objectives of the language policy in Dagestan, the role and status of the Russian language in the republic. At that time the scholars unanimously voted for the need to adopt a law “On the Languages of the Peoples of the Republic of Dagestan”, but in the end neither they nor language activists could come to a consensus on the content of this regulatory act.

It should be noted that this discussion was largely confined to the determination of the number of languages of the peoples of Dagestan. According to one version, there are 14, these are only written languages of the Republic. According to the other version — 32. The latter include those that are often called dialects of some “major” languages, although scholarship and native speakers themselves clearly consider them separate languages.<sup>224</sup> These are, for example, the languages of the Ando-Tsez subgroup, which are attributed to the most widespread language of this subgroup — Avar, or Kaitag and Kubachin languages, which are considered to be to Dargin.<sup>225</sup>

The 14 official languages of Dagestan include Avar, Aghul, Azeri, Dargin, Kumyk, Lak, Lezgin, Nogai, Russian, Rutul, Tabasaran, Tat, Tsakhur, Chechen languages.<sup>226</sup>

Experts from various departments have not come to a consensus on how the draft law should be called — “the Law on the Languages of Dagestan” or “the Law on the Languages of the Peoples of Dagestan”.<sup>227</sup> The latter option, as some participants noted, gave the law a political connotation, as representatives of non-written languages could claim the right to be represented in government in accordance with the informal principle of ethnic quotation. As of today, only the 14 ethnic groups have such an informal right.

It should be noted that in the post-Soviet period, the struggle of representatives of small peoples for the right to be recognized as individual ethnic groups intensified. The Tsez, Karata and Andi were most active in trying to seek recognition of themselves as separate ethnicities.

Their desire to separate is dictated not only by the desire to have a quota in power, but also by the fact that these ethnic groups may not learn their native language and instead have to learn Avar and Dargin which are not very distinguishable to them.

At the same time, the language activists and scholars of the largest Dagestan ethnic group that is the Avars express their dissatisfaction with their position. The Avar population will soon reach a million, but the Avars have no preferences in comparison with other peoples of Dagestan.

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<sup>222</sup> <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/802018919>

<sup>223</sup> <https://rg.ru/2014/02/03/reg-skfo/yaziki-anons.html>

<sup>224</sup> <http://www.garshin.ru/linguistics/languages/dene-caucasian/north-caucasian/east-caucasian/avar.html>, <http://xn--80aaa1b5an.xn--p1ai/?cat=126>

<sup>225</sup> <http://kavpolit.ru/blogs/ashvado/32982/>, <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/teper-kandidaty-v-deputaty-hotyaby-budut-razgovarivat/28986740.html>

<sup>226</sup> <https://skavkaza.ru/pub/dagestan>

<sup>227</sup> <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/dagestan-narodov-mnogo-a-zakona-o-yazykakh-net/28323392.html>

*“Dagestan is a multi-lingual republic, but that wealth turns out against us. By the number of people here every third is an Avar. But the Avars do not enjoy any privileges as the republic-forming people. The conditions for support are the same for the Avars, and, for example, a people of small numbers like the Tsakhurs. They are provided with the same time on TV, radio, teaching support. This is unfair,”* a professor of linguistics said.<sup>228</sup>

The recognition of non-written languages and peoples since Soviet times is interpreted by major ethnic groups as a political step aimed at weakening and division of these peoples. That’s how Khanzhan Kurbanov assesses this process in relation to the Lezgins:

*“...during the Soviet period... the Lezgin peoples were provided with the “vaccine” of independent peoples with their own written language, a separate culture and history. They were nurtured by the regime of the Dagestan’s leader Daniialov (1948-1967), who separated them from the Lezgins in order to reduce the number of the largest Dagestan nation at that time. Since then, several generations who do not identify themselves with the Lezgins have grown up. Therefore, today we do not have to talk about any visible process of unity or consolidation of the Lezgin peoples — Aguls, Tsakhurs, Rutuls and Tabasarans — or their movement to a single...Lezgin center.”*<sup>229</sup>

An increased attention to the issue of studying national languages is caused by the significant pace of linguistic assimilation of even numerous Dagestan peoples, not to mention the small ones. Thus, between the last two censuses in 2002 and 2010, the number of the Avars increased by almost 100 thousand people, while the number of the Avar speakers decreased by more than 70 thousand people. In 2010, the Avars had over 912 thousand people, and the speakers of the Avar language were a little more than 715 thousand.<sup>230</sup> The Kumyk-speakers in Dagestan during the same period was reduced by almost 63 thousand people.<sup>231</sup> This trend is observed in almost all ethnic groups of Dagestan.

