

# The Rise and Fall of Ethnic Mobilization and Sovereignty in Tatarstan: Patterns of Elite Continuity and Dominance\*

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## Abstract

This article aims to examine the rise and fall of the intertwined concepts of ethnic mobilization and sovereignty of Tatarstan from both micro and macro chronological perspectives. The findings of the article indicate that Tatar elites were always hegemonic and decisive in shaping the autonomous sovereignty. The path dependency of Soviet nationality policies combined with an ethnic nomenklatura discourse enabled the Tatar elites to challenge the Federal center for the expansion of sovereignty. However, the Tatar elites pursued an adoptive strategy in order not to risk their elite power and wealth when faced with the growing state capacity of Moscow in the Putin era.

## Keywords

Ethnicity, sovereignty, Tatarstan, Russian federalism, nomenklatura, political elites.

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## Introduction

The first rise of the ethnic mobilization of the Volga Tatars (Hereafter Tatars) dates back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This study, however, focuses on the second rise of the ethnic mobilization and drive for sovereignty of the Tatars, which emerged at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In a compressed period of time between 1988 and 1992, the Tatars pressured Moscow through various political demands, which oscillated from an independent Tatarstan to a high level of asymmetrical political autonomy. The effects of the democratization process of Perestroika revealed the national problem in Tatarstan. The Tatar elites began to question the impacts of Soviet rule in the cultural and ecological spheres. The main problems were clustered in the underdeveloped status of the Tatar language, grievances against the autonomous status of Tatarstan, and ecological damage caused by Soviet modernization. From previously being cultural and ecological national movement assumed a political character, which supported national self-determination of Tatarstan in the course of time. Similar to the popular fronts in different Soviet Union republics, *TOTs* (Tatar Public Center) was the main formal organization of the Tatar national movement that initially included both non-nomenklatura originated Tatar nationalists and the Tatar state elites. Throughout the 1990s, the February Treaty consolidated the autonomy of Tatarstan and became a significant example of federal bargaining and peaceful ethnic accommodation. Nevertheless, the ‘Tatarstan Model’ has gradually disappeared with the rise of Vladimir Putin and his ‘Power Vertical’ policies. The consolidated asymmetrical federalism of Tatarstan is now being increasingly eroded due to the resurgent capacity of the Russian state. Hence, during a period that only lasted for approximately a quarter of a century (1990-2015), post-Soviet Tatarstan witnessed both the rise and fall of its autonomous sovereignty.

Some Western scholars who have conducted research on Tatarstan omit the nomenklatura origins of Tatar elites. These Western works have simply claimed that asymmetrical federalism in Tatarstan can cause the democratization of Russia and Russian Federalism (Graney) (Cashback) (Faller). However, these minority friendly works disregard the non-democratic internal regime dynamic of Tatarstan, which was created and consolidated by the nomenklatura network of Shaimiev. On the other

hand, from the opposite perspective, other scholars have focused on the authoritarian and oligarchical character of the state elites of Tatarstan (Emel'yanova) (Matsuzato). However, these scholars have also neglected the Russian Federal center's oligarchical and highly authoritarian regime character (Longdon et al. 90-97). Regional authoritarianism in these works is represented as an excuse to attack the federalism principle per se. This research is skeptical of both opposite poles of research on Tatarstan and attempts to open up a third perspective to understand the dynamics of federalism in Russia and Tatarstan. The legacy of the nomenklatura structure and Soviet nationality policies have structurally determined the destiny of ethnic mobilization and sovereignty projects in various Soviet nations. Moreover, this durable path dependency highly influenced the direction of post-Soviet Russia's federalism. In other words, this study claims that the Tatar state elites successfully instrumentalized Tatar nationalism for their elite survival strategy in both the Perestroika and post-Soviet periods. The success of the elite continuity of the Tatar state/nomenklatura elites emerged as a result of their advantageous social structural position that enabled them to defeat the rival national discourses without facing serious challenges from the oppositional actors. The emergence of the titular elite dominance was a product of the Soviet nationality policies' titular elite development strategy and the adoptive, flexible, cooperative political behaviors of the Tatar state elites stemming from the patron-client relationship essence of the Soviet nomenklatura structure. Hence, under this conceptual framework, this article determines the reasons for the continuity of the titular elite dominance in Tatarstan in Soviet nationality policies and Soviet nomenklatura formation's path dependency, which strengthened informal networks and cooperation between the Russian and Tatar state elites. Under this conceptual Soviet legacy framework, this study attempts to examine the destiny of sovereignty in Tatarstan from a chronological perspective taking into account the concept of state capacity. Starting from Perestroika continuing through Yeltsin's economic and federal policies during 1990s, state capacity of Moscow had dramatically decreased. In this period the research findings of this paper reveal that the Tatar state elites, namely the ethno-national nomenklatura, from the end of the Soviet Union, were always hegemonic and decisive in the drive towards sovereignty in Tatarstan. Initially, the Tatar state elites instrumentalized minority nationalism for their own interests and the

