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Finno-Ugric Republics and Their State Languages: Balancing Powers in Constitutional Order in the Early 1990s

Most of Russia's national republics established titular and Russian as co-official state languages in their constitutions of the early 1990s. There is no consensus on the reasons and consequences of this act, whether it should be seen as a mere symbolic gesture, a measure to ensure a language revival, an instrument in political debate or an ethnic institution. From an institutional and comparative perspective, this study explores the constitutional systems of the Finno-Ugric republics and demonstrates that across the republics, the official status of the state languages was among the few references to ethnicity built into their constitutions. However, only in the case of language requirements for the top officials, its inclusion could be interpreted as an attempt at instrumentally using ethnicity for political ends. Otherwise, constitutional recognition of the state languages should be rather understood as an element of institutionalized ethnicity that remains a potential resource for political mobilization. This latter circumstance might clarify why federal authorities could see an obstacle for their Russian nation-building agenda in the official status of languages.

I. Introduction

The period of social transformations of the late 1980s and early 1990s in Eastern Europe was characterized by countries' transition from the communist administrative–command systems towards the representative democracy and market economy. One important driving force of change in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was the rise of popular movements out of national resentment and dissatisfaction with the state-of-the-art in the sphere of inter-ethnic relations. Ethnic mobilization led to the formation of national movements in its Union and Autonomous Republics that accumulated popular appeal concerning the problem of a language shift to the Russian language and ethnic assimilation of non-Russians and sought a higher political status for their *titular peoples* and *titular republics* (each republic was *titled* after “its own” ethnic group that was referred to as *titular people* and its language as a *titular language*). Activities of national movements contributed to dissolution of the USSR and resulted in the emergence of new independent states on the basis of the Union Republics (SSRs). The centrifugal processes extended to the further layers of the Soviet *matrěška*-like federal system and took the form of regional separatism in the Autonomous Republics (ASSRs) of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR).

The leadership of national movements both in SSRs and ASSRs envisaged a *national revival* as a solution for national problems. On the peak of the popular involvement in public affairs in the late 1980s, one after another the SSRs started to

adopt the declarations of state sovereignty, proclaiming supremacy of their laws over the Union ones, and finished with the declarations of independence. An important step in the dissolution of the USSR was the adoption of the RSFSR's Declaration of State Sovereignty by the First Russian Deputies Congress (12 June 1990). The ASSRs joined the process that was later named the *parade of sovereignties* and adopted their sovereignty declarations somewhat later – since August 1990, after Russian President Boris Yeltsin inspired them to do so in hope to gain their support in the face of Union authorities. Researchers have explained the *sovereignization* in most ASSRs not as an actual attempt of breaking away but as a way to ensure more regional powers vis-à-vis the central authorities. In December 1990 the term *autonomous* before *republics* was also dropped from the RSFSR constitution, recognizing their new political status. The Russian authorities agreed with the federalization as a mechanism of balancing the political regime and recognized wide proxies of republican authorities, i.e., in linguistic and cultural issues (see Zamyatin 2013a: 126–129).

Status planning as a device of language policy implies designation of a certain language or languages with an official status and ensures exclusive use of that language(s) in the public sphere. In the Soviet Union, due to the proclaimed equality of languages, a formal status planning of languages was practically absent. Under the pressure of national movements and after the adoption of language laws by some Union Republics, the “advisability” of the designation of state languages was recognized by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) at its 19th party conference in September 1989 and was shaped into the Union law (USSR Language Law of 24 April 1990). By spring 1990, most SSRs already designated state languages in their language laws. Moreover, since August 1990, some ASSRs also designated the state languages in their sovereignty declarations. Status planning was ideologically proclaimed both in the SSRs and ASSRs as a measure for achieving the *language revival*. In the striving to preserve the integrity of the country, the RSFSR authorities initially abstained from addressing the language issue and designated Russian as the state language much later (RSFSR Language Law of 25 October 1991).

The legitimation of the former ASSRs that were re-established as the *constituent republics of Russia* was carried out in the Federation Treaty (31 March 1992) that was appended to the RSFSR constitution (12 April 1978), which was still in force and even became the basic law of the country after the disintegration of the USSR in December 1991. The new Russian constitution (12 December 1993) reproduced the recent designation of Russian as a state language and the Soviet legacy of ethnic federalism as the principle design of center–periphery relations, when some regions were titled after their autochthonous national groups. Among the ethnically defined regions, only the constituent republics were recognized as a form of national statehood. The constitution recognized the right of the republics to have their constitutions and establish their state languages (see Zamyatin 2013a: 129–133). What determined such a visible role given in the new political system to state languages?

While many scholars agree on the importance of regional separatism as a force that contributed to the collapse of the USSR, there is no consensus to what extent

the latter was a consequence of activities of mass popular movements and to what extent elites' activities were crucial for it. Some scholars emphasize the central role of the fragmentation and division of the elites for dissolution of the USSR (Lane & Ross 1999: 6). Among both Russian and international scholars studying elites, an *instrumentalist* perspective is widespread and it explains the activities of regional elites by their use of ethnicity as a resource for political mobilization of the masses in their endeavor for acquiring political power or other benefits for themselves (see, e.g., Kovalëv 2011). Typically, instrumentalists do not accept *revivalist* appeals expressed by the national activists as a sincere motivation for establishing the state languages which they label as based on *primordialist* views of pre-existing nations. Instead, the instrumentalists argued the elites use national revival and language revival as a cover to ensure the privileged position for titular peoples and, thus, for themselves.

Among Russian scholars, Michail Guboglo (1993, 1998) was the first to apply the instrumentalist theory in explaining the dissemination of the state language phenomenon in the Soviet Union and Russia (see also Aklaev 1994). Perhaps, unsurprisingly, scholars find more evidence for the instrumentalist explanation from developments in SSRs with the sole titular state languages and less evidence from Russia's ASSRs with the co-official titular and Russian languages, because the instrumental use should be contradictory to and preclude bilingualism. Among the ASSRs, the evidence would be typically sought in the republics with a high level of regional separatism such as Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. The instrumentalist approach was also occasionally applied in studies on the republics with low public support for nationalism (see, e.g., Čarina 2012 for the Finno-Ugric republics), where the designation of the state languages was also explained as pursuing instrumentalist ends. It seems that this approach underestimates the recurrent character of ethnicity in politics, when the salience of national identities varies over time, as they may go to the background of politics and may again come to the forefront (Roeder 2012: 172–173). As a consequence, this approach tends to downgrade the intensity of involvement of popular masses and their influence on elites, while overemphasizing the role of the latter (Zamyatin 2013a: 123–124). Furthermore, it does not elaborate what benefits the elites could have from the act of the officialization of languages in the latter category of republics.

Alternatively, an institutionalist approach for studying political mobilization of ethnicity was also applied in the Russian context. Remaining within the constructivist paradigm of understanding ethnicity, this approach emphasizes the importance of state institutions that structure interactions of the state with ethnic groups living on its territory or, using the Dmitry Gorenburg's (2003: 3–5) term, *ethnic institutions*. Scholars such as Rogers Brubaker (1996) argued that institutionalization of ethnicity by Soviet authorities opened the way for its later political mobilization and, thus, played a crucial role in the dissolution of the Soviet Union. A merit of the institutionalist approach is that it allows the understanding of the establishment of ethnic institutions also in the republics with low regional separatism. From the institutionalist perspective, the official language could be seen as yet another institution that structures

the social space by conjoining the state and ethnicity. How was the institutional solution for establishing the state languages reached in the latter republics?

The purpose of this article is to explore the dynamics of constitutional building in the republics titled after the Finno-Ugric peoples in the early 1990s in order to understand the place and importance of state languages for their political systems. The approach of this study is to test the alternative theories that explain the designation of the official languages with the help of comparative analysis. The article is not restricted to the comparison of the constitutions of the Republics of Karelia (RK), Komi (KR), Mari El (RME), Mordovia (RM) and Udmurtia (UR) themselves, but it addresses a wide range of policy-defining documents, legal acts and expert evaluations. Following these materials, the study traces what demands the national movements presented in the process of drafting the constitutions and which among them entered the final texts adopted by regional parliaments between 1993 and 1995. These demands for establishing the institutions with implication for ethnicity included: the name (title) of the republic, the act of sovereignization and the proposed source of sovereignty, republican citizenship, principle of political representation in parliament and some language-specified demands. Eduardo Ruíz Vieytes (2004), using the method of comparative legal analysis, distinguishes groups of constitutional language provisions, such as linguistic declaration, non-discrimination clauses, knowledge requirements, recognition of linguistic rights and other groups of provisions. The constitutions of the Finno-Ugric republics contain some linguistic declarations, few linguistic rights and non-discrimination clauses, all formulated after the analogical provisions of the Russian constitution. The only contradictory language issues in the republics were: 1) the designation of state languages and 2) the introduction of language requirements for the first officials. The article is organized around these two language demands that are in focus, accordingly, in its second and third sections. The findings of the study are summarized and discussed in the fourth section.

2. State languages in the republics' constitutions

2.1. State languages from sovereignty declarations to constitutions

If in the late 1980s the popular movements defined the dynamics in the process of transition to democracy and democratic consolidation, then from 1990 on, the elites became a major actor of social changes (Gel'man 2002, Gel'man & Tarusina 2003). This is the reason why this study primarily follows, while concentrating on the dynamics of a constitutional building, the activities of the elites that are understood as *power elites* according to a classic definition by Charles Wright Mills (1956). In the Soviet political system up to 1990, the elites consisted de facto of political (CPSU functionaries) and administrative (Soviet *nomenklatura*) layers, and representativeness in the CPSU was the key factor in political decision-making in favor of a group. The quasi-parliaments – Supreme Councils of the SSRs and ASSRs – were rather

symbolic bodies, while the real power in regions was in hands of the CPSU regional committees or *Obkoms* (more precisely – *Oblastnoj Komitet Kommunističeskoj Partii Sovetskogo Sojuza*). The process of a gradual power shift from *Obkoms* to the ASSR Supreme Councils started in spring 1990, when the Supreme Councils for the first time were freely elected in many ASSRs, and ended in August 1991, when after the coup d'état attempt, the CPSU was prohibited and the *power dualism* of *Obkoms* and Supreme Councils ended. Despite this shift, the newcomers still constituted only a minor fraction of the post-Soviet regional elites, while in most regions, the members of the former *nomenklatura* elites retained power positions. According to the model of *nomenklatura conversion*, they first converted their Soviet privileged political status into privileged economic positions during perestroika times, and then again to political power in the early 1990s (Gel'man & Tarusina 2003: 196–197).

In the conditions of the disintegration of the USSR and unclear future perspectives on the continued existence of a centralized state, regional elites in the republics sought to maximize their political power and were careful to ensure their new political status by legitimizing the new emerging polities. The declarations of state sovereignty were the documents that contained the demand for sovereignty. By inclusion of the statements concerning ethnicity in this document, the elites claimed to satisfy the popular demand for national and language revival. As the declaration had importance primarily in the context of center-periphery relations, regional elites had a joint interest in agreeing on the state languages and other references to ethnicity of the titular group as the attributes of the national statehood needed to justify the emerging polities in the face of the central authorities (see Zamyatin 2013a: 151–153). The designation of the state languages in the declarations was a symbolic act of the politics of recognition that was taken by “a cascade effect” between the republics. Most ASSRs established in the declarations titular *and* Russian as their state languages. Sovereignty declarations were, first of all, the policy documents, and their legal nature was disputed. Although their adoption did not have immediate legal consequences, their legal significance was that their ideas had to be taken as the basis for drafting the constitutions. Now, the declaratory statements had to be followed by the constitutional designation in order to receive juridical meaning (see Zamyatin 2013a: 128).