The challenges faced by the national languages in Dagestan are due to several main factors. First is the rapid urbanization and mass migration from the mountains leading to the fact that settlements are becoming more and more multinational, and this forces people to focus on the common Russian language in everyday life. Second is the influence of the information field that is television and media in such a way that even in villages people largely prefer Russian. Third difficulty is the decline in the prestige of native languages due to the impossibility of professional implementation in the native language, the lack of a language environment and weak teaching methods. All this together has led to an increasing speed of assimilation.

*“The city is the graveyard of languages”*<sup>232</sup>

According to the experts and teachers interviewed, the national languages in Dagestan are preserved mainly due to a large rural population and the existence of national districts.

*“In Dagestan, 55 percent live in villages, due to the high birth rate, the rural population remains. The city is mostly characterized by mixed marriages. In the villages these marriages occur less frequently. In the 2000s, mixed marriages were hardly possible, as parents did not allow them, but now it is possible,”* the teacher of the Avar language from Makhachkala said.

Her colleague, who used to work in the countryside for a long time, explained:

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<sup>228</sup> Interview with a linguist, the Doctor of Philology. Makhachkala. May 2019.

<sup>229</sup> [http://lezgi-yar.ru/news/khanzhana\\_kurbanova\\_khvatit\\_derzhat\\_lezgin\\_v\\_ehtnokulturnom\\_getto/2012-03-22-691](http://lezgi-yar.ru/news/khanzhana_kurbanova_khvatit_derzhat_lezgin_v_ehtnokulturnom_getto/2012-03-22-691)

<sup>230</sup> <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/avarskiy-yazyk-teryet-svoi-pozitsii/28457083.html>

<sup>231</sup> <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/mikhail-kaplan/yazik-do-moskvy-dovedet>

<sup>232</sup> From the interview with a language activist. May, 2019

*“In the village there are no problems [with the teaching of national languages], the Avar language is treated as the main subject, and both the attitude and requirement as for the main subjects. But in villages children can speak both languages and write in both of them because parents speak the native language. The Avar language in the village is studied from the first class, four to five hours a week, from the first to the eleventh class, there are two lessons of literature and two lessons of native language. And this is a compulsory subject.”*

In cities, the percentage of intermarriages is very high. As a result, families speak Russian and most children at school rarely speak the national language.

The father of five children from Makhachkala explained:

*“My children know the language, we speak Lak at home. But it is impossible for them to develop the language properly in Makhachkala. There are children in the class who do not know the language at all. As a result, the teacher focuses on low-performance students, and high-performing students do not develop.*

*“My children’s native language at school is taught until the eighth or eleventh class, depends on school. But the effect of this is small”.*

According to an expert, the national language does not reflect the modern urban reality, and therefore dies:

*“The national language is the language of the rural way of life, the language of a cattle-breeder. How will you say, for example, in Nogai: “Go and bring me a beer from the fridge.” There are no such words! We are part of Russia, we are already in this space, so if you want to live in the city — learn the global language!”*

A Makhachkala activist confirmed:

*“The city inhabitants do not know their language and don’t care... I’m urban, but I know the language, they call me in the village “urban goose” with a hint that I can do something despite being from the city. But I can’t write. We have the alphabet of 46 letters, I can’t learn them all. It is impossible to preserve languages in the city of Dagestan. The culture of language is preserved in our national districts. But if in the villages language teaching is removed from school, the language will remain only at the level of colloquial”.*<sup>233</sup>

In 2007, Moscow decided to “exclude a national-regional component” from the State Standard of Education. The implementation of this legal act began with the introduction of a ban on the state certification of students in their native (non-Russian) languages by the Ministry of education and science in November 2008. In other words, such students are not eligible for the Unified State Examination.

This approach makes it impossible to expand education in the regional language. It bears reminding that in Dagestan in places of compact residence of certain ethnic groups primary schools use native language as the language of instruction. Thus, further spread of this practice to secondary and high school has become impossible, as students have to take the Unified State Examination only in Russian, even if the subjects have been taught in their native language.

It should be noted that the language of instruction in kindergartens is mainly Russian. Private kindergartens and schools with the teaching in regional languages in Dagestan have not developed.