monopolization of power and won the power struggle against the two rival national discourses. The victorious Tatar state elites succeeded in gaining significant asymmetrical federal concessions from Moscow throughout the 1990s. However, the resurgent Russian state in the Putin period took all of the concessions back and restricted the autonomous sovereignty of Tatarstan. The Tatar state elites assumed a pragmatic approach by choosing not to resist these centralist attacks launched by the Putin established order. Moreover, they implemented highly submissive strategies and began to overuse the Federal Center's subsidies. The legacy of the nomenklatura structure and Soviet nationality policies have structurally determined the destiny of ethnic mobilization and sovereignty projects in various Soviet nations. This enduring path dependency highly influenced the direction of post-Soviet Russia's federalism and reproduction of the flexible political strategies of the Tatar state elites.

### **The Legacy of Soviet Nationality Policies and Nomenklatura Structure**

The regional and republican elites in Russia are overwhelmingly the product of Soviet nationality policies and its sine quo non nation-building model. Hence, understanding the Soviet nationality policies and their durable path dependency helps to understand the ethnic mobilization and sovereignty in Tatarstan, since the patterns of the Soviet nationality policies have continued into the post-Soviet period. Contrary to the 'nation killing' arguments, the author of this study believes that the Soviet state implemented a sui generis 'nation building' model. From 1923 to 1939 in particular, there was an enormous state-led effort to support various nation building projects in various non-Russian republics, which has been defined in the literature as the 'Affirmative Action Empire' (Martin). Apart from these collective rights, the Soviet state created and trained new national elites in their assigned republics, who would be the pioneers of the ethnic mobilization during the period of the collapse of the Soviet state. Slezkine (414-452) likened the Soviet Union to a communal apartment in which the private rooms are assigned to the various non-Russian nations and the public space remained under the dominance of Russian language and culture. Stalin truncated the ethno-territorial federative design of the Soviet state in favor of union republics and autonomous union republics. This policy increased the assimilative line of the Soviet nationality policies. However, another

nationality policy of inscribing ethnicity on Soviet passports, which began to be implemented in 1932, undoubtedly strengthened and fixed the multiethnic aspects of the Soviet nationality policies. Codifying ethnicity on passports and territorially institutionalizing the ethno-federal structure would provide durability for minority nationalism (Aktürk 41).

The nationality policies under the tenure of Khrushchev were initially in favor of titular nationalities. However, soon after the rehabilitation of the deported nations, the Khrushchev regime increased the assimilative tendencies of the Soviet nationality policies (Shcherbak 1-31). The education reform of 1958-1959 was a significant step that strengthened the position of the Russian language at the expense of native languages (Smith 210). The nationality policies discourse under Khrushchev was to a certain extent revised in favor of a relative assimilationist tendency through the concept of the *Sovetskii Narod* (Soviet People/Nation) supra-identity. However, the failure of the *Sovetskii Narod* discourse heralded ethnic mobilization, which threatened the Federal center during the era of Gorbachev. The vulnerability of the Soviet nationality policies was ignored in the era of Khrushchev. Brezhnev's tenure sustained the centrifugal and centrist aspects of the Soviet nationality policies. With its several aspects, Soviet modernization consolidated the status of Russian language and culture in the long tenure of Brezhnev. Russian language became the lingua franca or interethnic communication tool in the Soviet State. However, Brezhnev created a tradition that necessitated the appointment of titular elites as first secretaries of the Union Republics. Hence, the heads of the SSRs and ASSRs were primarily from the native elites during the Brezhnev period. Therefore, SSRs in particular found the opportunity to widen their autonomies. The consolidation of the titular nomenklaturas in the Brezhnev period would cause widespread corruption and the growth of nepotism networks (Sakwa 22).

