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Bowring, Bill (2019) Minority language rights in the Russian Federation: the end of a long tradition? In: Hogan-Brun, G. and O'Rourke, B. (eds.) The Palgrave Handbook of Minority Languages and Communities. London, UK: Palgrave, pp. 73-99. ISBN 9781137540652.

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**Forthcoming in *Handbook of Minority Languages and Communities*
(Palgrave), edited by Gabrielle Hogan-Brun and Bernadette O'Rourke**

Minority Language Rights in the Russian Federation: The End of a Long Tradition?

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Introduction

This chapter cannot present an overview of a developed and stable contemporary Russian approach to minority language rights, even if that was the objective. The reason is that from 2016 there has been a very significant shift away from special status for “national”, ethnic, languages in the context of an asymmetric federation. While Russia has a developed hierarchy of norms, consisting of international obligations which are part of Russian law, the Constitution of the Russian Federation of 1993, and relevant legislation, the latest fundamental changes have been brought about without amendments to the Constitution or to the relevant legislation. In order to engage with the issues posed by the dramatic events of the last few years, I outline a history of the development of minority language rights.

First I present Russia’s unusual federative, ethnic and linguistic complexity. Second, I sketch developments in the Russian Empire and the USSR. Third, I trace the consequences of the collapse of the USSR and the “parade of sovereignties” of 1990 to 1992. Fourth, I introduce the Constitution of 1993 and its rather radical provisions. Fifth, I present the last report of the Advisory Committee for the Framework Convention for the Protection of Minority Rights (FCNM)² in 2012, a continuing process. Sixth, I engage with the beginning of the present era. President Putin has now been in power since 2000, 18 years, and is just commencing a further six years in office. Finally, I discuss the dramatic events of the past few years, and how matters stand at the time of writing.

Russia

The Russian Federation has an unusually complex structure. Since the annexation of Crimea in March 2014, it has now has 85 subjects (members) of the Federation, the most recent being

the Republic of Crimea (illegally annexed by Russia in 2014), and its capital, the city of Sevastopol, as a City of Federal Significance. There are 22 ethnic republics, each with the constitutional right to an official language in addition to Russian³. Russia's population is falling, currently around 140 million.⁴ In September 2017 the Economy Minister, Maksim Oreshkin, said that Russia's demographic situation is "one of the most difficult in the world"... "in the next five to six years we are going to lose approximately 800,000 working-age people from the demographic structure every year." (Balmforth, 2017)

Russia's ethnic and linguistic diversity is also impressive if not unique. In the first periodical report⁵ of the Russian Federation, dated 8 March 2000, to the Advisory Committee under the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM), a treaty which Russia ratified in August 1998 (Council of Europe 2000), Russia stated that, "The Russian Federation is one of the largest multinational states in the world, inhabited by more than 170 peoples, the total population being about 140 million." Russia also reported that, "The education in Russia's schools is now available in 38 languages... As many as 75 national languages are a part (including languages of national minorities) of the secondary schools curricula."

The annexation of Crimea means that there is one more "people," the Crimean Tatars (Bowring 2018). I return in my Conclusion to the latest engagement between Russia and the FCNM. Russia's Fourth State Report was received by the Council of Europe on 20 December 2016, and has been published.⁶ Publication by the Council of Europe was prefaced by the following:

The fourth state report submitted by the Russian Federation (ACFC/SR/IV(2016)006) has been made public by the Council of Europe Secretariat in accordance with Article 20 of Resolution (97)10 on the monitoring arrangements under Articles 24-26 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. The report has been prepared under the sole responsibility of the Russian Federation.

Being committed under the relevant Committee of Ministers decisions (e.g. CM/Del/Dec(2014)1196/1.8, CM/Del/Dec(2014)1207/1.5, CM/Del/Dec(2015)1225/1.8) to uphold the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, the Council of Europe does not recognise any alteration of status of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol.

Language and Education Policies in the Russian Empire and the USSR

There have been radical changes in language and education policy in the past two and a half centuries. During the Tsarist period (1721-1917), the Russian Empire's policy in relation to many linguistic minorities was harsh, despite the surprising degree of autonomy enjoyed by non-Russian ethnicities (Bowring 2015). For example, from 1876 to 1905, during the reign of the reformer Aleksandr II, noted for his abolition of serfdom in 1861 and the Great Legal Reforms of 1864, the publication of any literature in the Ukrainian language was forbidden, and the Polish language was expunged from academic institutions and from all official spheres. At the same time this harsh policy was tempered by the very large number of users of minority languages. For many of them, this was also a time of developing national self-consciousness (Alpatov 2014). Finns and Germans retained linguistic privileges, and the Volga Tatars, following the religious reforms of Catherine II in the 1780s, maintained their language along with their Muslim religion (Yemelianova 2007). I focus on the Tatars later in this chapter.

Despite the fact that in reality the USSR functioned as a state with strongly centralized power, under the control of the Communist Party with its principle of "democratic centralism," the formal, constitutional position was different—and quite different from the Tsarist empire. The USSR presented itself as a confederation, a union of sovereign republics with the right of secession; and the Russian Socialist Federation of Soviet Republics (RSFSR) as a unitary state with strong elements of territorial autonomy (Khazanov 1997). Of course, the ethnic populations which did not receive their "own" territory, especially the indigenous peoples of the north, lost out in this competition. The goal of leaders of the "titular" nationality in a particular territory was to preserve as much as possible of its ethnic character and territorial integrity. Dowley observed as follows:

Elites in the ethnic autonomous republics and national level republics were appointed to represent the ethnic group interests in the larger state, and thus, their natural political base of support was supposed to be the ethnic group. Other political appointments in these regions were made on the basis of ethnicity, a Soviet form of affirmative action for the formally, institutionally, recognised ethnic groups referred to in the early years of the Soviet Union as *korenizatsiya* or nativisation. (Dowley 1988, 363)

The chairmen of the Supreme Soviets of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, both of which aspired to the status of "union republics," were always members of the Presidium of the

Supreme Soviet of the USSR, along with those of the Union Republics—the only two “autonomous republics” so represented (Shaimiev 1996, 1).