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<sup>233</sup>Interview with an activist. Makhachkala. May 2019.

## Problems with textbooks and manuals

In addition to the problem of urban multilingualism and, as a consequence, the displacement of regional languages from the urban environment, there are other obstacles that prevent native languages from maintaining their positions. According to the principal of Khunzakh Secondary School No. 1 in Dagestan, the school lacks textbooks of the native language and literature.<sup>234</sup> The Dagestani officials went into the rant about this fact as well.<sup>235</sup> According to the new requirements, textbooks shall be certified, comply with the GOST (State technical standards), be licensed, pass special expertise. “*In those republics where there is one or two languages, perhaps it is not so difficult, but in our republic, at least 14 shall pass such licensing,*” the former head of the Ministry of National Policy of Dagestan Tatiana Gamaley said.<sup>236</sup>

Other methodological materials are in increasingly short supply as well. Enthusiastic teachers try to address the problems using their own resources, without the support of the state or sponsors.

A teacher of the Avar language explained:

*“We have the association of teachers of the Avar language, the teachers themselves create materials. We have issued the curriculum developments lesson by the lesson for the sixth-seventh grade, experienced teachers write detailed lesson plans, we have published these plans and other manuals as guides for teachers. These lesson by lesson plans are a great help to the teachers, many do not know how to make a plan, and here everything is ready for them. Teachers begin to make videos for the study of the Avar letters, dub the cartoons: “Winnie the Pooh”, “Nu pogodi!”*

Her colleague added:

*“There were very few textbooks, recently new books for the first and fourth grades have been published. They have been designed by teachers together with linguists. They are colorful, children like them. We have got number enough of them for everyone, everything is according to GOST, but textbooks for high schools were not published. We have old textbooks, but we are not allowed to use them, because they are not according to the GOST. As a result, we make printouts from books, create ourselves cards, tests.”*<sup>237</sup>

In fact, only primary school is provided with textbooks for the native languages.

In the cities the problem is also that study groups, especially when it comes to numerous ethnic groups, are too big to effectively teach a language.

A teacher of a national language from a Makhachkala city school told:

*“Our school is in the city center. There are five classes in each age to be divided into two groups. Thus there are 26/28 people in each group. The groups are large, it is very difficult, but the number of classrooms is insufficient.*

*Only three or four people in the group speak their native language. We hold festivals, various events. The children, who know their language, participate in these festivals and competitions. Parents and students are pleased”.*<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/avarskiy-yazyk-teryat-svoi-pozitsii/28457083.html>

<sup>235</sup> <https://etokavkaz.ru/news/32622>

<sup>236</sup> <https://etokavkaz.ru/news/32622>

<sup>237</sup> Interviews with school teachers. Makhachkala. May, 2019.

<sup>238</sup> Interviews with a school teacher. Makhachkala. May, 2019.

The Minister of Education of Dagestan Ummupazil Omarova in 2018 said that 53 teachers of native languages were lacking in the republic.<sup>239</sup> However, according to teachers themselves, there is no shortage of cadres, but the profession of a teacher of the national language is not prestigious and people do not want to work at school:

The teacher from Makhachkala said:

*‘The salary is twelve-fourteen thousand/rubles/, for eighteen hours of work. I have twenty-four hours, sixteen thousand as a salary, plus in addition for checking exercise-books, in total – about twenty thousand. Last year our salary was fifteen thousand. The problem is, we can’t have private lessons, there’s no demand. I had one private student: he lived in Russia, arrived here, wanted to get married here, he was very ashamed that he did not know his native language. That’s all.’*<sup>240</sup>

In June 2019, a shortage was recorded at the Russian-Dagestan Department at the Dagestan State University (DSU). According to the DSU Rector Murtazali Rabadanov, “if it is still possible to hold entry competition for the Avar and Dargin languages, for other languages it is difficult to recruit a student group of even five people”.<sup>241</sup>

In 2017, the media reported that textbooks on native languages were expropriated from schools in Dagestan<sup>242</sup>. This happened in the middle of the school year, which complicated the already difficult process. The textbooks were probably withdrawn for not being included in the list of textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation. In other words: everything that is not approved by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation is not allowed. And this approach results in numerous new challenges.