In the process of polity formation, the regional elites were competing over the redistribution of powers within the polity, and intra-elite conflicts emerged. In these circumstances, ethnicity was part of the grounds that divided the regional elites. The democratic consolidation of political regimes was envisaged as the main way to overcome these conflicts of interests at the regional level. From a constitutional perspective, a democratic regime is considered consolidated when there are mechanisms allowing conflict resolution, i.e. through institutional solutions (Linz & Stepan 1996: 5–6). In the republics, the constitutions had to become the basic laws that established the fundamental principles of the state governance. These foundational documents had to give legitimation for the existing political regime which resembled a balance of powers in society. Adjusting John Rawls's concept of the political constitution as a

social contract (1971, Section 2) to non-liberal post-Soviet realities, the constitutions in the republics were not just a liberal contract of individuals but also a communitarian contract of ethno-linguistic communities. The political system needed legitimation in an ethnic dimension as well. The elites bargained in order to ensure a better position for themselves, but also for the group they claimed to represent. In addition to defining multinational people as the bearer of republican sovereignty, the bicameral parliament elected both on the individual and collective principle was proposed to solve the problem of representation. In most of the republican constitutions, the establishment of both titular and Russian as their state languages became a part of the package of social institutions established as a result of a compromise.

The “thickness” of this package was predetermined by a number of variables, time being the most important among them. Russia was the only SSR which did not establish the state language(s) in its sovereignty declaration in order to not further provoke the centrifugal processes in the country. However, when after the coup d'état attempt in August 1991, the coming dissolution of the USSR became evident, Russia designated Russian as its state language in the Declaration on the Languages of the Peoples of Russia and the Language Law (25 October 1991). Furthermore, language law recognized the right of Russia's ASSRs to designate their state languages, even if Chuvashia, Tuva and Kalmykia have already taken this step. Somewhat later, Russia's Citizenship Law, that sanctioned the introduction of the citizenship of republics as well (28 November 1991), was adopted. In December 1991, the USSR ceased to exist and the Russian Federation (named so since 25 December 1991) became *de jure* an independent state. By that time, the Russian authorities had already sanctioned the language planning in its former ASSRs despite the weakened position of the constituent republics within the new polity. At that moment, the non-Russians found themselves to be in a state where the share of ethnic Russians in the population was about 80%. This was a significant change in comparison to the ethnic composition of the Soviet Union, where the share of Russians was slightly more than a half, that also had its impact on the emerging political system (Alpatov 2005: 210–211). Now the pendulum moved backwards and the central authorities started to be rather concerned with the raise of resentment in other regions on the special status of the republics.

The early adoption of the constitution in a republic of Russia on the wave of centrifugal processes made it easier to advocate for the insertion of the provisions on ethnicity and languages and to formulate them as collective rights or preferences in favor of the titular people. For example, the constitution in the Republic of Tatarstan (RT) was adopted even before the Russian constitution. Despite the earlier attempts of the Tatar movement to persuade the ruling elite to establish Tatarstan as the state of the ethnic Tatar nation, it was established by the republican constitution in the wording of the sovereignty declaration as a civic state based on the will of the Republics' multinational people (article 1, Constitution RT, 30 November 1992) (Gorenburg 2003: 207–209). The Constitution designated the “equal-in-rights Tatar and Russian state languages”, which had to “function on an equal footing” (article 8). Furthermore, in addition to non-discrimination provisions, it fixed requirements of knowledge of

both state languages for the President (article 91), guaranteed education in the state languages (article 56) and established that legal acts are to be published in both languages (article 80). The other republics followed the torn route but many of them were far less successful on it, i.e., because their constitutions were usually adopted between 1993 and 1995, that is, *after* the Russian constitution. Now, the main argument against proposed references to ethnicity was their supposed contradiction with the Russian constitution.

A constitutional crisis and the state coup in October 1993 led to Yeltsin's victory over the Supreme Council and imposition of presidential rule by a decree (see Decrees of the Russian President, 9 and 11 October 1993). The Russian constitution was passed within two months after the constitutional crisis and created a strong presidency. The constitution did not include the Federation Treaty as an integral part of its text, as it was hoped in republics. After the dissolution of the Supreme Council, regional support was not crucial for sustaining Yeltsin's hold on power anymore. In effect, the adoption of the constitution resulted in annulment of previous political agreements between Yeltsin and regional elites regarding the sharing of powers. Instead, regional representation, including ethnic representation, had to be ensured at the federal level through the Federation Council, the second chamber of the Russian parliament. According to the constitution (article 68, 72), the republics enjoyed significantly less power than what was allotted in the Federation Treaty. The republics now differed from the other federative units only by their right to have their own constitutions and state languages. In this context, it becomes evident why the issue of the constitutional recognition of the state languages is so important. The constitution not only established asymmetrical federalism between the different types of federal units (republics, regions and other types), but also allowed asymmetry between the federal units of the same type, for example, between republics. As a result, the status of titular groups, including the official status of the titular languages as state languages, differs depending on the level of institutionalization of its elements in the republican legislations. What variables influenced the institutionalization of ethnicity and languages in the republics?

The answer to this question should consist of two parts: some variables are linked to ethnic mobilization in the late 1980s, while other variables are conditioned by the intra-elite bargaining in the early 1990s. Among the key factors for the stage of mass politics of the late 1980s, in addition to such variables as the size of the national group, the degree of its assimilation and its religious sameness or otherness from the majority group, was the ethnic composition of a region. Although some scholars deny the strong correlation between the degree of separatism and the proportion of titular nationalities (Söderlund 2006: 72–75), it is argued in what follows that the framing of the constitutional systems of the republics in regard to ethnic institutions indirectly depended on the sociological fact of whether the autochthonous groups are in the majority or minority. The national movements in republics with a relative titular majority, such as in Tatarstan, could afford themselves to propose ideas of civic nationalism and look for a broader societal consensus. On the contrary, the specifics

of the national movements operating in a minority situation included the tendency of their ideology to be, by default, that of ethnic nationalism, which precluded their support by the Russian majority. Even if political mobilization of ethnicity among the titular groups also took place in the Finno-Ugric republics, the national movements there never reached the stage of mass movement (which Miroslav Hroch marked as Phase C in his study of the development of national movements 1985: 66–67) and, thus, had only a limited impact on the political processes (Zamyatin 2013a: 134–139).

Nonwithstanding the ethnic composition, a more important variable for the formation of institutions in the constitutional process was the circumstance that the latter remained predominantly a matter of the elite settlement. In line with the developments in Moscow, most of the Russian republics adopted a presidential or a semi-presidential form of government soon after October 1993. The problem of the separation of powers and confrontation between legislative and executive branches was also typical for the forming political system in Russian regions (see, e.g., Buskunov 2010). Among Finno-Ugric republics, first Presidential elections took place in Mari-El and Mordovia in 1991, in Karelia and Komi in 1994, and in Udmurtia in 2000 (Söderlund 2006: 44). In Mordovia, exceptionally, parliamentary regime was introduced for the short period between 1993 and 1995. Karelia and Udmurtia had also set up parliamentary regimes first. They also had created presidencies by 2000 in line with a new power recentralization agenda (embodied, i.e., in the Federal Law, 6 October 1999). Therefore, the chairs of the Supreme Councils continued for some time since 1990 to be the leaders in some republics, while in others, these were already presidents. In either case, the role of the first figure was central in the political landscapes and, thus, in processes around drafting the constitutions. Finally, all these republics ended up as strong presidential republics, where presidents are central actors in the republican politics (the process called *presidentization*; see, e.g., Petrov 2001: 112).

Regional political regimes were often studied in the context of democratization (see, e.g., Alexander 1999, Kowalev 2000, Alexander & Grävingsholt 2002). The establishment of some collective rights in the constitutions, such as language rights, does not in itself infringe on democracy, although, as some theorists of democracy argue, they should never prevail over individual rights (Linz & Stepan 1996: 388–389). By establishing the *power vertical* since 2000, President Putin and federal authorities regained the control over the regions that marked the retreat from the democratization agenda. Since 2005, the heads of the republics and the governors of the regions lastly lost their weight as independent players after the change of the procedure that now established their actual appointment from the Kremlin. Researchers point out that in many republics, the elite settlement resulted not in democracy but in the creation of regional authoritarian regimes, and often consider ethnicity to be a factor that contributed to such an outcome (see *Regiony Rossii* 2000, 2003).

Exploring the reasons for these developments and drawing on the study of the Republic of Bashkortostan, Rušan Galljamov highlights the processes of *ethnization* of republican elites and *etatization* of titular ethnicity in the republics. In his view, the establishment of the state languages and the language requirements as well

as the over-representation of titular elites (sometimes called, with a degree of value judgment, *ethnocratic elites*, see Novičenko 2009) both in representative and executive bodies led to their absolute domination and the creation of *ethnocratic regimes*. Giving evidence for etatization of ethnicity, Galljamov describes the regional political regimes as ones that ignored the principle of the separation of powers between state authorities and a local self-government. In Bashkortostan, titular elites dominated republican authorities that established control over municipalities by directly appointing their heads who typically became individuals of titular nationality. In effect, the second chamber of the regional parliaments was itself de facto appointed, because it consisted of the heads of municipalities (1998: 165–169).

Yet, Galljamov's instrumentalist conclusions are not relevant for many other republics where a titular group and, accordingly, its elite, is in the minority, because the abolishment of the Soviet national quota practices led not to ethnization but to the political under-representation of the titular peoples there. With more or less success, ethnic elites participated in the ruling elites, but this never reached the stage at which one could speak about ethnization. How was it still possible for regional elites to agree on the establishment of state languages in the constitutions of the Finno-Ugric republics?

2.2. Karelia

Among Russia's republics, Karelia is one which has the lowest share of a titular group in its population – according to the 1989 census, the share of ethnic Karelians was only 10%. Despite this low demographic resource, the Karelian national movement had a significant historical resource the others did not have at their disposal: Karelia was among the first territorial autonomies inside the RSFSR, and for a short period was even a Union Republic, which gave the ground to claim for a higher status in the new era. In perestroika times, and especially in spring 1990, the idea concerning Karelia regaining its status as a Union Republic got popularity. When the Declaration of the State Sovereignty of the Karelian ASSR was adopted on 9 August 1990, it recognized supremacy of Union and federal laws. Yet, it did not contain any provision with reference to ethnicity or languages. This was another peculiarity, because most other Autonomous Republics in their sovereignty declarations, which were passed within some weeks or months after the Karelian declaration, had references to their titular peoples as a source for the republican statehood and designated their state languages. For one thing, Karelian was underdeveloped in respect to public vocabulary because of the absence of its written form until 1988. In addition, another obstacle for the official designation of Karelian was the inability of the national movement to ensure a privileged status for the titular group. There was a public debate on whom to count as “the indigenous peoples of Karelia”, and the outcome was that not only the Karelians and Veps peoples but also the Russians qualified (Butvilo 1998). As a result, the Republic was not instituted as a form of national statehood of the Karelians.