After 1905 this policy to some extent was mitigated, but roused significant opposition from the ethnically orientated intelligentsia and opponents of Tsarist autocracy. The ideas of left liberals such as the Polish linguist Jan Baudouin de Courtenay (in Russian, Boduen de Kurtene) and revolutionaries such as Vladimir Lenin, were very close. In 1906 Boduen wrote that he preferred a form of the state in which “no one language should be considered the state language and compulsory for all educated citizens... Each citizen should have the right to engage with the central bodies of government in his own language. The task of such central bodies is to guarantee that translators in all languages should be found on the territory of the state” (Boduen-de-Kurtene, 1906). Lenin wrote in 1914: “Russian Marxists say that there must be no compulsory official language, that the population must be provided with schools where teaching will be carried on in all the local languages, that a fundamental law must be introduced in the constitution declaring invalid all privileges of any one nation and all violations of the rights of national minorities” (Lenin, 1914).

After the 1917 revolution these ideas began to come to life. Russia, according to Russian commentators, was the first country in the world in which minority rights to language were guaranteed (Alpatov, 2014). In February 1918 it was ordered that all local languages could be used in the courts. In the most bitter period of the civil war, in October 1918, the Narkomat (Peoples’ Commissariat) enacted a decree entitled, “On schools for national (ethnic) minorities.” At the same time the centralized production of literature began in a significant number of languages other than Russian.

In 1921 the X Congress of the Communist Party adopted a special resolution on national (ethnic) policy, which set out the task of translating into minority languages documents of the courts, administration, economic bodies, theatres and so on. However, achievements in the legal support for the functioning of languages was minimal.

After World War II the USSR became a state with one de facto official language: Russian. A new turn of the screw of Russification took place under Nikita Khrushchev, when in 1958 the law entitled, “On strengthening the connections between school and life,” was enacted, giving parents the right to choose the language of instruction for their children. Teaching in the native language in many schools of autonomous republics and oblasts of the RSFSR was initially terminated in the 4th year, or instruction was completely changed to the

Russian language, and the native language was treated as a subject to be taught rather than a language of instruction. In many regions the school system functioning in local languages was changed, above all in the territories of the RSFSR and such regions as Karelia, Marii El, Komi and others.

Significantly less literature in these languages was published and new mass media, radio and television, were for the most part in the Russian language (Zamyatin, 2012). In the succeeding decades the official ideology of the merging of the nations and peoples of the country in the framework of a united community, a Soviet people, and a sole common language for all, Russian, dominated. In many ethnic regions of contemporary Russia, the transition from local languages to the Russian language became stronger in the 1970s. The 1977-1978 Constitutions of the USSR and RSFSR preserved without change a quantity of legal regulation in the sphere of the official functioning of languages. At the same time the rights of the individual in the use of languages were broadened. These constitutional norms established the equality of citizens before the law independent of origin, race or ethnic belonging and so on, as well as of language (Article 34).

However, it should be noted that legal guarantees in the sphere of ethnic linguistic relations were strengthened, as before, only in the context of the rights of the citizen to education. Thus, for example, the following linguistic rights were established in the “Foundations of legislation of the USSR in union republics on peoples’ education”: freedom of choice of the language of instruction, the possibility of instruction in the native language, the choice of school with the corresponding language of instruction, equality in receiving education independent not only of the social situation, of racial and ethnic belonging, and so on, but also from language.

The list of languages of instruction, nonetheless, was not established by legislation at the union or republic level (Dorovskikh, 1996). The 1977 Constitution of the USSR did not define the legal status of a language. It contained no linguonym or other indication of the special status of the Russian language. Nonetheless, in the chapter, “The court and arbitrazh,” there was a hierarchy of languages, and special status for the Russian language with reducing status for languages of the union republics, autonomous republics, autonomous oblasts (regions which are subjects of the RSFSR) and autonomous okrugs (districts within subjects of the RSFSR). The special status of the Russian language was manifested in the heraldic symbols of the USSR. For example, “Proletarians of all Countries, Unite!” was written on the

state crest of the USSR in the Russian language at the centre and in bolder letters, and in the languages of the Union Republics at the edge.

The real language policy consigned native languages to the category of the languages of day-to-day communication, political decoration and folklore events. A particularly noteworthy change took place in the system of education. Native languages more and more began to be studied only as subjects (for example, Adigei, Ingush, Kabardino-Balkar, Karachaevo-Cherkess, Ossetian languages), or remained a language of instruction only to the third class in ethnic schools (Altai, Marii, Mordovian, Udmurt, Khakass, and the Komi languages).

If at the start of the 1960s instruction in the RSFSR was conducted in 47 languages, by 1982 this was reduced to 17 (Belikov, 2001). Vakhtin and Golovko evaluate the language policy of the Soviet period of the 1980s to 1990s in the following way: “In many senses the policy of Russification was successful: the proposed results were achieved” (Vakhtin and Golovko, 2004).

The results of the 1989 census confirm this view. According to this, 50% of Karelians, 30% of Bashkirs, Mordovians, Komi, Udmurts and others did not consider their ethnic language to be their mother tongue. From 1970 to 1985 the numbers of people who did not know their ethnic language among Buryats, Tatars, Marii, Yakutians and others grew twofold. Linguistic loyalty in the form of recognition as the language of one’s ethnos for the people of South Siberia was about 50% for Shors, 77% for Khakass and 85% for Altai.

However, if ethnic language use declined, the political strength of the “titular” ethnicity increased, and by the end of the 1970s, more than half of the professional cadre in half of the Union Republics and 11 of the 21 autonomous republics in the RSFSR were composed of members of the titular ethnic group. The social mobility of ethnic groups was higher than that of Russians. (Drobizheva, 1996, 2) As the Soviet Union weakened and finally collapsed, in December 1991, it is hardly surprising that the same leaders sought to turn symbolic authority into real power, and had a strong base for doing so.

The End of the USSR and the “Parade of Sovereignties”

The “parade of sovereignties” (Bowring, 2010) in the last years of the USSR, in which most of ethnic autonomies in the USSR declared their sovereignty and in several cases sought the status of a Union Republic, giving them the right to secede, enabled the Republic of Tatarstan

to emerge as the most autonomous subject of the Russian Federation, refusing to give up the status of its head as President. From 1996 there has also been the spectacular and paradoxical flourishing of National-Cultural Autonomy⁷, including NCAs of the Tatars living outside Tatarstan (Bowring, 2007). I return later in this chapter to the question of the Tatars, the most numerous minority in Russia and its former rulers.