*‘The regional component included one hour per week for the history of Dagestan. There are no textbooks, there is one published in the 80s, but they are outdated, everyone uses photocopies. Then the regional component was completely removed, regional history will be taught within the framework of the general history. Funds are not allocated for the development of textbooks, certification of textbooks takes a long time, costs 1,5 million rubles, then it takes much time to print materials’,* an expert told us.<sup>243</sup>

## **Official voluntary**

Since the end of 2017, a new round of what language activists consider a deliberate weakening of the position of national languages has begun. At the meeting of the Public Chamber of Dagestan in October 2017, official public figures proposed to revise the teaching of native languages, as well as the history, culture and traditions of the peoples of Dagestan. This initiative was put forward by a member of the Public Chamber Magaram Alijanov. In his opinion, too much time is allocated to these subjects : *‘There are basic disciplines that need to be given more time.’* In addition, the member of the Public Chamber of the Republic of Dagestan explained language assimilation as the consequence of more frequent mixed marriages. Magaram Alijanov also stated that the disappearance of the languages of the peoples of Dagestan is not a

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<sup>239</sup> <https://ndelo.ru/detail/yazyki-gosudarstvennye-i-rodnye>

<sup>240</sup> Interviews with school teachers. Makhachkala. May, 2019.

<sup>241</sup> Interviews with school teachers. Makhachkala. May, 2019.

<sup>242</sup> <http://flnka.ru/digest-analytics/18093-v-dagestane-pozhalovalis-na-izyatie-uchebnikov-po-rodnomu-yazyku.html>

<sup>243</sup> Interview with an expert

disaster.<sup>244</sup>

On July 25, 2018, the deputies of the State Duma of Russia adopted amendments to the law on the study of native languages, suggesting the actual voluntary study of native languages.<sup>245</sup>

In the cities of Dagestan, the voluntary study of regional languages has long been practiced; due to the large number of inter-ethnic marriages, parents could always choose which language to study. Given that the Russian population of the Republic is 3.6 %, theoretically the main beneficiaries of the law are the small ethnic groups in Dagestan. Now, Kubachi may apply to the school that their children could study Kubachi, not Dargin. While there are no reliable statistics on Dagestan as to how many students have chosen a particular language as their native one, it is hard to determine whether the small-numbered peoples learn their languages, and how they do it. But most likely, they do not have such a possibility, if only because there are no textbooks in these languages. However, the teachers have told us that families from sub-ethnic groups in the villages use the opportunity not to study a native language:

*“There are refusals in the villages, but mostly in places where there are sub-ethnic groups. Tsumadinskii, Tliaratinskii, Charodinskii districts. The Tsumada and Tsez don’t understand the Avar language. Andian and Avar are like German and English. These are the families from the sub-ethnies who withdraw their kids. Those, who are speakers of literary Avar, can help children do homework, but these parents cannot. If there are 28 people in a class, usually five or six will withdraw. Kumyk families do not refuse, they have one dialect (there are no sub-ethnic groups). The Kumyks generally try to learn the language and always speak to each other in their own language. If two Kumyks come together, they always speak their language. But our Avars immediately start speaking Russian.”<sup>246</sup>*

Language activists believe that parents have been intentionally convinced that the national languages makes it difficult to pass the Unified State Examination.

*“This is not without reason, this is a provocation at the state level. Why does the state ask whether it is necessary to study a native language? It doesn’t ask if you want to study physics, chemistry. If they asked, many would refuse such subjects. As a result, the kids are not interested to study the languages, parents are also convinced, and we are faced with the fact that in two generations our languages will not be studied and spoken at all,”* an expert said.<sup>247</sup>

However, researchers say that most parents without external pressure do not give priority to the study of native languages:

*“We conducted a small survey among parents in the urban environment about the teaching of national languages. Quite a common opinion is: I feel sorry for the language, but I want my child to study biology, he will go to the medical school, or a foreign language. Lak or Tabasaran are not in our plans. Is he going to be a teacher at a rural school? And in the villages there is even more desire to educate children in order to help them exit this rural environment. In addition, it is now in fashion to study Arabic in addition to English,”* the expert said.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/28800079.html>

<sup>245</sup> <https://ria.ru/20180410/1518325059.html>, <https://ria.ru/20180410/1518325059.html>

<sup>246</sup> Interview with the Avar language teacher. Makhachkala. May 2019.

<sup>247</sup> Interview with the Doctor of Philology. Makhachkala. May 2019.

<sup>248</sup> Interview with an expert, the Candidate of Historical Sciences. Makhachkala. May 2019.