The national movement officially demanded the state status for Karelian at the First Republican Congress of the Representatives of Karelians, which was a body of ethnic representation, held from 28 to 30 June 1991 in Olonets (Aunus). Nobody at the Congress questioned the perspective of Russian becoming the state language, and the debate was exclusively about which of the other languages should become the state language, Finnish or Karelian: and if Karelian, which dialect. Some writers from Viena Karelia advocated in favor of Finnish, but as the Finns were not considered “the indigenous people”, their language did not qualify to be an attribute of the statehood. Finnish as a language for all Karelians was also envisaged by Anatolij Grigor’ev, head of the *Karelian movement*. The language question triggered a split in the national movement and Grigor’ev was hence leading its radical part (Klemen’ev & Kožanov 2012: 175). At the same time, proposals to let Russian remain the only state language found little support at the Congress (Õispuu 2000: 150–155). The outcome of the debate was that the Congress demanded the introduction of Karelian instead of Finnish as the second state language: it passed a declaration that demanded to designate Karelian and Russian as the state languages of the republic. According to this document, conditions had to be created for the functioning of Karelian in public institutions and its teaching at educational institutions (*Karel’skoe nacional’noe dviženie* 2005).

A moderate stance of authorities in comparison to the demands of national movements was typical for the other republics as well (*Nacional’nye dviženija Marij EI* 1996: 7). The State Committee on Nationalities Policy Affairs insisted that both Karelian and Finnish were officially proposed as the state languages (Birin 1999). Yet, the authorities reacted to the demand of the national movement expressed at the First Congress. On 23 November 1991, the Republic’s Supreme Council approved the *Republic of Karelia* as the new name of the Republic, raising its status. The same session approved, with minimal majority, the level of local self-government as the only channel for exercising national self-determination of the Karelians (Law RK, 22 November 1991). Other ethnic demands went unsatisfied. There was no new republican constitution adopted in the early 1990s. Instead, the Constitution of the Soviet times (Karelian ASSR Constitution, 30 May 1978) was amended (Article 1, Law RK, 24 December 1993) right after the Russian constitution entered into force.

The amended Constitution made neither Karelian nor other languages official (Laričev 2009). Instead, it recognized the right of the Republic to designate its state languages by the republican law. This also means that the amended version of the Constitution no longer contained the elements of the official status for the Finnish language, which it had since 1978. According to the revised Constitution, the Head of Government became the elected chief executive: the post was taken by Viktor Stepanov, an ethnic Karelian. The parliament received two chambers: the Chamber of Representatives, elected directly by the population, and the Chamber of the Republic, its members elected from the administrative districts. One of the reasons for such a construction was also the need to ensure ethnic representation of the Karelians and Veps who predominantly live in rural areas (Kinner 2000: 32). The bicameral

parliament in Karelia is an exception among the Finno-Ugric republics. However, the second chamber did not become a body of ethnic representation as the national organizations demanded. The idea of its structure probably originated in the analogy with the Soviet Supreme Council, which included the Chamber of the Union and the Chamber of Nationalities. Later, the national movements in the other Finno-Ugric republics also attempted at establishing bicameral parliaments where the second chamber had to represent the interests of their titular nationalities, but they too did not succeed in this.

The ethnic representation of Karelians, Veps and Finns remained low. In the Supreme Council, until 1985, their share was 30 to 40%, in 1990, it was 13%, in the Legislative Assembly in 1994, it was 13% and in 1998 it was 6% (Hämäläinen & Kožanov 1992, Strogal'sčikova 2000: 165). Thus, a critically low percentage of the titular group and its subsequent political under-representation have to be listed among the reasons for the failure to achieve the status of Karelian as the Republic's state language in the sovereignty declaration. Nevertheless, experts present some indirect evidence on the fact that the republican establishment saw its interest "in presence of separatist ideas", because it could be used in bargaining with the federal authorities (Hämäläinen & Kožanov 1992).

The Second Congress the Representatives of Karelians in Prjaža (Prääsä) took place in autumn 1994, and the Third Congress in Kondopoga (Karhumäki) in April 1998. The final documents of both congresses continued to demand the recognition of Karelian as a state language. The issue of the official status for Karelian was, therefore, raised by the adoption of a new Constitution. The amendments in favor of Karelian as a state language were unexpectedly proposed in the name of the new Head of Government Sergej Katanandov, who was before that moment reluctant to the idea of granting any status to Karelian. At the third reading in the parliament in December 2000, the amendment passed and it seemed that it would pass in the final text too. But after heated debates, the deputies decided that the Karelians do not constitute a nation and there are not enough reasons to designate Karelian as the state language. Neither passed the proposal of the radical national organization *Karjalaine Kongressu* ('Karelian congress') that was created in 1993 out of the Karelian movement to ensure ethnic representation by quota of seats in parliament (Karely 2005: 199–215; Butvilo 2001; *Karel'skoe nacional'noe dviženie* 2012; Klement'ev, Kožanov 2012).

Therefore, the new Constitution of Karelia designated Russian as the sole state language of the Republic (Article 10 (later 11), Constitution RK, 21 February 2001). Simultaneously, according to the proposal of the regional department of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, the Legislative Assembly had defined the right of the Republic to designate the state languages more narrowly than before by adding the qualification that "the other state languages" can be designated only by republican referendum. Accordingly, the next demand of the national movement, which was again supported by Katanandov, was the exclusion of that qualification from the constitution. Instead, the national movement demanded the possibility to designate

the state languages for parliament (*Karely* 2005: 223–227). However, a new obstacle emerged. The amendment to Russia’s language law (11 December 2002) set Cyrillic as the only script for the state languages in Russia. After this amendment, status of a state language can be given in an ordinary procedure only to a language with its written form based on Cyrillic script. Official status can be given to those languages with their written form based on another script only in an exceptional procedure defined by federal law. This condition complicates designating a language based on Latin script with an official status (see, e.g., Khairov 2002). Nowadays, as a prerequisite for the Karelian language to become a state language in ordinary procedure, its current Latin script must be changed to Cyrillic (*Karely* 2005: 216–223).

Even though scholars sometimes write about *official-language rights* (see, e.g., Patten 2006), there is no human right to an official language; neither is the state obliged “to use a particular script in any of its official activities” for a minority language, Fernand De Varennes argues (1996: 106–107). He further argues that “[a] minority’s language may include a script (Arabic, Cyrillic, etc.) which differs from that sanctioned by the state. Whilst a state would not be obligated under the UN Declaration [of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, 1992] to use a particular script in any of its official activities, Article 2 does prevent a state from banning the use of a minority script (as an aspect of language) in the private sphere. Whether involving script use in private correspondence, the printing of a book by private entities, or on outdoor signs by a private entrepreneur, all these activities represent situations where persons have the right, in private or in public, to use their own minority language” (de Varennes 1997, Section 4.2.1).

The Russian authorities argue that designating a language with official status is an issue of internal government policy, and, following this logic, it is impossible to file a lawsuit in international court. It is not politically realistic for proponents of the official status for the Karelian language to lobby for exclusion from the federal rule because the federal authorities are cautious not to make a precedent which could be used in Tatarstan. Neither does the initiative of Tatar activists to designate the Tatar language as another state language of the Russian Federation fit Russia’s current constitutional settings.

2.3. Komi

In Komi, the titular group was in the minority and comprised less than a fourth in the republican population (23.3% in the 1989 census). In this situation, even if all ethnic Komi voters would elect as many ethnic Komi representatives as possible, it would still not be enough to pass laws in favor of a national revival through legislative procedure, which demanded at least 50% of the votes (Il’in 1994). In reality, there were 37% ethnic Komi elected in the Supreme Council in 1985 and 31.6% in 1990 (Popov & Nesterova 2000: 148, Table 8).

The observers point out that the creation of the first national organization *Komi Kotyr* ('Komi union') was initiated and supported in the Obkom. It was politically neutral and managed to cooperate with the authorities. Its activities were directed at the creation of the body of ethno-national representation of the Komi people. The First Congress of the Komi people was organized by the organizational and financial support of the authorities in January 1991. It was the first such forum of titular people in Russia and it united different political and social groups on the basis of the nationalist ideology (Il'in 1993–2, Section 2.1). The question of political representation was one of its central topics. In order to solve this problem, the Congress, in one of its resolutions, demanded the creation of a two-chamber parliament where one chamber would represent the Komi people, whereas both chambers would have a right of veto (Resolutions, 12 January 1991). Among the other demands, one resolution demanded the establishment of a state committee on nationalities affairs and the adoption of a law on the official status of the Komi and Russian languages (Cypanov 1994: 133; *Pervyj s'ezd* 1991; Kotov & Rogačev 1991; Markov 2011).

The executive body of the Congress, the *Committee for the Revival of the Komi People* (hereinafter – *Revival Committee*), chose the strategy of cooperation with the authorities and participated quite successfully in negotiations with the authorities. Valerij Markov was elected as its chair as a figure of compromise with modest views. He was a scholar, who became a member of the CPSU in 1985 and entered politics in the late 1980s on the democratic platform, but lost the 1990 Russian election and, as a consequence, joined the national movement (Il'in 1993–2, Section 2.1). Markov and other members of the Revival Committee used the rhetoric of international law and the right to national self-determination. Many of them themselves were a part of the Soviet nomenklatura elite and they skillfully oriented in the political situation of that time. There were different civil and political actions arranged to push through the demands. One of the important ones took place after the Republic signed the Federation Treaty (31 March 1992). The Revival Committee criticized the republican authorities for this action and made an appeal on 13 April 1992 with the proposal to take initiative on state-building in the Republic. The Republican "round-table" was called together with a wide representation of social and ethnic groups. Following this action, the Revival Committee reassured its stance, intensified cooperation with the authorities and managed to persuade the top officials to adopt some crucial laws (Popov & Nesterova 2000: 70–71).

As a result of this cooperation, the Supreme Council recognized a privileged status of the Komi people by passing a law on the legal status of its Congress (26 May 1992). The law treated the Congress as a political representative body of the Komi people and even granted it the right of legislative initiative (Popov & Nesterova 2000: 46–47). The language law (28 May 1992) reaffirmed Komi and Russian as the state languages of the republic; Komi was proclaimed to be the concern of the state and had to enjoy its protection, whereas Russian was proclaimed to be the main medium of "internationality communication" in the Komi Republic. In April 1993, the State Committee for Nationalities Affairs was created with the task to implement

the language law and program for its implementation. The State Committee prepared the list of posts of public servants with language requirements (Il'in 1993–8, Sections 2.2, 3.1; 1993–12). The Third Congress in December 1993 reconfirmed the idea to establish a chamber of the Komi people, but this demand did not pass in the Supreme Council. Foreseeing this, an alternative idea was also expressed at the Third Congress when the second chamber should be composed of the representatives of the Republic's administrative districts irrespective of the number of their inhabitants. The consideration was that this way, the Komi movement could gain extra seats from rural districts, which usually had smaller populations than town districts, and where the ethnic Komis were in majority. Furthermore, it was suggested that the candidates fulfill a residence qualification of ten years. Now, the Revival Committee included this alternative idea in its draft constitution.