The real threat of the transformation of Russia into a confederation provided the direct impetus for a draft Federative Treaty. On 31 March 1992 the RSFSR and most of the subjects signed the Federative Treaty, setting out a division of powers. The Treaty was incorporated into the 1978 Constitution of the RSFSR, going into effect on 10 December 1992. In the view of Umnova (1998, 63), Russia turned from a unitary state into a half-federation or quasi-federal state. She also considers that for the regions other than the ethnic republics, the Treaty “won” a status of autonomy similar to the regions of unitary decentralized states, such as Italy and Spain (both since the 1980s). I note later in this Chapter a comparison of Tatarstan with Catalonia. One of the most important guarantees of autonomy was the principle, to be found in Articles 84 of the Treaty and Article 84 (9) of the amended 1978 Constitution, that the territories of these formations could not be changed without their agreement.

It is notable that not all the subjects of the RSFSR agreed with the provisions of the Federative Treaty. Tatarstan’s Declaration of State Sovereignty of 30 August 1990⁸, declared that state sovereignty was the “realisation of the inalienable right of the Tatar nation, of all people of the republic to self-determination” (Tishkov, 1997, 56). President Shaimiev stressed the fact that the “people of Tatarstan” was not divided into ethnic groups (Shaimiev, 1996a). In a referendum of that time, no less than 62 percent of its population, Tatars and Russians, supported sovereignty. Tatarstan, like Chechnya, refused to sign the Federative Treaty in March 1992, but, unlike the Chechen leadership, whose intransigence led to armed conflict, Shaimiev entered into lengthy negotiations with the Russian government.

Neither Tatarstan nor the Chechen-Ingush Republic signed the Federative Treaty. On 21 March 1992 Tatarstan, despite the decision of the Russian Constitutional Court of 13 March 1992,⁹ held a referendum confirming the status of Tatarstan as an independent republic and subject of international law, with its own relations with the RF and other republics and also with foreign states on the basis of treaties and legal equality.¹⁰

Linguistic assimilation, which posed a real threat to the majority of languages of the peoples of the Soviet Union, became one of the causes of its collapse in 1991. This is

demonstrated by the fact that in almost all countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) the first laws to be enacted were laws on language, making the relevant languages state languages.

Russia was no exception. The law “On languages of the peoples of the RSFSR” was enacted in 1991, before the country’s Constitution of 1993. This was the result of the need to correct the errors made in state nationalities policy, and the regulation of questions of the state language of the country, on the one hand, and the creation of a legal mechanism for the protection of the languages of the peoples of Russia, on the other. A law “On education” was enacted in 1992. (Alpatov, 2000; Belikov and Krysin, 2001; Bowring, 2012; Vakhtin, 2001)

The RSFSR Law on Languages of 1991 defined the languages of the peoples of the RSFSR as a national achievement of the Russian state, a historical and cultural legacy, under the protection of the state. Languages were recognized as the most important element of culture and the foundation for the appearance of ethnic and personal self-consciousness.

Both Boris Yeltsin and Mintimer Shaimiev were democratically elected on 12 June 1991 - the former as the first president of the RSFSR, the latter as the first president of Tatarstan (Shaimiev, 1996a). One of the factors which precipitated the abortive putsch of August 1991 was the real threat of ethnic separatism. The putsch leaders, who were the leading officials of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, believed they were saving the Union.

The 1993 Constitution

The 1993 Constitution entrenched the fundamental principle of “the equality of the rights and freedoms of the person and the citizen independently of... race, ethnicity, language...,” and, developing this principle, directly forbade any form of “limitation of the rights of the citizen on grounds of social, racial, ethnic, religious or linguistic superiority” (Article 29). Article 26 provided that: “each person has the right to the use of their native language, and to the free choice of the language of communication, upbringing, instruction and creativity.” The Constitution also designated a single state language on the whole territory of the Russian Federation. The state language of Russia became the Russian language (Article 68[1]) – the language of the most numerous ethnic group in the country (about 80%), and one of the international languages of the world.

The realization of the constitutional principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples received its entrenchment in the linguistic sphere in Article 68(2), according to which the (ethnic) republics have the right to determine their own state languages. The Article further provides that these are used in the bodies of state power, the bodies of local government, and state institutions of the republic “side by side with the state language of the Russian Federation.” The Constitution also contained the collective linguistic rights of the other peoples of Russia. All peoples of the Russian Federation were guaranteed “the right to preservation of their native language, and to the creation of the conditions for its instruction and development.” (Article 68[3]). In all (ethnic) republics except Karelia, the corresponding “titular” languages received legislative status as state languages. There are 34 such languages in the Russian Federation. In some republics two or several languages received such a status. The greatest number of state languages is to be found in the Republic of Dagestan, in which there are 13 such languages. The enactment of language legislation in the Russian Federation from 1991 represented a genuine step forward. Only the provision in Article 3(6) of the 1991 Law “On languages,” forbidding the use of any alphabet other than Cyrillic for languages functioning in the Russian Federation, could be described as a violation of international law.

It is a problematic aspect of Russian language legislation that a wide range of rights of free choice and use of languages is declared, but their implementation is made difficult in practice by the absence of concrete regulations. Thus, for example, definitions of the rights to the use of their languages by the peoples of Russia is generally qualified in the following ways: “taking into account the local population” (Article 21), “in necessary cases” (Article 16), “in cases of necessity” (Article 15) and so on. This lack of definition is also maintained at the (ethnic) republic level of languages legislation, which influences practical activity in support of local languages in a negative way.

However, Baskakov referred to the “obviously political motivation of the Federal legislation on languages,” the aim of which “in the first instance was not so much the protection and development of languages, but rather the enhancement of the sovereignty of the ethnic subjects (republics) of the Federation, and the raising of the social and political status of their “titular” peoples”. (Baskakov, 2003) In 1998, a federal law “On amendments and corrections to the Law of the RSFSR ‘On languages of the peoples of the RSFSR’” was enacted. The changes concerned the formulations prescribing the use of the state languages of the (ethnic) republics, which were changed from mandatory requirements to formulations of a permissive character (Articles 12, 13, 16, 23).