## ***Mechanisms for preservation of national languages***

In addition to teaching native languages at schools, there are other mechanisms to support national languages and cultures. The four Ministries — the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of National Policy, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Press — deal with the preservation of languages to varying degrees. There is the Council on the Problems of Russian and Dagestan Languages and the Council on Ethnic Affairs under the Head of the Republic, as well as a number of other public associations.

To support the education system, the Dagestan State Pedagogical University has a Department of the Faculty of Philology, which trains teachers of the native language and literature<sup>249</sup>. There is also the department of Dagestani languages at the DSU, but there are no separate departments for each language. The study of the Dagestani languages is supported by the Institute of Language, Literature and Art of the Dagestan Scientific Center of RAN, by university scholars, and the Institute of Education Development and the A. A. Takho-Godi Dagestan Scientific Research Institute of Pedagogy focus on the methodological problems of teaching. It is interesting that interpreters of the Dagestan languages are not trained anywhere, although the courts, especially in rural areas, need their services. In such cases, interpreters or translators are not qualified professionals, and just native speakers.

The state supports the publication of the 14 Republican socio-political newspapers published in the languages of Dagestan. However, activists explain that these publications ignore important events happening to an ethnic group, avoid any criticism of the authorities. Not being platforms for discussion of actual problems of ethnic groups, these state outlets are in low demand among native speakers.

In Dagestan up to 50 minutes seven times a week are given for radio broadcasting in “major” languages, about an hour once a week for programs broadcasted on RGVK (the Republican state broadcasting company). In addition, the VGTRK (all-Russian state television and radio broadcasting company) broadcasts once a month half-hour programs in “key” languages. Literary, children’s, women’s magazines, as well as regional newspapers with circulation from 1000 to 2000 copies are published. Newspapers exist mainly at the expense of administrative resources, and are purchased and distributed by district administrations. The state publishing house “Dagknigoizdat” produces up to 10 titles of books in major languages per year.<sup>250</sup> The circulation of these periodicals, as a rule, does not exceed 300 copies.

Regional languages are also represented in the cultural sphere. For example, the state supports the creative ensembles and the national theatres of Avars, Kumyks, Dargins, Laks, Lezgins, Nogais, Azerbaijanians, Russians, Tabasarans.

Ethnic entertainment is also developed. Concerts of Dargin, Avar songs sell out full concert halls. Ethnic art is also supported by music channels. Thus, some channels broadcast songs of different nationalities, alternating them, and at weddings ethnic music of the of a bride and groom usually perform.<sup>251</sup>

Enthusiasts create sites focused on ethno-cultural needs, ABC books and books in nation-

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<sup>249</sup> <http://dgpu.net/ru/fakultety-i-kafedry/fakultety/fakultet-dagestanskoj-filologii>

<sup>250</sup> [https://www.kavkazr.com/a/kogda\\_plus\\_i\\_minus\\_ravny/28146033.html](https://www.kavkazr.com/a/kogda_plus_i_minus_ravny/28146033.html)

<sup>251</sup> *Interview with Edurad Urazaev*

al languages.

Mosques and madrassas are the important centers of preservation of national languages. In the national regions and places of compact residence of the sermon are often held in their native language. Moreover, our respondents have noted the high level of language proficiency of local imams.

*“As long as there is Islam, the Avar language will not disappear. Sermons are conducted in a beautiful literary language in mosques,”* a resident of one of the largest villages of Khasaviurt district said.<sup>252</sup>

In the cities there are also mosques, conducting sermons in different languages. For example, in the city of Khasaviurt in one mosque sermons are in Avar with translation into Russian, and in the fifth settlement of Makhachkala there is a Kumyk mosque. Part of the sermons in the famous mosque in Kotrova Street that is now closed have been conducted in Lak before.<sup>253</sup>

Individual projects to support national languages are implemented by enthusiasts with support of sponsors and parents. One of the most interesting projects was the children’s summer ethnic camp “Gazi-Kumukh”, organized by activists with support of deputies of the People’s Assembly in the Lak district of Dagestan, designed by rural teachers to teach urban children the Lak language, traditions of mountaineers, to establish their communication with rural peers who speak the language, as well as to provide an opportunity to spend part of the holidays in the fresh mountain air, to take part in horseback riding and undergo medical examination in the local hospital.<sup>254</sup>

An example of successful language activism is shown by the Avars: the initiative group annually holds an increasingly popular festival of the native language, various competitions; the Association of teachers of the Avar language operates actively as well. The Avars successfully promote the idea of prestige of native language proficiency, try to use it in network communication.