The cooperation of the national movement with the authorities also extended to the process of drafting the Constitution. The Revival Committee chair Valerij Markov participated in the work of the parliament's constitutional commission (Popov & Nesterova 2000: 174). Nevertheless, the revised proposal on the two-chamber parliament was rejected in this commission. Simultaneously, the constitutional commission rejected both the proposal of the culture commission that "the Komi language be used by the authorities along with Russian" and the proposal of the commission on science, headed by a person from the industrial Russian miner populated town of Võrkuta, to list Russian before Komi as the state languages. This symbolic issue demonstrated the intention of the Russian-speaking deputies to prevent the expansion of the official use of Komi and to restrict it only to the areas with a dense Komi population (Il'in 1994).

Some radical members of the Revival Committee criticized the strategy of its leadership directed at cooperation with authorities. In their view, the authorities started to interfere more and more in the activities of the Revival Committee (see, e.g., Štrichi 1994: 224–226). Non-Komi public officials started to be elected as delegates to the Komi Congresses. The Second and further Congresses were arranged by the Ministry of Nationalities Affairs. The ideological disagreements led to an inevitable split in the national movement. A radical segment of the movement departed from the Revival Committee in 1993 and established the national political party *Dorjam As'nymös* ('we defend ourselves'), headed by Nadežda Mitjuševa, a cultural activist (Il'in 1993–2, 1993–3). This party continued to propose ideas which have already been at that time considered radical in mainstream society, such as the idea of transferring of Komi language to Latin script (Tsypanov 2001: 118).

The new republican constitution was adopted a year after the Russian constitution, which created the constitutional framework to escape the key issues. The Komi Constitution (Constitution KR, 17 February 1994) established a single chamber parliament in the presidential republic. However, as a compromise, the Election Law (12 March 1994) fixed the election system where one half of the deputies had to be elected directly by citizens, whereas the other half represented the administrative areas. The election districts were also cut to ensure higher ethnic Komi representation (Kiselëv 2001). The law ensured almost a third of the seats of the deputies for ethnic Komis in the State Council, a new parliament, elected in 1995. Nevertheless,

it did not solve the problem of the threshold in ethno-national representation needed for vetoes on decisions and to pass laws (Il'in 1994; Popov & Nesterova 2000: 148, Table 8). The Constitution designated Komi and Russian as the state languages of the Republic (article 67). The Komi people were symbolically recognized as a source of statehood of the Republic; the state policy had to be directed toward the maintenance and development of the Komi language, culture and the traditional lifestyle according to international principles and norms concerning indigenous peoples (article 3). The Congress of the Komi People retained the right of legislative initiative (article 76). Komi had acquired the status of the state language in the Republics on par with Russian, the latter being the state language of the Russian Federation and hence in all its units. Unlike the Constitution of Tatarstan, where major linguistic issues were resolved, the Komi Constitution only stipulated the designation of the state languages and non-discrimination language provisions (Tsypanov 2001: 116).

With the political turn of 2000, the Komi Republican Office of the Public Prosecutor protested against the abovementioned provisions of the republican constitution. The Supreme Court of the Komi Republic did not find any contradictions of the Constitution with federal legislation (Decision, 21 February 2001). However, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation found the constitutional provisions on the Komi people as the source of sovereignty to be in contradiction with the principle of equality. The Court also ruled against the provision on republican citizenship (Determination, 13 April 2001). In accordance with the court decision, the amendments to the republican constitution were passed (Law KR, 12 October 2001). The provision on the Komi people as an indigenous people was excluded. The law on the status of the Komi people was abrogated (Law KR, 12 May 2003). The amendments to the language law were passed in the direction of its deterioration as well (Law KR, 16 July 2002).

2.4. Udmurtia

The percentage of the titular group in Udmurtia was 30.9% in 1989. The First All-Union Udmurt Congress (the fourth congress since 1918), held in December 1991, adopted the declaration on the realization of the sovereign rights of the Udmurt people (*Udmurtskoe nacional'noe dviženie* 2003: 13–14). The term *official language* was not used in the Resolution of the Congress, but there was the language requirement for the post of the president. The Resolution contained the demands for Udmurt to become the language of instruction in primary school and, later, in secondary school, for Udmurt to be taught in higher, high professional educational institutions (Resolution, 23 November 1991). The all-Udmurt association *Udmurt Keneš* ('Udmurt council') was created as the body, which operates between congresses and, among other things, aims at increasing the status of the Udmurt language. Headed by Michail Šiškin, the former second secretary of the Obkom (1978–82), the Udmurt Keneš dared to present rather modest demands (Kasimov 1992–7, Section 3.2.2). In 1993, Šiškin was accused of financial machinations by his colleagues and had to leave this post. A

more radical leader of the Udmurt Keneš, Roza Jašina, was elected, but lost her post in some months due to the speech on the genocide of the Udmurt people at the session of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) (Egorov 1995–3; Egorov & Matsuzato 2000: 281–282).

Since that time, for several years, the leaders of the Udmurt Keneš were loyal to the ruling elite. Ivan Griškin, a lecturer of the medical academy, was elected the next leader of the Udmurt Keneš at the Second All-Udmurt Congress in November 1994 (Egorov 1994–8, Section 5; it was decided to count it as the Fifth Congress by including in the numeration three congresses held in 1917 and 1918). It was this congress (Resolution, 4 November 1994) that demanded the rapid adoption of the constitution and the inclusion in its text of the provision on the official status of a state language of the Republic for the Udmurt language along with Russian. The congress adopted another declaration on the realization of the sovereign rights of the Udmurt people, where it stated that many demands of the First Congress, including the adoption of the law on the congress's status and the language law, were still not implemented. The Congress demanded the creation of a two-chamber parliament with the right of veto and the designation of Udmurt as the state language (Egorov 1994–11, Section 4).

After the adoption of the Russian constitution, regional authorities started to reconfigure the power structure at the regional level. There were steps taken in Udmurtia aiming at the creation of a presidential post (Law UR, 13 November 1993) and a republican parliament (Law UR, 21 December 1993), which had to have upper and lower chambers (Egorov & Matsuzato 2000: 306). However, these plans were not accomplished before the adoption of the republican constitution. The constitutional commission of the Supreme Council drafted the new constitution in consultations with federal authorities. The text of that draft copied a great deal of text from the Russian constitution. Consequently, there were no heated debates on the nationalities issues as in Komi, and the demands of language requirement for officials and civil servants, the national chamber or national quota in parliament, official bilingualism of public management, proposed earlier by the Udmurt Keneš in the alternative draft, were excluded in the early stages.

The statement on sovereignty of the Udmurt people was also excluded during the work on the draft constitution. Only the issue of presidency remained unresolved until the session of the Supreme Council where the constitution was adopted (Egorov 1995–1). In the final text of the Constitution, both “the Udmurt nation *and* the multinational people of Udmurtia” were stated as the bearers of sovereignty (Article 1, Constitution UR, 7 December 1994). The fact that “the Republic exercises the state power sovereignly on its territory” and the institute of republican citizenship were noted in the text, but they were excluded by the amendments to the constitutions in 2000. The constitution did not create the presidential post. The one-chamber parliament was named the State Council. The Constitution established Russian and Udmurt as the state languages of the Republics (Article 9 (later 10)). There was no mention of Russian as the “language of internationality communication”.

2.5. Mari El

The proportion of the main ethnic groups was more balanced in Mari El than in the other Finno-Ugric republics: Mari constituted 43.3%. The first president supported the activities of the Mari national movement. After his election as president, Vladislav Zotin proposed to change the name of the Republic. But it was only in July 1992 when the Republic dropped its attributes as *soviet* and *socialist* and received its current name Mari El. In October 1992, the Third Congress of the Mari People (actually, the first congress since 1918) was organized with the help of authorities and personally Nikolaj Rybakov, former chair of the Supreme Council and the state secretary of the Republic. In its resolutions, the Congress demanded the Supreme Council to adopt the constitution and the language law, where “the Mari language (Hill and Meadow Mari)” would be recognized as a state language of the Republic along with Russian; the document, thus, proposed a single Mari language, although there were proponents who wanted to include both main varieties: Hill and Meadow Mari. The language law had to also define language requirements. The Congress passed the appeals on the need of the official status for Mari in the places of dense living areas of the Mari population in the Republic of Bashkortostan and the Kirov region to the heads of these regions (K[asimov] 1992–10). Among the recommendations was the appeal for the adoption of the education law, which would introduce Mari as a compulsory subject in all educational institutions and prepare a gradual transition for national schools to have a native language used in instruction. The creation of a two-chamber parliament was required. Members of a chamber elected from the administrative units were required to know the state languages (Resolutions, 31 October 1992).

In the manner of *Interfront* (‘internationalist movement’) in the Union Republics, departments of the Russian national organization *Rus’* were created in Russia’s republics to oppose the activities of the national fronts and national movements of the titular peoples (see Taagepera 1999). In 1991, the regional organization *Rus’* was created in Mari El. The *Rus’* and some deputies of the Supreme Council criticized the documents of the Third Congress for its position as a political organization and blamed the participation of government officials in the Congress. The conservative Supreme Council also continuously criticized the activities of its former chair and the current President Vladislav Zotin and his government, whose members were predominantly of ethnic Mari origin. The president’s decisions on the nationalities issues and the draft language law were among the main targets of criticism. Furthermore, the parliament wanted to restrict the powers of the president. In this situation, fearing to lose his positions, Zotin decided to postpone the adoption of the constitution (Belokurova & Denisova 2003: 30, 49–50).

After the October 1993 power shift in Moscow, Mari El was among the few regions that choose to reform their authorities with no delay. In line with the Decree of the Russian President (9 October 1993) and President Zotin’s proposal, the republican Supreme Council elected in 1991 agreed to terminate its proxies before its legitimate

time was over in 1994 and to have midterm elections in order to be replaced by a new parliament – the State Assembly. The latter body was elected in December 1993, simultaneously with the referendum on the Russian constitution. However, in the conditions of the weakening of the regional legislative authorities throughout the country after the events of October 1993, President Zotin did not have enough time to strengthen his own powers in the Constitution, as did the leaders of the other regions. The reason for this was precisely the lack of a period with no functioning parliament (Belokurova & Denisova 2003: 51–53).

The constitutional commission, headed by President Zotin, drafted the constitution. The constitution had to be adopted by the Constitutional Assembly, composed of the deputies of all authoritative levels: republican deputies to the two chambers of the federal parliament, deputies of the State Assembly and deputies of urban and rural councils. Deputies from rural areas, where the Mari population was traditionally predominant, in this way gained more influence than they had in the State Assembly. Out of 30 deputies elected to the State Assembly in December 1993, 13 were of ethnic Mari origin; out of 267 deputies elected to the urban and rural district assemblies, 137 were of ethnic Mari origin (Belokurova & Denisova 2003: 57). The Rus' was against the procedure, according to which the Constitution had to be adopted by the Constitutional Assembly, and insisted on a direct popular vote (Smirnov 1995–3, Section 1.5). Among the amendments to the draft, the State Assembly proposed the recognition of a single Mari language and Russian as the state languages. Among the proposals to the draft constitution, there was an open letter of scholars, writers, cultural activists with the demand to designate Hill Mari with the status of the state language, but the latter was rejected by the State Assembly (Smirnov 1995–5, Sections 1.1.1–1.1.2). Therefore, one of the complicated issues was the presence of two varieties of the Mari language. Both varieties had literary forms. The Meadow Mari representatives were predominant in the *Mari Ušem* ('Mari union'), whereas the Hill Maris were well represented amongst the top officials, including the president (K[asimov] 1992a–6, Sections 2.2, 2.3). This problem caused some delay in the languages' official recognition. It was a question of whether only (Meadow) Mari and Russian or if Hill Mari too should be declared as the state languages of the Republic (Vasikova 1994, Kazancev 2000). President Zotin insisted on the designation of both varieties of Mari as the state languages (Matsuzato 2003: 17; Belokurova & Denisova 2003: 58–59).