Criticisms from the Council of Europe

Adoption of the Constitution in 1993 was followed, also under President Yeltsin, by accession to the Council of Europe in 1996 (Bowring 2013). Russia signed the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) on 28 February 1996, ratified it on 21 August 1998, and it entered into force on 1 December 1998. I referred above to Russia's First Report received on 8 March 2000. The Advisory Committee of the FCNM adopted its Second Report on 11 May 2006.¹¹ Russia's Third Report under the FCNM was received by the Council of Europe on 9 April 2010.¹² A delegation from the Advisory Committee visited Perm Krai, Tyumen and Moscow Oblasts, as well as the city of Moscow, from 12 to 16 September 2011. In its Third Opinion on the Russian Federation, adopted on 24 November 2011, and published on 25 July 2012¹³, the Advisory Committee (AC) of the FCNM commented (para 12) that

Since the previous monitoring cycle, there has been no substantial legislative progress in the area of minority protection at federal level. Amendments to the federal education law could lead to fewer opportunities for minority language education. Existing guarantees contained in various federal laws related to, *inter alia*, minority media, education in and of minority languages, or the use of minority languages, continue to be in need of laws as well as relevant mechanisms at regional level to guarantee their effective implementation. This leaves considerable discretion to the regional authorities and results in different levels of protection at regional level, due to sometimes considerable differences between the various legislative acts in force in the subjects of the Federation.

The AC added:

However, few opportunities exist for access to secondary education in minority languages and the right to take the state examination in a minority language was removed in 2009. Federal legislative provisions concerning minority language education are too broad and often not effectively implemented at local level and there are no guarantees regarding weekly hours of minority language classes or quality standards in the curriculum. Moreover, the ongoing process of "optimisation" of schools has resulted in the closure of various schools with instruction in and of minority languages, even where parents have requested minority language education.

There were detailed critical comments in respect of Article 10 of the Framework Convention, “Use of minority languages in private and in public” (pages 38-40), and the AC reiterated “... its strong recommendation to the Russian authorities to ensure that the rights contained in Article 10 of the Framework Convention are guaranteed and implemented effectively in all regions.”

Russia’s response¹⁴ was (p.3) that “... it should be noted that in most subjects of the Russian Federation the regional authorities pay close attention to these issues, and the existing approaches to the issue of instruction in languages of national minorities are continuously improved.”, and (p.6) “According to the 2010 census, an overall number of languages and dialects used in Russia amounts to 277, with 89 languages used in children's education, 39 of which are used for teaching and 50 are studied as school subjects...”.

On 20 December 2016 the AC received Russia’s Fourth Cycle Report, which had been due in December 2014. In its previous Reports, the AC had called on Russia to ratify the European Languages Charter, and Russia responded:

In accordance with Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 90-pp of 22 February 2001, the Russian Federation signed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages on 10 May 2001 and has considered the possibility to ratify it until now.

In order to assess the possibility of implementation of the Charter in the Russian conditions, the joint project “National Minorities in Russia: Development of Languages, Culture, Media and Civil Society” was implemented during 2009-2011 in cooperation with the Council of Europe and the European Commission.

I was myself an Expert in this project, which cost nearly €3 million, and wrote papers and took part in numerous meetings in Moscow and Strasbourg. But Russia is no closer to ratification, and some Russian experts considered that even recognition for the purposes of the Charter of languages other than Russian could pose an existential threat to the integrity of the Russian Federation.

And it is certain that the issues discussed in this chapter of the future and even survival of minority languages in Russia will be the subject of anxious examination by the

AC. On 16-24 October 2017 a delegation of the Advisory Committee visited Tyumen, Kazan, Krasnodar, Moscow and Murmansk to evaluate progress made in the monitoring of the protection of national minorities in the Russian Federation. This was the fourth visit made by the Advisory Committee to the Russian Federation.¹⁵

Developments under President Putin

Following his election in 2000 President Putin on several occasions declared his strong opposition to the bilateral treaties and his determination to bring them to an end. From 2000 on Putin used administrative and judicial pressure to keep politically inconvenient governors and other leaders from seeking reelection. Hashim adds: “Only a few defiant regional leaders, like Republican presidents of donor and ethnic regions such as Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, have maintained sufficient autonomy in spite of increased federal intervention in order to strengthen the power *vertikal*” (Hashim, 2005).

On 19 December 2012 President Putin signed Decree No. 1666 confirming the new “Strategy of State National¹⁶ Policy for the Period to 2025” (hereinafter, the Strategy). The Strategy replaced the “Concept of State National Policy” confirmed by President Yeltsin’s Decree No. 909 of 15 June 1999. On 20 August 2013, by Order No. 718, the Russian Government confirmed the Federal Strategic Programme “Strengthening the unity of the *Rossian* Nation and the Ethnocultural Development of the Peoples of Russia (2014-2020)”, intended to implement the Strategy.¹⁷

Further insight into government strategy was given by President Putin’s introductory remarks to the meeting of the Presidential Council on Interethnic Relations on 19 February 2013. He insisted that the main task of nationality policy must be to “strengthen harmony and accord” among Russian citizens, so that they will see themselves as “citizens of a single country”.¹⁸ He outlined five key concepts of the new policy, the first of which was that the Russian language is “the fundamental basis of the unity of the country”. This was anathema to the leaders of Russia’s ethnic and linguistic minorities, and their entrenched territorial autonomies.

On 1 September 2013 the 1992 law “On Education” was repealed and replaced by the 2012 law “On education in the Russian Federation.” This continued a trend established in amendments of 2007 to reduce the ethnic component in education, with the abolition of the “national cultural component” and the recentralization and standardization of education

(Prina, 2011). Article 14 stipulates that education is guaranteed in the state language of the Federation, Russian, while the right to choose the language of instruction is provided “within the opportunities offered by the education system.” The same article states that, in schools situated in the (ethnic) republics, the teaching of and instruction in the state languages of the republics “*can* be introduced”; this, however, must be “in accordance with the federal state education standards,” and “should not be to the detriment of the teaching and learning of the state language of the Russian Federation” (Prina, 2015).