A variety of promotional flash mobs and “total dictation” are also conducted in other languages<sup>255</sup>.

Despite the fact that there are many rich people in Dagestan, there is little private support for such projects that extremely upsets language activists: *“There are philanthropists in Dagestan, but they do not care about science or education. Look at how in Dagestan we meet /returning home/ athletes at the airport. Have you seen a scholar returning from an international symposium ever met in such a way?”*<sup>256</sup>

Such activists and scholars perceive the weakening of national languages very painfully: *“I do not go to all these events [dedicated to language topics], my soul is bleeding, I cannot see this indifference. We should create a language environment, hold meetings with writers... We have offered to create national schools, but, alas, we have only been accused of nationalism. In two generations our languages will disappear,”* a doctor of philology told us.

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<sup>252</sup>Talking to residents of the large villages of the Khasaviurt district. June 2019.

<sup>253</sup>Interviews with believers, attending Kumyk, Avar mosque and the mosque in the Kotlov Street in Mahachala. May 2019.

<sup>254</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIGt1P1zq8U&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR3MTsL59pillapWQTfrJBLGoX7kGj5l7aa8l1W4NCg6jHJBXi8nblFchS0>

<sup>255</sup>Interview with an expert by e-mail; interview with representatives of the Association of Teachers of the Avar Language. May-June, 2019.

<sup>256</sup>Interview with a language activist. Makhachkala. May, 2019.

### 3. Conclusion

Given the multilingual nature of Dagestan, the rapid pace of urbanization, the continuing relocation from mononational mountain areas to the plains and the systemic difficulties in teaching, it is becoming increasingly difficult to preserve languages in the urban environment. Language remains only in villages, but the rural population is steadily declining, especially in the mountains.

Eduard Urazayev believes that:

*“The trend with national languages is contradictory: there is a stable core in every nation that loves its language and wants the language to be preserved, but it is very difficult for them to challenge the global processes. The center understands that attempts to pursue the policy of unification directly and rigidly encounter resistance, so it does it carefully.”*

Another expert spoke more sharply:

*“There is no state policy aimed at the preservation of languages in the country now. In the Soviet times, there was such a targeted policy, legislative acts were translated into languages, officials spoke national languages. What we can see now is the all-out attempt aimed at integration. In the global world, you either follow a common path and lose your identity, or, like Georgia, on the one hand, you are in the globalization process, on the other — you do not lose your culture. And we are like animals that have lost their orientation.”<sup>257</sup>.*

Preservation of the national languages of Dagestan requires a separate program aimed at support of the national languages with stable funding and, perhaps, even a special institution responsible for their preservation. The creation of such a body will require political will of both the federal and regional authorities. The republican ministries are unlikely to be willing to delegate it the authority and even coordination. Some experts believe that local languages will receive additional preferences after the adoption of the long-discussed law on the Dagestan languages. However, the situation with this law is ambiguous, especially given the fact that the adoption of the law will once again exacerbate the debate on the non- parity development of written and non-written languages and dialects.<sup>258</sup>

One of the experts is sure that support of villages is the most effective mechanism for preserving the natural language environment:

*“A powerful economic program for the development of mountain areas with the creation of new jobs there, of opportunities to support the family, to provide good education to children, to provide other social needs are the best means to boost local languages. Localized living will save languages as much as possible, although it sounds in modern conditions, admittedly, quite utopian. The future of modern life of the highlanders is in the poly - and bi-lingual society, including outside the republic, and to preserve languages in this case, even at the survival, daily life level is very difficult”.*

The state and private system of grants aimed at supporting educational and research projects, linguistic and methodological materials (ABC books, translators, electronic dictionaries and textbooks, interactive phrase books, communication games, etc.); language nests in preschool institutions, summer language camps, theater projects, discussion clubs for young people, PR campaigns to promote languages can assist the school in maintaining and developing linguistic

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<sup>257</sup> Interview with an expert, Candidate of Historical Sciences. Makhachkala. May, 2019.

<sup>258</sup> Interview with an expert by e-mail. June, 2019.

skills of young people.<sup>259</sup> Creative, fashionable, modern projects will help to attract young people and stimulate the interest of parents. A sincere interest of state institutions in creating conditions for the preservation of national languages will ensure support of a large part of the inhabitants of Dagestan.