The Constitution of the Republic of Mari El was adopted by the Constitutional Assembly in 1995. The Constitution did not have any statement on sovereignty, and instead it established the Republic as "the democratic, law-bound state within the Russian Federation" (Article 1, Constitution RME, 24 June 1995). 50 deputies of its parliament had to be elected individually and 17 deputies represented the administrative-territorial units (Smirnov 1995–7). The Constitution designated Mari (Hill and Meadow Mari) and Russian as the state languages of the Republic (Article 15), and included the requirement of the president's knowledge of both state languages. The Constitution left the question of language varieties open and adopted a compromise

designating the Mari (Hill, Meadow) language in singular, but adding the names of both varieties in parentheses. With the policy turn in 2000 (RF Constitutional Court Resolution, 7 June 2000), the Declaration of State Sovereignty was under protest and was discontinued (RME State Assembly Decree, 10 November 2000). In December 2000, the Constitutional Assembly excluded the provisions on the democratic state and republican citizenship from the Constitution (Belokurova & Denisova 2003: 86–87).

2.6. Mordovia

The percentage of Erzya and Moksha in the Republic of Mordovia's population was reported to be 32.5% in the 1989 census. The First All-Russia Congress of the Mordvin (Erzyan and Mokshan) People was arranged somewhat later than what had occurred in the other republics, in March 1992, and also demanded, among other things, the constitutional recognition of the status of the state languages for Moksha and Erzya Mordvin. A further demand was the restoration of the Mordvin languages as a medium of instruction, first, through their expansion in primary school and, later, in basic secondary school. The Congress advocated the necessity of all students learning the state languages and repeated the demand of parietal Russian-national bilingualism (Resolution, 15 March 1992). Newly presented in comparison with the 1990 program of the society of national revival *Mastorava* was the demand of language requirements for officials. As the first head of the *Mastorava* and university professor Dmitrij Nad'kin untimely passed away, Michail Mosin and Grigorij Pinjasov were elected as co-chairs of the Congress (Kasimov 1992b–6; Latypov 1994–2, Section 4). The Congress elected the *Council for the Revival of the Mordvin People* (hereinafter – *Revival Council*) as its executive body.

In its activities, the Revival Council presented more modest demands than the *Mastorava* or the Congress itself, and started to advocate for the unification of Erzya and Moksha into the Mordvin people. The disagreement regarding the need of unification created the grounds for the split in the national movement in 1992 out of the contradictions, which existed prior to this move. The split in the Revival Council itself was triggered by a strong conflict between some ethnic Mokshan leaders who were better represented in Soviet nomenklatura and preserved their position in the new government (Utešev & Ščerbakova 2004: 146–148). Michail Mosin criticized his colleague Grigorij Pinjasov for supporting Nikolaj Birjukov, chair of the Supreme Council (see Section 3.6 below), and Pinjasov had to leave his post of co-chair (Latypov 1994–2, Section 4).

The Mokshan leaders were in favor of a united Mordvin people, while most Erzyan activists claimed to represent a separate people. Moreover, some Mokshan leaders advocated the policy directed at the creation of a unified Mordvin language out of the two existing languages (Butylov 2000). The presented justification can be summed up in their emphasis on the need to consolidate a single nation and, thus, to

escape the trap of co-existing language varieties, as in Mari El and, particularly, in Karelia. Proponents of a unified Mordvin language argue that such a measure would enhance both-sided Russian-national bilingualism, whereas in the existing situation triple translations are viewed as an insurmountable obstacle, which, in practice, leads to use of the titular languages as symbols but not as vehicles of communication. Language unification is an ambiguous undertaking and its reasonableness is not discussed here. Despite the sociolinguistic difficulties associated with this project, political considerations came to the forefront since the early 2000s and were expressed in the endeavor to copy a new federal policy of the building of a unified Russian nation.

It is no wonder that the intention for unification was opposed by the more radical Erzyan activists who saw it as an attempt of Moksha leaders at strengthening their position in opposition to the Erzya stand. These activists created the organization *Erzjan' mastor* ('Erzyan land') in December 1992 (Utešev & Ščerbakova 2004: 148). Following the logic of confrontation, *Erzjan' mastor* even proposed to split the Republic and advocated for the creation of an Erzyan autonomy (see Resolution, 20 June 2009). According to their vision, Erzya should be the state language of this autonomy. Moreover, it should be the only official language in the administrative districts with the Erzya majority population (*Obščestvennye dviženija v Mordovii* 1993: 253; Iurchenkov 2001: 91–92). All in all, because of the contradictions between the Erzya and the Moksha, the national movement was weaker than in the other republics. In this context, neither ethnic nor language issues had any remarkable role in state-building in Mordovia (Mares'ev 1995: 181–182). This situation led to a significant delay in language planning.

A further reason for the weakness of national organizations was its alienation from the democratic movement because of the issue of sovereignty. The confrontation between President Vasilij Gusljannikov, who was in office from 1991 to 1993, and Nikolaj Birjukov, chair of the Supreme Council, ended with the victory of the later and the temporary abolition of the institute of presidency. The Supreme Council initiated the drafting of the new constitution. The central issue of debate around the constitution was the re-establishment of the presidency and the order of his or her elections. As in Mari El, Birjukov wanted the constitution to be adopted by the Constitutional Convent and hoped to ensure, in this way, his own position by support of deputies from rural areas. However, in January 1995, he unexpectedly did not become the chair of the newly established State Assembly (Latypov 1995–3).

The Second Congress of the Mordvin (Mokshan and Erzyan) People in March 1995 demanded the designation of the Mordvin languages as the state languages and the adoption of a law on the state languages (Resolution, 24 March 1995). Nikolaj Merkuškin, the new parliament chair, supported the inclusion of the idea of the Constitutional Convent in the draft constitution with the majority of rural voters for the appointment of the Head of the Republic. The constitution itself had to be adopted by the Constitutional Convent (Latypov 1995–7, Section 3.1, 1995–9). According to the Constitution (Constitution RM, 21 September 1995), Russian and Mordvin (Mokshan and Erzyan) became the state languages (article 13). In other words, the

document established a single Mordvin language. The Congress of the Mordvin (Mokshan and Erzyan) People received the right of legal initiative. As the republic did not pass the sovereignty declaration, there was no provision on sovereignty in the constitution. Consequently, unlike the other republics, the revision of the constitution in 2001 touched upon only some minor issues (Utešev & Ščerbakova 2004: 155). It states that the source of power in Mordovia is “the multinational people of the Russian Federation” (Article 2).

3. Language requirements in the republics' constitutions

3.1. Language requirements for the post of the President of the Republic

If there is an official language in a country, it typically has to be compulsorily used by parliament, administration, judiciary and other authorities. The head of the country as the top official has to know the language. Obligatory knowledge of the official language by (a candidate to the post of) the head of a state or territory is an important element of language status. This requirement can have dual justification within the language status: as a part of its function the working language of the state authorities and as a language preference. Both in Soviet and post-Soviet times, the role of *first figures* used to be crucial for the functioning of the political system. Since the Soviet times, there was an unwritten practice that the main representative public figure in the SSRs and ASSRs, chair of the Supreme Council, would be a person of titular nationality who would presumably know the titular language. At the same time, an ethnic Russian would typically have been the Head of the Obkom.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the central political issues were 1) if the head of state or a territory has to be a representative of titular nationality and 2) if he or she has to know the titular language. The former Union Republics usually did not require their heads to be of titular ethnic origin, but often introduced the obligatory knowledge of their state languages by the first figures and the deputies of their parliaments (see, e.g., Ajrapetjan 2012). In the former Autonomous Republics, ethnic preferences were not in the agenda because they were established in the form of multinational statehood, not ethnic statehood. Yet, language preferences and the requirement to know both state languages were justified in the new political systems exactly by the multinational character of statehood. The inclusion of language requirements did not mean an automatic advantage for the candidates of titular nationality, because an ethnic Russian with the knowledge of the titular language were also sometimes elected as, for example, in Buryatia (see Arutjunjan et al. 1998). In all former Autonomous Republics, with the exception of Karelia, the titular languages have the official status of state languages, but language preference for the post of head of republic had been introduced in only eight republics. The language requirements for the Republican President had been included in the constitutions of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Chuvashia, and a few other republics.

Since the late 1990s, in an attempt to break up with this Soviet practice, the core of Russia's nationalities policy held the exclusion of ethnic categories from legal and political space. In 1998, Russia's Constitutional Court had a ruling concerning the compliance of the provisions on language requirement in the Constitution of Bashkortostan, the law on the President of Bashkortostan and the President's elections (at that time, there was no language law in Bashkortostan). The Court declared them to be in contradiction with the Russian constitution. The ruling was of a restricted procedural character, as the language requirements themselves were not challenged by the Court but the impossibility of their implementation was emphasized because of a lack of a legislative mechanism. However, the position of the Constitutional Court in this issue was reaffirmed in the new political situation, when in 2001, the Court issued a decision concerning the similar case of the language legislation of Adygea (Determination, 13 November 2001).

In effect, the legal norms that establish language requirements for chief officials have not been in use since the late 1990s. According to the policy to foster anti-discrimination clauses in legislation (Osipov & Sapožnikov 2004: 189–190), there was a clear tendency to abolish ethnic and linguistic preferences, although in some republics there is still an unwritten practice that persons of titular ethnic origin were and are first figures. At the same time, in several republics, requirements of the knowledge of both state languages continue to be enforced for some professions such as teachers, secretaries and other civil servants who in some cases receive a bonus (see, e.g., Arutjunjan et al. 1998). This fact supports the notion of the importance of language requirements as a practical arrangement and not just as a political instrument.

3.2. Karelia

Viktor Stepanov, an ethnic Karelian with a knowledge of Karelian (*Karely* 2005: 186), the head of the department of the Obkom, became the chair of the Presidium of the Supreme Council in 1989. He managed, himself being a former member of the nomenklatura, to ensure a gradual transition to a more democratic regime and, thus, encountered virtually no counter-elite activities to his early political moves (Tsygankov 2002: 266). After this first success, he was the first figure in the Republic for many years: he was the chair of the Supreme Council from 1990 to 1994, and simultaneously the President of the Republic from 1991 to 1993. Despite his support of the Russian parliament in October 1993, he was elected chair of the government in 1994 (the post of the Head of the Republic) without the necessity to use such additional instruments as language requirements (Law RK, 18 January 1994).