The Ministry of Regional Development, founded just ten years earlier on 13 September 2004, was dissolved on 8 September 2014 by decree of President Putin, and announcing the dissolution,¹⁹ Prime Minister Dimitri Medvedev said that its functions with respect to economic development, construction, and culture were to be distributed between three ministries: the Economic Development Ministry, the Ministry of Construction, Housing and Utilities, and the Culture Ministry.²⁰ This plainly did not work.

On 31 March 2015, by the President’s Decree No.168, a new Federal Agency was created (Bowring, 2017), the Federal Agency for Affairs of Nationalities²¹ (hereinafter, FADN), with the function of realizing state national (ethnic) policy and the implementation of state and federal special purpose (*tselevikh*) programmes in the sphere of interethnic relations.²² The retired Colonel of the FSB and former soldier Igor Vyacheslavovich Barinov (of whom more below) was appointed Head of FADN. FADN’s remit includes “Taking measures directed to the strengthening of the unity of the multiethnic people of the Russian Federation (the *Rossian* nation), securing interethnic agreement, the ethnocultural development of the peoples of the Russian Federation, protection of the rights of national minorities and indigenous small in number peoples of the Russian Federation. Functions were transferred to the new agency from the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Barinov²³, who is relatively young (49 years old, born on 22 May 1968) has an unusual background for such an important appointment. He graduated first in 1990 from the Novosibirsk Higher Military and Political All-Services College (VVKOU), then in 2003 from the Academy of the FSB, and finally from the Academy of the Economy and State Service in 2011. He is a retired Colonel of the FSB (the former KGB). His military career was as follows. From 1990 to 1992 he served in the Parachute Division in Vitebsk, in Belarus, and from 1993 in the Regional Section of the Spetsnaz (Galeotti 2015) Forces (Group Alpha) of the regional FSB for Sverdlovsk Oblast and rose to be the commander of the regional group.

He fought in the internal armed conflict in North Ossetia and Chechnya, and was wounded three times.

On 2 April 2015 he was featured in an article in *Vzglyad*, entitled “I know the Caucasus quite well, its traditions, and elites”.²⁴ That was, indeed the limit of his knowledge of and engagement with Russia’s vast territory and at least 130 minorities—military service in North Ossetia and Chechnya.

On 30 July 2015 Colonel Barinov gave an interview to the daily *Kommersant*.²⁵ He told the reporters that his first task was to create a system of monitoring of the interethnic situation in the regions of Russia. He emphasized that he proposed to view ethnic policy from the point of view of securing national security. More controversially, he insisted that the ‘Russian question’ could unify the country, if what was meant was the totality of the Russian language, Russian culture, and the role of the Russian (*Russkiy*) people (not, it should be noted, the *Rossian*, *Rossiiskiy*, people), in the history of the country.

These developments were summed up by President Vladimir Putin in his address to the Joint Session of the Council for Inter-ethnic Relations and the Council for the Russian Language on 19 May 2015 at the Kremlin²⁶. The discussion that followed Putin’s introduction highlighted the tensions created by the new policies. Pyotr Tultaev of the Association of Finno-Ugric peoples of Russia pointed to the severe lack of textbooks and failure to prepare teachers for ethnic languages. Mikhail Khubutiya of the Georgian National Cultural Autonomy used stronger language, asking why schools with an ethnocultural component were being abolished. Ethnic culture was disappearing. Ildar Gilmutdinov of the Tatar National Cultural Autonomy also expressed alarm. Despite the fact that there are 5.5 million Tatars in Russia, 2 million live in Tatarstan, and 3.5 million in other regions of Russia. There are textbooks for Tatar language for primary schools, but no textbooks at all for years 5 to 9. How then, he asked, can the Tatar language be taught in Ulyanovsk Oblast or Mordovia? Furthermore, no teachers were being trained to teach national languages; he gave as an example the Moscow State Pedagogical University, which previously had trained teachers in Tatar language and literature. At the same time, standards of Russian language in Tatarstan were constantly rising²⁷.

The development of language policy has resulted in a number of measures, including some which promise improvement in the legislation on the use of languages of different status. One of these measures was the task of carrying out annual monitoring of the state and

development of the languages of Russia. The results of the 2015 monitoring confirmed a decrease by 1.6 times (238,900 people) of the number of children taught at school in their mother tongues compared with 2007. According to these statistics, in the 2014-2015 academic year, only 24 state languages of the republics of Russia were used as languages of instruction, and 73 languages of the peoples of Russia were taught as a subject²⁸.

On 29 August 2016 it was announced that FADN had drafted a new state programme “Realisation of state ethnic policy for the period 2017-2025”, costing some 40 billion roubles.²⁹ This would amend the existing Federal targeted programme so as to strengthen the *Rossiiskiy* nation – civic Russian nation.

The Case of the Volga Tatars

The Volga Tatars are the most numerous minority in Russia, some 5.5 million strong, with their own Republic, Tatarstan. They have proved to be remarkably resilient. As the Golden Horde, they ruled what is now Russia for nearly 250 years from 1237, leaving many indelible legacies in the Russian language. (Figes, 2002) As a result of the departure of the Golden Horde at the Great Stand on the Ugra River in 1480, and the conquest of the khanate of Kazan by Ivan IV in 1552, the Volga Tatars were subjected to Moscow; and in 1783 Crimea was annexed by the Russian Empire, and the long tragedy of the Crimean Tatars began.

However, in 1787 Catherine II ordered the printing of the Qu’ran and started the process of bringing Russian Islam into the orbit of the State in Ufa in 1788. (Crews, 2006) Somehow the Tatar language and Muslim religion survived the changing policies of the Empire, and the Volga Tatars achieved autonomy in the USSR. The “parade of sovereignties” in the last years of the USSR enabled the Republic of Tatarstan to emerge as the most autonomous subject of the Russian Federation, refusing to give up the status of its head as President.