The nomenklatura system was not unique to the Brezhnev regime. Historically, the origins of the nomenklatura system can be traced back to the Bolshevik party model. Although the Bolshevik party model was structurally suitable for the emergence of nomenklatura, Lenin took no direct role in the creation of the nomenklatura system (Rigby 523-537). Soon after the October Revolution, the infant forms of the nomenklatura system began to emerge in 1919-1921. In this period, the Soviets, business

firms, and trade unions were subordinated to the administrative authority of the state apparatus. Moreover, the election system in the bureaucracy was converted into an appointment system. From 1921 onwards, the Communist Party penetrated into all layers of the society. Independent minded communists were being liquidated and career-minded new pliable members were recruited into the party, which caused depolitization and overcentralization of the Soviet political culture (Harasymiw 493-512). The nomenklatura system began to change dramatically in the middle of the 1980s. Until that time, the nomenklatura system had provided privileges to the Soviet elites in political terms. Gorbachev's reforms, however, substantially changed the elite structure in the Soviet Union. The Perestroika reforms, which allowed Komsomols to function on commercial principles on the grounds of scientific and technical areas, resulted in the emergence of Russian capitalism through the 'Komsomol Economy' (Kryshtanovskaya et al. 711-733).

Despite the diversification, the nomenklatura legacy continued in the post-Soviet era. Political elite dominance in the Soviet era was transformed into economic dominance in the post-Soviet period. As for the federal center, the state elites' appropriation of private property was a more complex issue since there were too many actors competing against each other. However, in the autonomous republics of the Russian Federation, elite continuity was a prominent tendency. In the republics and regions, the possession of private property of the state elites generally occurred through the re-appropriation of regional-republican state assets through a process of privatization during the 1990s. The weakened state capacity of the federal center of the Russian Federation could not hinder the enrichment of the ethno-national nomenklaturas through the possession of state properties, particularly in resource-rich republics. Among the autonomous republics, the first state that comes to mind is Tatarstan due to its resource potential and nationalist drive for sovereignty.

### **The Rise of Sovereignty under the Hegemony of the Tatar State Elites in the Period of Ethnic Mobilization (1988-1992)**

Until the democratization reforms of Gorbachev, the Tatars were indeed well integrated into the established Soviet order, albeit the dissatisfaction regarding the autonomous status of Tatarstan. As Damir Iskhakov, Professor

of History Department at Kazan Federal University (KFU), emphasized, unlike the Baltic societies that never recognized the legitimacy of the Soviet system, the Tatars initially did not react as a dissident center to the Soviet system. The majority of the Tatar society and elites respected the established order. However, after 1985, the nationalist mobilization that emerged in the Baltic countries began to be imitated in Tatarstan. Similar to the other Soviet republics, the Tatars began to question the impact of the Soviet Union on cultural and ecological spheres. The main grievances clustered around the underdeveloped status of the Tatar language, the quality of Tatar language education, the Autonomous union republic status of Tatarstan and the ecological damage of Soviet modernization on the territory of Tatarstan (Iskhakov 57). In a short period of time, all these movements assumed a political character that supported the national self-determination of Tatarstan. Finally, the main organization of the Tatar national movement, namely the Tatar Public Center (*Tatarskii Obshchestvennyi Tsentri* or TOTs) was founded in the autumn of 1988. TOTs was an umbrella organization that bound almost all of the cultural-political fractions of the Tatar national movement (Gibadullin 26). Though TOTs aimed Tatar cultural revival, it adopted a moderate nationalist ideology, which was sensitive not to alienate the Russian population of Tatarstan. Apart from emergence of TOTs there were the Tatar state elites who were at the power under the leadership of Mintimer Shaimiev. As Rustam Gibadullin, Associated Professor of History at the University of Naberezhnye Chelny and TOTs activist, identified, most of the significant figures among the republican elites were coming from Tatarskii Obkom of the CPSU, such as Rafael Khakimov and Marat Mulyukov. Likewise, other elites gathered around Shaimiev were those who had benefitted from the Soviet era affirmative action policies, which enabled them to further their careers through nomenklatura networks. The third actor in the period of ethnic mobilization was the ‘Democratic Opposition’ or ‘Federalist Electoral Bloc’. According to Vladimir Belyaev, Professor of Political Science at Kazan National Research Technical University and Head of *Soglasie*, the Democratic Opposition was mainly formed by democratic parliament members from the regional Supreme Soviet. The Democratic Opposition largely comprised three political lines: Liberals, Social Democrats, and the Right Defending Movement. Within the Right Defending Movement, there were also three main divisions, but the most

influential one was *Soglasie* under the leadership of Belyaev. *Soglasie*, the dominant fraction of the Democratic Opposition, proposed three main ideas that would enable Tatarstan to escape from the political instability of Perestroika. The first was obligatory education in both Tatar and Russian languages for all students, the second was to engage in negotiations with Moscow to achieve a bilateral agreement, and the third was to hold a referendum to determine the status of Tatarstan.