Since 1991, the conflict emerged between the Supreme Council and the local authorities of Petrozavodsk, the capital of the Republic, ruled by its mayor Sergej Katanandov, an ethnic Russian and ex-manager of a local construction firm (Hämäläinen & Kožanov 1992). In the election campaign of 1998, Stepanov did not

initiate the introduction of language requirements, although his activities in advocating the draft language laws were interpreted by his opponents as evidence for his intention to use linguistic preferences as an ethno-political resource (*Karely* 2005: 154–155, 173–174). The Third Congress of Karelians supported his candidacy for the Head of the Government. Surprisingly, Stepanov was unable to compete with his rival Katanandov. Katanandov won the 1998 elections and became the Head of the Government. According to expert evaluations, the fact that elites and political parties (and not popular movements and national organizations) were at the center of political life by that time is among the reasons for this outcome (Butvilo 2001).

As it was previously noted, in two years after his election, Katanandov supported the designation of Karelian as a state language, arguably doing so for the reasons of its symbolic significance for the Republic's statehood (*Karely* 2005: 209). The new Constitution (Constitution RK, 21 February 2001) brought the legislation into concordance with the Federal Law (6 October 1999) and changed the structure of the state authorities by excluding the bicameral parliament and introducing the post of the Head of the Republic. According to the new election law (Law RK, 19 July 2001), Katanandov was re-elected as the first Head of the Republic in 2002 and managed to maintain his post until 2010, even if since 2005 regional chief executives in Russia were no longer elected in regions, but appointed by regional legislatures according to suggestion of the Russian president (see Section 2.1 above).

3.3. Komi

Jurij Spiridonov, an ethnic Russian (as stipulated in his passport), was the second secretary of the Obkom since 1985 and its first secretary from 1989 to 1990. In March 1990, he was elected the chair of the Supreme Council, the first figure in the Komi Republic at that time. This was when the power shifted from the Obkom to the Supreme Council. Spiridonov was able to preserve this post until the elections of the head of the Republic in 1994.

The Supreme Council of the Komi Republic initiated the republican referendum on the issue of the presidency in 1993. The Third Congress of the Komi People, held in December 1993, was against the presidency and against the draft president law, because, among other things, the president would receive too wide proxies and it would unlikely be a Komi representative. Instead, as an alternative, the Congress required the Chair of the Supreme Council, the then first figure, to have knowledge of both state languages. In the case the decision of the arranged referendum would still be in favor of the post of president, the Congress demanded to include an amendment that the president would have to know both state languages (Il'in 1993–12, Section 2). The referendum was not accomplished due to abstentions of citizens, but a majority of those who came voted against the presidential office (Il'in 1994). This result was interpreted as delegation of power for the decision concerning presidency to the Supreme Council (Il'in 1994–4).

Later, in the draft constitution, the Revival Committee again proposed the requirement of knowledge of both state languages as a condition for candidacy for the first figure's office. However, Jurij Spiridonov, supported by the Russian majority of deputies, could effectively prevent the inclusion of language requirements in the constitution because it could have excluded his candidacy. As a compromise, he suggested that the knowledge of both state languages should be a requirement only for civil servants such as interpreters, editors and secretaries. As a result, the requirement for the knowledge of the state languages by the Head of the Komi Republic was not included in the Komi Constitution in 1994. The only provision on the issue that entered the final text was that the Head of the Republic will take an oath in the state languages (Article 82).

Spiridonov won the elections of the Head of the Republic in May 1994 with 50.9% of the votes (Alexander & Grävingsholt 2002: 84, 87–88). His rival, Vjačeslav Chudjaev, an ethnic Komi and the head of the Government, took 33.1% of the votes, while the Revival Committee chair Valerij Markov only had 3.7% of the votes (Kovalëv 1995; Il'in 1994, 1994–4). It is notable that Spiridonov was elected mostly by ethnic Russian voters, while the ethnic Komi population voted mostly for Chudjaev (Tsypanov 2001: 117–118). In January 1995, Chudjaev and Markov were elected as the deputies of the State Council, a body newly established by the Constitution. Valerij Markov became its vice-chair. Vladimir Torlopov, a Russophone who has an ethnic Komi father, was elected in 2000 and remained the Head of the Republic until 2010.

3.4. Mari El

After the election of the Russian President in June 1991 and the coup d'état attempt in August 1991, the presidency was established in many republics. Vladislav Zotin, the chair of the Supreme Council, initiated the establishment of the presidency in the Mari Republic. On the day of voting on the issue, representatives of the Mari Ušem gathered in front of the parliament building with demands for the president to know both state languages. The Supreme Council agreed with the proposal of the Mari Ušem on the knowledge of both state languages and adopted the decree on the presidential elections on 14 December 1991 (Decree, 16 October 1991; Smirnov 1995–3, Section 1.8.5). All three candidates for the presidency were of ethnic Mari origin, whereas all the vice-presidential candidates were ethnic Russians. Besides Zotin, the other candidates were Aleksandr Kazimov, the leader of the republican department of the public movement Democratic Russia, and Evgenij Petrov, the head of government (Belokurova & Denisova 2003: 47). Vladislav Zotin, an ethnic Hill Mari and the chair of the Supreme Council, was elected president (*Kto jest' kto* 2002: 208). Grigorij Posibeev, former first secretary of the Obkom tried to fill the vacant seat of the chair of the parliament but lost to Jurij Minakov, an ethnic Russian.

The Third Congress of the Mari People in 1992 appealed to the Supreme Council to comprehend the necessity of the knowledge of the Mari language by the republican

officials and proposed to settle the order of approval of language requirements for officials (Resolution 'On language', 31 October 1992). There was no direct demand on the knowledge of the state languages by the president, because the language requirement had already been established. The Constitution of the Republic of Mari El of 1995 established the requirement for the President of Mari El to have knowledge of the state languages (article 76).

In summer 1996, when the next presidential campaign started, the Republic was deep in economic crisis. This presidential campaign was marked by the conflict around the president's language requirements. The law on the presidential elections was adopted in late summer and contained the requirement on the knowledge of both languages (Law RME, 20 August 1996; Smirnov 1996–7, Section 1.3.1, 1996–9). Leonid Markelov, deputy of Russia's State Duma from the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia and a potential candidate for presidency built his campaign on the criticism of economic developments and pretended to "protect the national interests of the Russians", arguing against the language requirement that it was discriminatory and promising a revision of the language law (Smirnov 1996–3, Section 1.6.1). He initiated an appeal of the State Duma to Russia's Constitutional Court concerning the inconformity of the Constitution of the Republic of Mari El to the federal legislation (Decree SD FA RF, 18 October 1996; Smirnov 1996–9, Section 1.2.5). The public prosecutor of Mari El, Nikolaj Piksaev, first sent his protest against the language requirement to the Republic's Central Election Commission (CEC) and, when this was rejected, turned to the Republic's Supreme Court. In this situation, President Zotin needed the support of the national movement. He attended the Fourth Congress of the Mari People held in October 1996 and made his speech in both Russian and Hill Mari. The Congress expressed its support for Zotin as a candidate and emphasized the obligatory character of the knowledge of the state languages by the president (Resolution, 19 October 1996; Belokurova & Denisova 2003: 66).

The CEC created a working group to check candidates' knowledge of the state languages. Vjačeslav Kislicyn was invited to the CEC on 29 October 1996 as the first candidate to prove his knowledge of the state languages. He greeted the CEC in Mari, argued that he has enough knowledge of the Mari language and culture to be president and refused to take an exam. Later, he explained why he refused to take the exam: he did not want to humiliate the Mari people with his broken Mari language (Belokurova & Denisova 2003: 67). The CEC overturned the language requirement on 1 November 1996 as unconstitutional, and registered on the same day Kislicyn and in two weeks Markelov as candidates (Smirnov 1996–12, Section 1.1.1). After this the public prosecutor recalled his application from the Supreme Court (Smirnov 1996–10, Section 1.3.1). Russia's Constitutional Court dismissed the case later (Determination, 11 March 1998).

In November 1996, President Zotin unsuccessfully contested the CEC decision on the registration of Kislicyn and Markelov as the candidates for breaking the provisions according to the the Mari Constitution and the law on the presidential elections on the compulsory knowledge of both state languages. However, Russia's

Constitutional Court admitted, in its decision 14 December 1996, the validity of registration and recommended freezing the constitutional provision on the knowledge of the state languages (part 2, Article 76) (Krajnov 1997: 67–68; Isanbaev 1997: 34; Lallukka 2003: 305; Belokurova & Denisova 2003: 67). In December, two days before the elections, President Zotin attempted to delay them, by the decree, with a controversial reference to the decision of Russia's Constitutional Court and the decree of the State Duma. However, the Republic's Supreme Court annulled the president's decree the next day. The first round of elections still took place as planned on 22 December 1996. None of the candidates received the majority vote, and Kislicyn and Markelov went on to the second round (Smirnov 1996–12, Sections 1.3–1.4). In the second round on 4 January 1997, Vjačeslav Kislicyn, an ethnic Russian and a previous Kolkhoz chief, was elected the new president (Smirnov 1996–12, Section 1.5, *Kto jest' kto* 2002: 258; Belokurova & Denisova 2003: 68). After the elections, criminal proceedings were instituted against Zotin (Petrov 2001: 114).

In 1995, Kislicyn joined the Communist Party of Russia, but distanced himself after becoming the president. Unlike the previous president Zotin, Kislicyn managed to consolidate his powers and take control over republican political and economic resources in his hands (Belokurova & Denisova 2003: 69–70). Among the initiatives directed at strengthening his powers, the constitutional amendment was initiated in May 1997 in order to prolong the president's time in office up to seven years and to exclude the language requirement for presidency (Smirnov 1997–4, Section 1.2). The former amendment did not pass, but the language requirement was excluded in October 1997 (Law RME, 22 October 1997). The provision that the president takes an oath in both Mari and Russian was amended as well. It states now that the president takes an oath in Mari and/or Russian (Article 78).

Consolidating his regime in conflict with the local self-government in March 2000, Kislicyn lost support of the federal authorities. When after the election of Vladimir Putin as President of Russia, the building up of the power vertical had started in June 2000, Kislicyn wanted to demonstrate his loyalty and he fully supported the policy of bringing regional legislation into concordance with federal legislation. However, as a part of this policy, numerous federal inspections took place which assessed the economic situation in the Republic as critical. These processes were in the background for the presidential election campaign. In order to compensate for his lost support in Moscow, Kislicyn tried to win proponents among the regional elites. One of his plans was to propose the post of vice-president to an ethnic Mari. Among the other moves, Kislicyn unsuccessfully tried to be manipulative with the elections, i.e. by changing their time for autumn 2000. Ivan Teterin, the only ethnic Mari candidate for president and a military man, was supported by the Moscow authorities. In December 2000, Markelov and Kislicyn went on to the second round, where Markelov won (Belokurova & Denisova 2003: 71–86).

In January 2001, Leonid Markelov, an ethnic Russian born in Moscow and worked in the Yoshkar-Ola Military Procuracy since 1986, became the president (*Kto jest' kto* 2002: 344). In the December 2004 elections, Markelov won against Vladimir

Kozlov, a journalist and head of the Mari Ušem. It must be noted here that as a consequence of presidentization, and especially since the early 2000s, the authoritarian regimes in many Russian regions used administrative resources and even electoral fraud to reach the needed election outcomes. If, during the times of Zotin's and Kislicyn's presidencies, the national leaders had their share of the political power, then during the time of Markelov, they were mostly in opposition. As a result of the 2004 election campaign, ethnic division was actualized in the republican political Olympus. Markelov expelled many officials of titular ethnic origin from the leading offices (Sokolov 2002: 218–219). Within a few months, the only minister of ethnic Mari origin in Markelov's government remained, and still is, Michail Vasjutin, the Minister of Culture and Deputy Head of Government.