On 15 December 2015 the State Council of Tatarstan considered the conception of language education which had been drafted by specialists of the Russian Academy of Science and the Pushkin Institute of the Russian Language.³⁰ Particular dissatisfaction was aroused by points concerning teaching of the Russian language in schools of the ethnic republics. In yet another turn of events, Tatarstan had been obliged by 1 January 2016 to cease calling its head ‘president’, but faced with strong protests, President Putin appeared, in his press conference of 17 December 2015, to have retreated.³¹

On 17 January 2017 the All-Tatar Public Centre (VTOTs) called on the Tatar legislature and political movements to save the Tatar language, and to retain in Tatarstan just one state language – Tatar. VTOTs is the oldest Tatar public organisation, which came into being at the peak of perestroika, at the end of 1988. Its founding conference was held in February 1989. Its main goal at that time, as well as the rebirth and development of the Tatar language, was the proclamation of Tatarstan as a Union Republic, with the right to secede from the USSR. On the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 the Union Republics (Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova etc) became independent states. Tatarstan did not.³²

The declaration was published in the national opposition newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, and widely reported in local and national media.³³ VTOTs declared that in Tatarstan there are fewer and fewer Tatars who are able to read books and newspapers in Tatar and express their thoughts in their native language. It recalled that 25 years ago the Constitution of Tatarstan consolidated two state languages with equal status in the Republic – Russian and Tatar. However, in fact there is presently only one state language – Russian. In all these years the State Council of Tatarstan has not been able to hold even one session in the Tatar language, and in the Kazan City Duma the previous simultaneous translation has ceased. According to the declaration, 699 Tatar schools have closed in Tatarstan, and 4000 in Russia, and Tatar faculties have closed in two higher education institutions. It continued: “Is this proposal radical? Perhaps there is another proposal for saving the Tatar language? Is real bilingualism possible in Tatarstan? Let’s think about it!”³⁴

On 31 January 2017 the young political scientist Ildar Garifullin of the Institute of History of the Academy of Science on Tatarstan wrote under the heading: “The last guarantee: how the treaty between Tatarstan and Russia has lost its real substance.”³⁵ According to him it was necessary to look closely not only at the declaration but also at its context. As the VTOTs representatives themselves had admitted, surrounding this question was the fact that in 2017 the treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Tatarstan was to run out. This document, along with the post of President of Tatarstan, is the last “splinter” of the epoch of the “parade of sovereignties” of 1990-91, already so long ago. The existence of this status documents decides very little, as experience has shown. Although the treaty exists de jure, de facto Tatarstan and its rights and possibilities differs very little from other regions of Russia. His conclusion is that the main problem is that in the 1990s there was a powerful national movement, which was ready not only to ensure the legitimacy

of the republic itself, but also its special status. Now there is no such movement, Garifullin considered.

As if to make Garifullin's point for him, on 5 February 2017, Ildar Gilmutdinov, who represented Tatarstan in the State Duma of the Russian Federation, took it upon himself to explain the essence of the proposed law on the *Rossiiskaya* nation.³⁶ Gilmutdinov has a Soviet background in the Komsomol, has been a member of the Duma since 2003, is a member of President Putin's Party, United Russia, and is Chairman, of the Duma Committees on Affairs of Nationalities and of the Accounts Commission.³⁷ He said "I want everyone to calm down. There is no direct decree on creating a unified nation or enacting a federal law on that. Simply the President proposed preparing a "normative" on the unity of the people, on preservation of the culture and the languages of the peoples, living in one country. Now a working group is working on it, and the results will only appear in the summer. But the "normative" does not propose the merger of all peoples into one nation. Here the emphasis is on the formation of a united political nation with the goals of development and strengthening of the country."

Religion has also become an issue. A report published in February 2018 by the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology in Moscow entitled *Ethnic and Linguistic Diversity of Russia*³⁸ states that while indigenous Muslim nationalities formed 10.4 % of the population of the Russian Federation in 2010, a fraction that may increase to 14.5 % in 2030 – a rise of almost 50 %. The increase will come from the continuing rapid growth of Muslim nations in the North Caucasus rather than from Tatars and Bashkirs whose populations, like those of ethnic Russians, are falling.³⁹ Paul Goble points out that these figures do not include Muslim gastarbeiters from Central Asia and the southern Caucasus. According to some estimates there may be as many as eight million of them, a figure that if true would add nearly five percent to the Muslim total -- and thus they significantly understate the share of Muslims in the Russian population now and a decade from now.⁴⁰

As an indication of what is taking place, on 5 February 2017 Ildar Gilmutdinov expressed his strong opinion on an increasingly controversial issue in Russia, the wearing of the hijab, or head-scarf, by school and higher education students.⁴¹ He told *tatar-inform* that today each region of Russia determines for itself the standards for school uniform. If one speaks of school students who wear the hijab, then this is not a tradition of the Tatar people, in his opinion.

I already spoke of this previously. Maybe I will be criticised, but for me girls should tie on a Tatar scarf and wear a closed dress. Tatars never wore a hijab.

The issue came to a head when in the neighbouring Republic of Mordovia, girls in the Tatar village of Belozeriye⁴² were forbidden to wear hijabs, and on 24 January 2016 Olga Vasilieva, the Russian Federation Minister of Education and Science, intervened to say that the question had been definitively decided by the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation, banning the wearing of the hijab.⁴³ This met with angry responses from the Head of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, and the Mufti of Chechnya, Khadzhi Mezhiev, who the following day described it as discrimination.⁴⁴ The national news aggregator *newsru.com* pointed out on 26 January 2016 that the Constitutional Court had never rendered such a decision.

The End of Language Rights?

On 20 July 2017 President Putin held another meeting of the Council on Interethnic Relations in Yoshkar-Ola, the capital of the Republic of Mari El.⁴⁵ The most controversial element of his address was his declaration that all non-Russians must learn Russian, but that no ethnic Russian must be compelled to learn the language of a republic even if he or she lives in a non-Russian republic – one of the ethnic republics.⁴⁶ Mr Putin declared that

“[t]he Russian language for us is the state language, the language of inter-ethnic communication, and it cannot be replaced by anything else. It is the natural spiritual skeleton of all our multi-national country. Everyone must know it ... The languages of the peoples of Russia are also an inalienable aspect of the unique culture of the peoples of Russia.”