Despite the fact that, according to our observations, the national factor in isolation from other (social and political issues) loses its relevance, for most residents of Dagestan ethnicity remains the most important marker of identity. However, today, in the words of one of the activists, “*the work on national issues is often perceived by the authorities as an attempt to undermine the existing order. But this policy will not work.*” After all, if the national issue is coupled with social, territorial or political problems, it could again, as in the 90s, become a powerful factor of mobilization.

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<sup>259</sup>*Interview with an expert by e-mail. June, 2019.*

## FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the transformation of federal relations between the two republics — Tatarstan and Dagestan — shows that the Russian federalism, in the classical sense of the political system, based on the principles of subsidiarity, interdependence of levels of governance, transparent coordination of interests, mutual adaptation, search for balances often through negotiations, is de facto lost. The power vertical built into the rigid hierarchy not only the financially dependent elites of the socially disadvantaged region, but also the elites of region-leader. The specificities of republican legal and political institutions have been practically leveled, the remnants of the republican sovereignty has been exchanged by the elites for guarantee of their own property.

The success of Tatarstan was largely due to the consolidation of the political and business elites, their ability to offer residents of the republic the appealing ideologically charged agenda (which was ethno-political in the era of Shaimiev, and focused on the economic and technological development in the period of Minnikhanov), as well as the fact that their personal business, the community and the future of the children are connected with Tatarstan. Therefore, the elites have managed the republic as their own home, maintained ties with the agricultural sector, where the leaders have their educational and professional background. At the same time, there has been no political competition in the republic since the collapse of the Soviet Union, almost immediately an authoritarian style of government was established, and the elite was formed on the principle of patron-client relations and personal loyalty to the republican leader. In recent years, meritocratic tendencies, providing channels of social mobility to people who are loyal, but not included in the inner circle, have intensified at the middle level of bureaucracy.

Much more pluralistic Dagestan has lived a rich political life, with independent media and public policy. Full-fledged authoritarianism could not be formed at the republican level, perhaps because of the constant intra-elite conflicts, inter-ethnic and intra-religious tensions. At the same time at the local level, the patron-client and clan relations over the years have transformed into neo-feudalism. It has been easier for the Kremlin to negotiate with the strengthened Dagestan barons to implement its priorities in the region covered by the armed conflict. Not having their own economic base, Dagestan elites have competed for budget financial flows, invested little in the republic and, often immediately after their resignation from high positions, have quickly moved to Moscow. There has been a huge distance between the Dagestan power and citizens.

The Tatarstan political and business elites, successfully consolidated and showing high efficiency in the development of their region, make a bureaucratic “export” to Moscow and other regions of Russia. During the post-Soviet period, both Tatarstan presidents were considered political heavyweights of the federal level. The Dagestan elites, who had brought republican institutions and the economy to the state of failed state, lost both their positions in the hierarchy of power relations and their lobbying abilities in the Kremlin.

The islands of autonomy, where the federal control has not penetrated, have been minimized in recent years. The remaining space for maneuver is filled in different ways. Tatarstan supports the Tatar culture not only in the Republic, but also abroad, as well as implements successful economic projects. In Dagestan, autonomy is mainly associated with the shadow economy and

the relative inviolability of local law enforcement agencies. The latter is achieved due to the fact that the threats of separatism and Islamist radicalization are still the arguments of Dagestan security services use in relations with the federal ministries. However, since the Dagestan elites are today largely removed from the governance of the republic, or even imprisoned, it is almost impossible to talk about serious lacunae of sovereignty in the Dagestan case.

This does not mean that Dagestan's political groups have been completely destroyed: they have lost inter-elite competition at the federal and republican levels, but regrouped and taken a wait-and-see position. The Kremlin is trying to bring Dagestan to a condition close to the average Russian one. When this is done, if the center does not decide to permanently maintain "external governance" in the republic, the Dagestan government officials will have a chance. However, they will need to be able to fit into the increasingly legalistic bureaucratic logic of the modern Russian system of public administration.

The analysis of the relations between the two national republics and the Kremlin shows that in recent years the federal districts and special representatives of the President have not played any significant role in their relations with the center, and all important decisions have been made in Moscow. The main competition has also moved to Moscow, where every political group is looking for access to the decision-making center.