The conflict between the national leaders and the Markelov administration became internationally known, when Vladimir Kozlov was severely beaten in February 2005. Although the authorities argued that this was a domestic crime, those who did it were never found, and there were widespread suspicions that the crime was politically motivated. Kozlov was beaten for his political activities, among others, for arranging rallies during the time of the president's inauguration in January. A petition, that demanded an investigation of the crime, was made public on the Internet and, in a few days, received signatures from many prominent public figures in Estonia, Finland, Hungary and other countries, including some former and acting top politicians. The petition was followed in spring 2005 by a great number of publications in a cascade effect, both in international and Russian mass media, statements of politicians etc. that culminated in a resolution of the European Parliament criticizing Russia for violating the cultural and political rights of the Mari people (Resolution, 12 May 2005). Ethnic elites, who became marginalized, hoped that the federal center would replace the President of the Republic, which occurred in the center of international scandal. However, the federal center, i.e., the Russian Foreign Ministry, considered the acts, like the European Parliament resolution, as an intrusion into internal affairs and backed the position of the regional authorities against the opposition forces. Markelov was reappointed to office in 2009.

3.5. Udmurtia

Since August 1991, the highest position in the Udmurt Republic shifted from the first secretary of the Obkom to the parliament elected chair of the Supreme Council. From 1990 to 1995, this post was held by Valentin Tubylov, an ethnic Udmurt and a former CPSU functionary. In October 1991, the Supreme Council passed the decision to establish presidency (Law UR, 10 October 1991). The language requirement for the president also became a heated issue (Ponomarëv 1992: 18–19; Osipov 2002: 280–282). The establishing conference of the *Udmurt Kalyk Partija* ('party of the Udmurt people') in October 1991 demanded that the president should be an ethnic Udmurt. The First and Second All-Udmurt Congresses in November 1991 and

November 1994 demanded the president's knowledge of the Udmurt and Russian languages (Resolution, 23 November 1991; Resolution, 4 November 1994). Also, the Udmurt Keneš approved a resolution on this issue (11 November 1992). According to unofficial data, the democrat and ethnic elites informally agreed on the requirement of the president's knowledge of Udmurt, but it was the influential local Tatar elite that insisted on the president representing the titular nationality (Kasimov 1992–7, Section 3.3).

The President Law in Udmurtia was passed after the victory of Boris Yeltsin over Russia's Supreme Council in October 1993. It contained the requirement for the president's knowledge of Udmurt and Russian, with the exception of the first presidential election. The latter qualification provides evidence that the law was enacted for the election of a certain person, namely, Aleksandr Volkov, the head of the government at the time (Article 4, Law UR, 14 November 1993; Law UR, 18 January 1994). Because there was neither a republican constitution nor a republican language law in 1993 which would regulate the status of the state languages, language preference was not formulated as requirement for the knowledge of the state languages of the republic. One might note the sequence of listing the languages with Udmurt in the first position (Ponomarëv 2009: 31; *S'ezd sovetov* 2005: 55; Vojtovič 2006: 327). However, this presidential law was never in force, because the constitution was approved in 1994.

The clause on the president's language requirement was included in the draft constitution and stayed there longer than the other demands of the national movement. Nevertheless, it was left out of discussions concerning the issue on the session of the Supreme Council. Moreover, the political system, framed by the republican constitution, did not contain the post of the President of the Republic. Yet, the questioning had to be arranged on the issue of presidency, so that the coming State Council would decide on it later (Egorov 1995–1, 1995–3). The questioning arranged in March 1995 rejected the idea of presidency (Egorov & Matsuzato 2000: 311).

A person of titular ethnic origin has always been chair of the Supreme Council of Udmurtia since its establishment in 1938 until 1995, when the post was abolished. In 1995, Aleksandr Volkov, the Head of Government and an ethnic Russian with no knowledge of Udmurt, won against Valentin Tubylov, an ethnic Udmurt and the last head of the Supreme Council. Volkov took over the first position in the Republic as the chair of the State Council, the body newly established by the constitution. There were no language requirements for this post (Vojtovič 2006: 344–345). In 1997, Tubylov became the head of the Udmurt Keneš. In 1999, Tubylov supported Pavel Veršinín, another ethnic Udmurt and head of government, against Volkov in the next election for State Council chair. The argument was presented that traditionally one of the first figures of the Republic should be an ethnic Udmurt. However, Volkov won again. Volkov was the chair of the State Council of the Republic from 1995 to 2000 (Egorov & Matsuzato 2000: 282, 362).

In 1999, the Federal Law (19 October 1999) defined the principles of the division of powers at the regional level and put restriction on the regional authorities. In 2000, the presidential post was established again by the amendment to the constitution, but

without any language requirements (Law UR, 8 June 2000). There was the provision stating that the president takes an oath in the state languages of the Republic (Article 46), which was implemented as well. Igor' Semënov, an ethnic Udmurt, was the State Council chair from 2000 to 2007, but at that time, he was already a third figure in the Republic, after Aleksandr Volkov was elected president in 2000 and Jurij Pitkevič, a Belarusian, became the head of the government since 2000, thus, neither of them were an ethnic Udmurt or had a knowledge of Udmurt (*S'ezd sovetov* 2005: 89). Vitalij Solov'ëv, a Russophone with an ethnic Udmurt father, has been the chair of the State Council from 2008 to 2013 and Vladimir Nevostrujev, an ethnic Udmurt, since 2013.

3.6. Mordovia

In September 1991, the Supreme Council took a decision on the establishment of presidency. This decision was supported by the nomenklatura elite and the national movement, whereas the democrats opposed it. There were no language requirements for the presidential post, which was criticized by the Mastorava. Nikolaj Birjukov, an ethnic Mordvin and former CPSU party functionary, the Supreme Council chair, was supported by the nomenklatura and titular population (Polutin 2000: 167–171). His opponent Vasilij Gusljannikov was a chief of the regional department of Democratic Russia, an engineer and an ethnic Russian without any knowledge of the Mordvin languages. Gusljannikov won the popular election and became the president in December 1991. Arguably, the most important basis for his victory was the support of Russophones, who feared that the Republic would follow the way of sovereignization and studying the titular languages would become compulsory in school (Matsuzato 2003: 13–14). Mordovia became an exception among the Finno-Ugric republics in that the Soviet nomenklatura temporarily lost its dominant position in the Republic. It is no wonder that the conflict emerged with the still agrarian- and communist-dominated Supreme Council and its chair Nikolaj Birjukov.

Gusljannikov was a democrat and a pro-reform liberal in economic policy but strongly opposed the national movement. Birjukov started to support some national leaders who were also members of the *agrarian elites*, that is, chiefs of the kolkhozes and the CPSU rural departments (Kasimov 1992b–6, Sections 1.2, 1.4). Due to his course for unpopular market economy reforms and administrative incompetence in the conditions of the continuing economic crisis, Gusljannikov lost support of the Russian population as well. The presidency was created by the decision of the Supreme Council and, in the same way, it was liquidated in April 1993.

However, the old first line nomenklatura again lost its power in the Republic in 1995 with the election of the State Assembly to the second line. Nikolaj Merkuškin, an ethnic Moksha, who was until 1991 the second secretary of the Obkom, won the election against Nikolaj Birjukov and became the first chair of the new parliament (Utešev & Ščerbakova 2004: 140–144; Latypov 1995–1). Vladimir Volkov, an ethnic Russian and the CPSU functionary, became the head of government. The First

Congress of the Mokshan and Erzyan People in March 1992 required the Republican President and the Ministers of Culture, Education and Mass Media to have knowledge of either Moksha or Erzya (Resolution, 15 March 1992). However, this requirement was later withdrawn (Iurchenkov 2001: 90). The Second Congress of the Mordvin (Mokshan and Erzyan) People, held in March 1995, was opened by Merkuškin's greetings in two languages (Latypov 1995–3). Here, the issue of language requirements was not raised because the national movement was satisfied with the election results.

Later the same year, Merkuškin became the Head of the Republic, elected by the Constitutional Convent. According to the newly adopted constitution, approved one day earlier by the Constitutional Convent, the Head of the Republic had to be elected directly by the population. That is why the election was arranged in 1998. Merkuškin won and was re-elected as Head of the Republic. From 2000 to 2001, by the amendments to the constitution, the Head of the Republic received additional competencies and the presidential republic was finally formed (Kozin & Šilov 2001). In 2012, Merkuškin handed over this top position to his longstanding companion Volkov.

4. Discussion

The titular groups in the Finno-Ugric republics typically are in a minority situation. The political process inspires competition in which minority groups are doomed to lose. In a situation where a group represents only a small non-dominant segment of the population, the inclusion of any institution ensuring its interests in the political regime would be an unexpected outcome because the majority would be against it. How was it still possible to include any reference to ethnicity in the constitutions?

After their peak in the late 1980s, the popular movements did not have much influence on the constitutional processes in the early 1990s that were elites-centered. The constitutions themselves were adopted by regional parliaments or constitutional assemblies, but not by popular vote. Thus, to answer the aforementioned question, one should turn to the study of elites. As the Finno-Ugric titular groups mostly reside in rural areas, the ethnic elites in the early 1990s mostly originated from the agrarian sector in the Soviet nomenklatura elites, while the Russian elites were predominant in the industrial and technocrat sector. Different segments of the political elites, most notably still regionally weak democrats and the still strong old nomenklatura, advocated in national and language debates in favor of interests of the Russophone or titular nationalities. The ethnic elites had to struggle for new rules of the political game where the issue of political participation was the key to advancing their demands. The representative democracy and its majority rule became an insurmountable threshold for the elites of those nationalities that were in the numerical minority also in their titular territories, because they would be outvoted. There were votes cast for the constitutions in the republican parliaments with the majority rule and, from the instrumentalist perspective, the claims that would not be supported by majority, for example, to establish ethnic institutions, were deemed to fail.

Yet, even if there were no ethnocratic elites that controlled the regional power, as in some Turkic republics, some references to ethnicity were also included in the constitutions of the Finno-Ugric republics and it was done so for several reasons. The shift of power from the legislatures to the presidents and the executive branch after the October coup in 1993, both at the federal and regional level, marked the end of the confrontation and the beginning of the consolidation of elites, which in some republics continued up to the late 1990s. As ethnic elites in the Finno-Ugric republics were not strong enough to form a single political force, only rarely did the ethnic divisions and ethnic institutions coincide with the conflicts around the separation of powers. In the latter case, these tensions have had an inter-ethnic dimension. In most cases, despite the tensions, the elite settlement appeared to be possible.