However, these non-Russian languages are only the languages of the peoples who bear them, so that studying them is “a right guaranteed by the constitution” but it is “a voluntary right,” not an obligatory one. “To force someone to study a language which is not his native tongue is impermissible.... [it is] just as impermissible as reducing the level of instruction in Russia. I call on the heads of the regions of the Russian Federation to devote particular attention to this.”⁴⁷

This dramatic announcement was greeted with enthusiasm by Russian nationalists⁴⁸. Equally, Russian ethnic minority media reacted with alarm.⁴⁹

I mentioned above the special treaty status with the Federation which Tatarstan enjoyed from 1994, with its own laws, tax rules and citizenship privileges. Tatarstan kept control over its resources and budget, and could even participate in international affairs. However, on 24 July 2017 Tatarstan's agreement with the Federation expired, and with it the remains of its special status.⁵⁰ On 23 August 2017 Professor Midkhat Farukshin, a leading Tatar intellectual, warned that the Kremlin would use the end of the agreement as an occasion to launch a broad new attack on the Tatar language and culture.⁵¹

On 8 October 2017 Colonel Barinov visited Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan, and took part in the youth forum "Gold of the Turks".⁵² In conversation with the correspondent of "Tatar-Info", he spoke about the perspectives for developing a programme for the support and development of ethnic diversity in the Russian Federation. In his words, the key factor here was language.

However, President Putin had already, on 31 August 2017, following his speech in Yoshkar-Ola on 20 July 2017, ordered a check by prosecutors on continuing compulsory education in the languages other than Russian which are the second official languages of the ethnic republics.⁵³ On 29 November 2017 the Prosecutor-General of Tatarstan, Ildus Nafikov, said children in Tatarstan's schools will study Tatar for two hours a week on an optional basis and with written parental consent. This contradicted the statement made by the President of Tatarstan, Rustam Minnikhanov, who had said on 8 November 2017 that Tatar language classes would remain mandatory but be scaled back from six hours to two hours per week. Minnikhanov said at the time that the federal authorities in Moscow had agreed with the plan.

The change was certain to alarm supporters of the Tatar language who warned that it would violate the republic's constitution, discourage learning of the language of the indigenous ethnic group, and undermine Tatarstan's cultural identity.

On 21 September 2017 the North Caucasus expert Ramazan Alpaut asked whether the prosecutors would come for the Chechen or Ossetian languages (Alpaut 2017). He warned that after Bashkortostan and Tatarstan it might be the turn of the North Caucasus. He noted that the Caucasian republics also have their own state languages. In this sense, North Ossetia, Ingushetia and Chechnya are the most interesting. In North Ossetia the prosecutors had

already “come” for the Ossetian language. Alpaut concluded by observing that the North Caucasus is witnessing a reduction in the number of speakers of regional languages.

A commentator, referring to Tatarstan as Russia’s Catalonia (Galeev, 2018), argued that:

While the republic’s secular institutions have totally capitulated before the will of Moscow, religious authorities have tried to compensate for their failure, insisting on the wider use of national language, opening free courses of Tatar language and culture in mosques and switching all the preaching in Tatarstan mosques from Russian to the Tatar language⁵⁴. Samigullin, the Mutfi, published a declaration⁵⁵ saying that “Islam as it had been in the hardest times for Tatar people again has to defend the Tatar language...even though the religion is separate from the state it lives in the soul of our people.” He added, “Words pronounced from the mosques’ minbars have more power than those said from political tribunes.” The muftii’s stubborn persistence reflects one of the main myths of Tatar national history — according to legend, the defense of Kazan during its siege by the Russians in 1552 was organized by imam Kul-Sharif (and not the political leader, the khan, who surrendered to the enemy). The republic’s main mosque in Kazan Kremlin is named after the imam. Now, as in the past, religious leaders may take initiative when the political ones fail to do so.

Conclusion

It is much too early to say what consequences will follow from Mr Putin’s July 2017 and his August 2017 instruction to the prosecutors. It was a surprise to many commentators that the Tatar and Bashkir authorities acceded so swiftly and without protest to the new linguistic dispensation. The mass movement for the sovereignty of Tatarstan has significantly receded. It may well be that the Tatar language is fighting a losing battle (Kashin, 2017). But it is plain that the question of religious observance, including the wearing of the hijab in schools, has now become more significant than issues concerning culture, language and traditional Tatar dress. On such matters the Volga Tatars are in the front line.

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¹ I am indebted to Tamara Borgoyakova, of the Khakas State University, Abakan, Russia, Institute of Humanities and Sayano-Altay Turkology, for many of the Russian language references below, which appeared in our joint publication “Language Policy and Language Education in Russia”, Chapter 25 in the Encyclopedia of Law and Language, Springer International Publishing AG; and to Mustafa Tuna and Michael Newcity of Duke University for inviting me with Sophie Roche of Heidelberg University to participate in the seminar “Preserving Culture at the Fringes in Authoritarian States” at Duke University on 15 February 2017, where a version of this chapter was presented, and a rich discussion ensued.

² See the chapter “Minority language rights and standards: definitions and applications at the supra-national level” in this collection.

³ Constitution of the Russian Federation, 1993: Article 68 - <http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-04.htm>

1. The Russian language shall be a state language on the whole territory of the Russian Federation.

2. The Republics shall have the right to establish their own state languages. In the bodies of state authority and local self-government, state institutions of the Republics they shall be used together with the state language of the Russian Federation.

3. The Russian Federation shall guarantee to all of its peoples the right to preserve their native language and to create conditions for its study and development.

⁴ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rs.html>

Ethnic groups: Russian 77.7%, Tatar 3.7%, Ukrainian 1.4%, Bashkir 1.1%, Chuvash 1%, Chechen 1%, other 10.2%, unspecified 3.9%: nearly 200 national and/or ethnic groups were represented in Russia's 2010 census (2010 est.).

Languages: Russian (official) 85.7%, Tatar 3.2%, Chechen 1%, other 10.1%: data represent native language spoken (2010 est.).

⁵ “States are required to submit a report containing full information on legislative and other measures taken to comply with the principles of the Framework Convention within one year of the entry into force”

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/fcnm-factsheet>

⁶ ACFC/SR/IV(2016)006, at <http://rm.coe.int/doc/09000016806fd935>

⁷ See the chapter by Federica Prina, David Smith, Judit Molnar Sansum, “National Cultural Autonomy and Linguistic Rights in Central and Eastern Europe”, in this volume.

⁸ This still appears on the official web-site of Tatarstan: <http://1997-2011.tatarstan.ru/english/00002028.html>

⁹ Vestnik of the Constitutional Court of the RF 1993 No. 1, 40–52.