In fact, federalism and public policy have been replaced by competition between federal and regional patron-client networks. These networks, based on fraternal, kinship and friendly ties, usually combine political and business interests and have ties with the security forces. Such groups are not ideologically motivated, but in certain situations can use the national and regional agenda as a political resource. Real potential belongs to the patron-client networks, closed to the Kremlin or with access to the first person in the federation.

With the active application of the practice of appointing "Varangians" to senior positions in the regions, a new market for such government officials arises. Being sent to the region to make effective governance and to fight corruption, such officials together with successful management technologies (in the Russian bureaucratic logic of technocracy and reporting) bring people from their informal network and business groups close to them to the region. Tatarstan is successful in this market of technocrats.

At the same time, the problems of taking into account the specifics of national peculiarities in the regions are being solved in Moscow. The principle of subsidiarity on these issues is practically not applied. The final loss of meaningful sovereignty by the republics frustrates a significant part of their population. Every nation has a national-oriented core that loves its language, appreciates its culture and strives to preserve them. For objective reasons related to urbanization, the influence of the Russian-language media space, the lack of higher education delivered in native languages, limited ability to use the language in professional life, poor methodological support for the language learning process in schools, the level of native language proficiency in Dagestan is reduced, and in Tatarstan the scope of its use is reduced to the household level. In rural areas, where there is an ethnic environment, the language retains its functionality, but in the city it is much more difficult to preserve the language culture.

The amendments to the law on education, enshrining voluntary study of native languages, difficulties in the certification of textbooks and the creation of teaching materials further weaken the position of native languages. In addition to schools and state-supported research institutes, theatres and newspapers, mosques and madrassas, as well as initiatives of national associations, remain important centers for the preservation of native languages. Projects aimed

at supporting native languages through the organization of ethnic camps, competitions, the creation of ABC books and educational literature require sustained grant support from the state and philanthropists. In Dagestan, private philanthropists hardly invest in such projects, national schools and kindergartens are not widespread. In Tatarstan, the policy of supporting the Tatar language in the education system, on the one hand, has contributed to the creation and development of national schools (not only Tatar, but also other peoples of the Volga region), and on the other, has given rise to a hidden conflict associated with dissatisfaction with the distribution of educational resources and the quality of educational material. In recent years, the efforts of the federal authorities to support the policy of the Tatar-language secondary education and parity of the Tatar and Russian languages are significantly reduced. The decrease in the volume of studying the Tatar language in the secondary education system, despite the discontent of the Tatar public, has been supported by the Russian-speaking population. However, the frustrated ethnic feelings of not only representatives of national movements, but many Tatar-speaking residents are the price paid by Tatarstan for weakening of sovereignty. However, this does not lead (and rather will not lead in the future) to an open ethnic conflict.

The national movements have survived in both republics, but are weakened and do not put forward political slogans today. Their organizational structure is changing, and the diasporas that are horizontally self-organizing through the Internet are becoming more and more involved. Many national-oriented activists are focused on grassroots work to preserve their native language, history and culture, improve their settlements, develop ethnic business projects, and try to stay in the shadows, realizing that attempts to politicize ethnicity can lead to repression. These networks have a great demand for re-federalization, return of republican sovereignty, direct elections of heads and preservation of national identity.

Latent internal interethnic conflicts neither disappear, nor fall into the strategic agenda, and the authorities postpone their solution. The Russians in Tatarstan support the trend towards unitarism, while ethnocentric Tatars and Dagestanis fear the loss of languages, culture and complete assimilation.

*“The stage that we can see now is not the dismantling of federalism, it is the process of destruction of national identity. Abdulatipov was a Trojan horse: he looks like a Dagestani, Muslim, Caucasian, but inside his filling is far from what the Caucasus is. And Vasiliev is already a doctor, he is still holding the stethoscope, but the scalpel is already in his pocket. We will be left with lubok nostalgic Caucasusness. They will leave the form but dilute the content.”<sup>260</sup>*

At the same time, federalism is still formally preserved in the institutions, and if conditions arise for its revival, it has a chance to recover. Experts believe that the movement towards democratization can lead to a period of instability, as after rigid centralization, the pendulum can again swing in the direction of ethnic separatism. But if the center remains strong, with positive trends in the development of the economy and social sphere in Russia, the mature federal relations can begin to form on the principle of “strong center-strong regions”.

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<sup>260</sup> Interview with a public figure, Makhachkala. May 2019.