The findings of this study demonstrate that, as in other regions, the etatization of the elites in the Finno-Ugric republics took place in the early 1990s as a part of the elite settlement. Udmurtia became internationally famous for the conflict between the regional authorities and the local self-government, when the former included the level of rural districts and towns as another layer of the state authorities, restricting local self-government only to the level of localities. In this way, the regional authorities not only could expand their control over the municipal level of rural districts and towns, but also could control the regional legislature, because the appointed heads of municipalities used the administrative resources to get elected to the regional legislature. The case against such a mechanism was brought to Russia's Constitutional Court and found its solution in 1997. In the case of the Komi Republic, there was a similar conflict, and a similar solution was taken by the Constitutional Court, being among the first sign of change towards recentralization in federal policy (Alexander 1999: 376–378; Petrov 2001: 120). Among the considered republics, the bicameral parliament was established as a clear mark of etatization only in Karelia, but there was also only representation of municipalities in this Republic and no principle of ethnic representation enshrined in the constitution. In other words, the etatization of the elites did not lead to their ethnization in the Finno-Ugric republics.

As a result, references to ethnicity bore the function of symbolic affirmation but could not be used instrumentally in the political process. In addition to the names of the republics, the preamble of the constitution of those republics, that declared their state sovereignty, had the reference to a titular people (nation) as historical grounds for the creation of the republic. Yet, the constitutions of all Russia's republics, established them as civic states with the multinational people of the republic as the source of their sovereignty and not the titular nations (except Mordovia; see also Gorenburg 2003: 207–209). Accordingly, where established, republican citizenship was assigned to all inhabitants irrespective of ethnicity. Moreover, the constitutions of all the republics reproduced the designation of the co-official state languages made in their sovereignty declarations, with the exception of Karelia. Therefore, the findings of the study demonstrate that across the republics, the official status of the state languages was virtually the only institutionalized reference to ethnicity built in the constitutional systems that was more than just a symbol (see findings summarized in Table 1).

Demands	Constitutional provisions of the Republics in the 1990s				
	Karelia	Komi	Mari El	Mordovia	Udmurtia
Sovereignty source	Reference to titular people	Reference to titular people	Reference to titular people	No	Reference to titular people
Republican citizenship	No	All inhabitants	All inhabitants	No	All inhabitants
Bicameral parliament	Proportional and territorial	No	No	No	No
Co-official languages	No	Two state languages	Two (three?) state languages	Three (two?) state languages	Two state languages
Language requirements	No	No	Two state languages	No	No
Oath	No	Two state languages	Two state languages	No	No

Table 1. Demands in respects to ethnicity and the constitutional provisions in the 1990s.

It is argued that these outcomes could be best understood from the institutionalist perspective, because the constitutions fixed the political balance and were substantially an agreement of the republican elites on the main institutions of the political system (Uvarov 2003, Laričev 2009). Authorities rejected most demands of the ethnic elites for the establishment of ethnic institutions with the exception of the designation of state languages. Ethnic demands were rejected because they could be potentially used as political instruments. The demand for state languages was accepted in order to ensure a compromise among different segments of elites. The official status of the titular languages and some other ethnic institutions were achieved through interplay within the system of power relations, whose composition was unique for every republic. In Karelia, despite relatively well organized ethnic elites, the very low percentage of the titular group in the population significantly restricted their influence in political landscapes. Yet, Karelia also has used its right to designate its state language(s), even if it is Russian only. In Mari El, the percentage of titular and Russian groups in the population is comparable, aligning political forces for a serious conflict that might be understood in instrumentalist terms. In Komi, Mordovia and Udmurtia, the percentage of titular groups in total populations is about one third, which leads to the need for the elites to cooperate with other segments of elites. Ethnic elites in Komi were co-opted and participated in the ruling elites, being more successful in the promotion of their demands than elites in other republics. In general, the developments in the Komi Republic present an example where the events took the most interesting turn, but were also topical for the other republics.

In the conditions of representative democracy and continued rule of the old nomenklatura, the strategy of national movements directed at cooperation with the ruling elites showed itself more fruitful than conflict. It is especially evident in the case of the Komi national movement, despite the fact that all its major demands went unheeded in the constitution. This was the only republic where the status of the body of ethnic representation, the Congress of the Komi People with the right of legislative initiative, was recognized by law, although after 2000, its status was equated to that of an NGO (on the problem of their legitimacy see Osipov 2011, 2012). The other People's Congresses and other national organizations could only call attention to problems and could not be directly in charge of national survival. Nevertheless, the national organizations still had possibilities to play an active role in politics and to influence authorities, e.g., through the mechanisms of consultative bodies. Moreover, members of the ethnic elites were co-opted and received power positions. However, in a midterm perspective, there was a tendency for the cooperating leadership of the national movement to start alienating itself from the people who they claimed to represent, because cooperation influenced both ways. Authorities intensified their interference with activities of national organizations, which gradually became more and more dependent on administrative support. In these circumstances, one might argue that the split in the national movements to collaborationist and radical wings was inevitable. If previously, the coalition of the two major ethnic elite groups, *national cadres* of Soviet nomenklatura and the national intellectuals, resulted in the creation of the movements, then its split occurred largely along the same line.

Radical organizations emerged in every republic in the early 1990s that started opposing the authorities, including the national party *Dorjam As'nymös* (1993) and the organization *Komi Stav* (1992) in Komi, the organization *Kugeze Mlande* (1991) and the national revival party *Ušem* ('union') (1994) in Mari El, the organization *Erzjan' Mastor* (1992) in Mordovia, *Udmurt Kalyk Partija* (1991) in Udmurtia, and *Karjalaine Kongressu* in Karelia (1993). Unsurprisingly, these organizations soon started to blame the collaborating ethnic elites in power for "betrayal" and "ethnic entrepreneurship". National organizations representing the radical segments of national movements continued to propose the range of unrealistic ideas by the time of recentralization: from the idea of transferring to Latin script up to full independence. Yet, some experts note that their activities might have been of crucial importance for the advancement of the more modest national organizations, because authorities saw the need to cooperate with the latter ones in order to escape the radicalization of the national movements (Il'in 1993–3, Section 2.1). With an overall decline of national movements after 1993, the radical segments became more and more marginalized and finally disappeared from the political scene, returning to cultural activities. At the same time, the position of Russophone populations and the Russian elites on ethnic issues had been getting tighter throughout the country, among other reasons, as a reaction to pro-titular policies introduced in most former Union Republics.

From a comparative perspective, it could be observed that the instrumentalist explanation was not very useful in understanding the designation of the state languages in the Finno-Ugric republics. Only in Mari El, with its comparable distribution

of ethnic groups and their proportionate representation at some point in the republican parliament, were the titular languages employed in an attempt to use them as a resource in strife for power on the basis of the constitutional provision on the language knowledge requirement. However, such an attempt provoked a conflict, and language requirements were never actually enforced even in Mari El. As it was previously pointed out, the top officials were key figures in regional political landscapes, and especially so after the power shift from parliaments to presidents since late 1993. Even if undemocratically, this shift removed the problem of minority political underrepresentation of the period between 1990 and 1993, but raised the problem of support on the side of the first figure for national aspirations and, in particular, the projects of language revival (see Zamyatin 2013b).

Even though the top officials could not yet dictate the rules of the political game, their position had already mattered at the time of drafting the constitutions. If the formal designation of two state languages changed virtually nothing in the political landscapes, then the demand of a public official's language knowledge could be used as a political resource and touched upon the interest of chief executives. Like Tatarstan and six other republics of Russia, among the Finno-Ugric republics, only Mari El has included the language requirements for first figures in the constitution. However, the conflict arose when the elites sought to enact the legal provision in practice. This attempt provoked a harsh reaction on the side of Russophone populations and authorities, both on the federal and regional level, but the regional Russian elites were among the most involved. A typical argument against the language requirements was that this is a discriminatory provision used by the national leaders to exclude their opponents from the first posts (Smirnov 1995–5, Section 1.1.1).

In the other republics, keeping the coming elections in mind, the top officials of titular nationality calculated that the preservation of the status quo is better than the confrontation around language requirements. Leaders of titular nationality were elected in Mari El (from 1991 to 1996), Mordovia (from 1993 to 2012), Komi (from 2000 to 2008) and Karelia (until 1998). Election of a republican leader of the titular nationality did not automatically mean it was better off in creating the constitutional framework and increasing support of language revival projects, and, in contrast, the election of a leader of ethnic Russian origin did not automatically mean the decrease in support for language revival. On the contrary, the latter often provided more support as a concession in return for their strict position on the issue of language requirements. Language requirements were in no case in the interests of predominantly Russian ruling elites.

In the Komi Republic, an ethnic Russian leader to some extent supported national revival but only up to the point when he rejected language requirements unfavorable for him. In Mari El, support on the side of the first president, an ethnic Hill Mari, made it possible to push through the adoption of the rather strong language provisions, including language requirements. The republican leadership in both aforementioned republics, up to a certain moment, saw their interest in certain degrees of regional separatism. After 2000, when an ethnic Komi became the

new head of the Komi Republic, much less started to be done for language revival. After 2001, support for language revival has rapidly decreased in Mari El with a new, ethnically Russian president. In Udmurtia, Mordovia and Karelia, language revival projects neither received any particular systemic support on the level of top officials, nor were they directly opposed. Ethnic elites in these republics were not as strong and, consequently, the language issue was not as heated as in the other republics. Typically, the ethnic elites did not place all stakes on a single candidate for presidency (with some exceptions, as in Mari El in 2000), but had to align themselves with several candidates. As a result, they have typically not been in opposition, and the first figure ensured that the interests of their national segment are also concerned in the elite settlement.

Therefore, if in the case of sovereignty declarations the republican elites had a common interest in the face of federal authorities to promote the statehood, i.e. officially designating the state languages, then interests of republican elites diverged in the case of the constitutions. In political bargaining around the constitutions, the ethnic elites, in their striving for power, attempted to instrumentally use the issues connected to ethnicity for advancement of their own interests. Due to diverging interests, they failed to build ethnic institutions as political resources into the constitutional system. The constitutional order did not include either the reference to sovereignty of the titular nation or the mechanisms of ethnic representation in parliaments as its elements. Nor was it possible to have an influence on the ethnicity of the head of the republic through the language knowledge requirements.

Conclusion

The official status of the languages was virtually the only ethnic institution built in the constitutional systems, because, after all, it was a formal recognition with no effect on real politics. The incentive on the side of the Russian elites was the need to make concessions to ethnic elites without the fear that these could be used against them. On the side of ethnic elites, which had to refuse the instrumental use of the official language as a political resource, it was primarily viewed as a means of language revival. Instrumental use is not precluded for the future: the official status remains a potential resource that could be employed for political mobilization of ethnicity. The republican constitutions and the state languages are the last bastions of statehood, institutionally retained in the existing political regime. It seems that if there would not be large social cataclysms, the Russian ruling elites would tolerate these institutions in the foreseeable future as well, as they currently cannot be used instrumentally in power relations. If the situation changes and Russian nationalist forces still gain more weight in Russia's political landscape, the settings could be changed in the direction of even more centralization, including the attempts at the dismantling of the republics. One possible scenario in development of Russia's language policy, in that case, could be that the Russian authorities would also attempt to abolish the institute of the state

languages of the republics. In the latter case, the notion of the impossibility of “state languages” in the republics could be advanced on the pretext that the republics are not the “states”. Furthermore, this institute could be represented as a threat to the Russian nation-building that challenges the position of “Great Russian” as a world language.

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