¹⁰ <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/22/world/tatars-vote-on-a-referendum-all-agree-is-confusing.html>

¹¹ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/russian-federation>

¹²

<http://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168008b7c>

³
¹³

<http://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168008c6a>

⁶
¹⁴

<http://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168008fa2>

⁹

¹⁵ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/-/russian-federation-fourth-cycle-delegation-visit>

¹⁶ By ‘national’ is meant ‘ethnic’, and the two words are used interchangeably in Russian.

¹⁷ <http://government.ru/media/files/41d4862001ad2a4e5359.pdf>

¹⁸ “Putin on Russian (*Rossiiskiy*) identity and Russian language”, at

<http://www.odnako.org/blogs/putin-o-rossiyskoy-identichnosti-i-russkom-yazike/>

¹⁹ See his meeting with President Putin at <<http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46572>>, and his meeting with the government at <<http://government.ru/news/14661/>>.

²⁰ “Putin liquidates Regional Development Ministry”, at <http://en.itar-tass.com/russia/748551>

²¹ <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2778421>

²² <http://fadn.gov.ru/>

²³ Short biography: “What is Igor Baranov famous for?” at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2699714>

²⁴ <http://vz.ru/politics/2015/4/2/737777.html>

²⁵ <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2778226>

²⁶ Putin, V. (2015) Address to the Joint Session of the Council for Inter-ethnic Relations and the Council for the Russian Language. Transcript at <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/49491> (accessed on 27 July 2016). Videos of Putin’s address and concluding remarks are also to be found at this address.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ On monitoring (2015). Ob osuschestvlenii monitoring sostoyaniya i razvitiya jazykov narodov Rossii. (On monitoring of the state and development of the languages of peoples of Russia). http://www.school58.edu.27.ru/files/documents/430_ob_osuschestvlenii_monitoringa_sostoyaniya_i_razvitiye_jazykov_narodov_rf_porucheniya_prezidenta_rf_ot_4_iyulya_2015_g_pr_1310.pdf. Accessed on 25 July 2016.

²⁹ <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3075511>

³⁰ “Are the Tatar Authorities against the Linguistic Unity of Russia?”, at

<http://posredi.ru/vlasti-tatarstana-protiv-yazykovogo-edinstva-rossii.html> , and

<http://www.evening-kazan.ru/articles/vlasti-tatarstana-grozyat-moskve-cto-russkiy-yazyk-do-ploshchadey-dovedet.html>

³¹ <http://nazaccent.ru/content/18774-putin-pozvolil-tatarstanu-samostoyatelno-reshit-vopros.html>

³² <http://www.idelreal.org/a/28262902.html>

³³ <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/news/2017/01/17/128181-tatarskiy-yazyk-predlagayut-sdelat-edinstvennym-gosudarstvennym-yazykom-tatarstana>; and see <http://inkazan.ru/2017/01/17/vtots-predlozhi-ostavit-odin-gosudarstvennyj-yazyk-v-tatarstane-tatarskij/>; <http://www.vz.ru/opinions/2017/1/19/854028.html>; <http://simcat.ru/news/32173>; <http://prokazan.ru/news/view/115072>; <http://v-chelny.ru/online/tatarskij-yazyk-predlozhili-sdelat-edinstvennym-gosudarstvennym-yazykom-tat/>

³⁴ <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3195058>

³⁵ <http://www.idelreal.org/a/28262902.html> ; see also Paul Goble “Fate of All Non-Russians Rests on Future of Moscow-Kazan Federative Treaty, Analyst Says” at

<http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.co.uk/2017/01/fate-of-all-non-russians-rests-on.html>

³⁶ <http://zpravda.ru/novosti/item/29625-ildar-gilmutdinov-ob-yasnil-sut-zakona-o-rossiyskoy-natsii.html>

³⁷ <http://www.duma.gov.ru/structure/deputies/131481/>

³⁸ <http://nazaccent.ru/content/26537-izdana-monografiya-ob-etnicheskom-i-religioznom.html>

³⁹ <http://nazaccent.ru/content/26570-uchenye-k-2025-godu-nency-vyjdut.html>

⁴⁰ <http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.co.uk/2018/02/muslim-share-of-russian-population-will.html>

⁴¹ <http://www.tatar-inform.ru/news/2017/02/05/538178/>

⁴² According to press reports Belozeriye has become known as the “Mordovian Califate”, and is said to be under the control of the FSB

⁴³ <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/news/335249>

⁴⁴ <https://lenta.ru/news/2017/01/25/mordovia/>

⁴⁵ <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55109>; in English <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55109>

⁴⁶ <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/352146>, and

⁴⁷ <http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.co.uk/2017/07/putin-non-russians-must-learn-russian.html>

⁴⁸ politikus.ru/v-rossii/print:page,1,97010-putin-ukazal-na-nedopustimost-sokrascheniya-chasov-izucheniya-russkogo-yazyka-v-respublikah-rf.html; idelreal.org/a/28630266.html;

ruskline.ru/news_rl/2017/07/21/polozhitelnye_podvizhki_v_nacionalnoj_politike_sovpadenie_ili_tolko_nachalo/; stoletie.ru/na_pervuiu_polosu/putin_russkij_jazyk_nichem_zamenit_nelza_998.htm. (Thanks to Paul Goble for these links).

⁴⁹ turantoday.com/2017/07/russia-republics-indigenous-languages.html; idelreal.org/a/sotsseti-o-viskazivanii-putina-pro-russkiy-yazik/28630274.html; idelreal.org/a/reaction-tatarstana-na-slova-putina-o-russkom-yazike/28630471.html. (Thanks to Paul Goble for these links).

⁵⁰ “Tatarstan, the Last Region to Lose Its Special Status Under Putin: Kazan looks on as a deal granting it special status expires” *Moscow Times* 25 July 2017 at

<https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/tatarstan-special-status-expires-58483>

⁵¹ <https://www.idelreal.org/a/midkhat-farukshin-dogovor-tatarstan-rossiya/28692206.html>

⁵² <http://www.tatar-inform.ru/news/2017/10/08/576494/>

⁵³ <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/news/356052>. The instruction was published on the Kremlin web-site: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/assignments/orders/55464>. And see Paul Goble at <http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.co.uk/2017/08/is-putin-attacking-non-russian.html>

⁵⁴ <https://realnoevremya.ru/news/48409>

⁵⁵ <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3447795>