In the summer of 1990, the politics in Tatarstan began to focus on the issue of the declaration of sovereignty. In Moscow, Yeltsin had already begun to undermine the position of Gorbachev by supporting centrifugal policies throughout the USSR. At the beginning of August 1990, Yeltsin made a visit to Tatarstan and Bashkortostan to encourage the sovereignty demands of these countries. He said “take all the sovereignty you can handle.” (Chernobrovkina 27). Increasing suspicion of the center and worsening economic conditions resulted in bold demands being made by TOTs. TOTs were demanding an almost independent statehood similar to the Baltic republics. The regional democrats, however, supported the demands for sovereignty, while still remaining an autonomous republic under the Russian Federation. Ultimately, Shaimiev balanced the poles and prepared a vague sovereignty declaration. The act was symbolically important because Tatarstan removed the title ‘Autonomous’ and renamed itself as the ‘Tatar Soviet Socialist Republic’. The sovereignty declaration was the last accord before the rise of ethnic mobilization from August 1990 to summer 1991 (Kondrashov 148).

In the chaotic period before the coup attempt, Gorbachev proposed a new union treaty to save the Soviet Union from disintegration. The Tatar ethno-national nomenklatura and TOTs supported the proposal of Gorbachev to the extent that it would upgrade the status of Tatarstan to a union republic. In March 1991, Gorbachev’s union treaty was approved in Tatarstan by 88 percent. However, the latest version of the proposal, which was published in May 1991, did not afford Tatarstan union republic status. The disappointed regional elites did not sign the treaty until the Union Republic status for Tatarstan was approved by Moscow (Gibadullin 64). Another disputed issue before the coup attempt in Moscow was the presidential election of the Russian Federation. Shaimiev was nominated as the only candidate for the Presidency of Tatarstan with the full support of ethno-national nomenklatura



and TOTs. A total of 66 percent of the electorate chose to vote for Shaimiev, while only 37 percent voted for than Yeltsin in the simultaneous elections of June 1991. Shaimiev consolidated his position, since the inability to reach the threshold of 50 percent for the Russian Federation invalidated the federal election in Tatarstan (Walker 1-35).

The positive political atmosphere for the republican nomenklatura experienced a difficult period after the coup attempt in August 1991. From August 1991 to the summer of 1992, the politics of Tatarstan was marked by political crisis and this altered the political situation against Shaimiev. Shaimiev gave implicit support to the putsch of hardliner communists who attempted to overthrow Gorbachev. However, most of the regional democrats and Tatar nationalists openly supported Gorbachev and democracy and they conducted demonstrations in Freedom Square in Kazan. Shaimiev miscalculated the situation and ordered the dispersal of the pro-democracy crowds. After the failure of the attempted coup, Moscow discarded Shaimiev and applied pressure for him to be liquidated, as the regional democrats had also attempted. Although Shaimiev's popularity decreased considerably, both the Tatar national movement, TOTs and the Democratic Opposition could not create an alternative for Shaimiev's ethno-national nomenklatura network. Nevertheless, the Tatar national movement attempted to exploit Shamiev's weak position. For TOTs, Shaimiev was always a better alternative against Moscow. Furthermore, they could have used Shaimiev's weak position to take further nationalist concessions from him. TOTs aimed to pressure Shaimiev to declare state independence in the period of turmoil (Kondrashov 173). In October 1991, when the Tatar nationalists commemorated the anniversary of the collapse of the Kazan Khanate, they stormed the regional parliament in Freedom Square and demanded that the Supreme Soviet declare republican independence. The demonstrators clashed with the police when they realized that the regional parliament members were not willing to declare independence. Several members of the security forces and demonstrators were seriously injured (Giuliano 121). When conducting field research in Kazan, many Tatars related to the author that the Russian army was already equipped to attack Kazan in case of an independence declaration. As indicated by Vasil' Sakaev, Assoc. Professor of International Relations at KFU, the situation was on the brink of military intervention:

During the events when the parliament was stormed, I was a child and one of our police officer relatives came to our house and told us that the Russian army had encircled Kazan with numerous tanks and they were waiting to attack in case of a state independence declaration.

Shaimiev rejected the calls to declare independence and gave the order to investigate the violence that had occurred in Freedom Square during the protests of 15-19<sup>th</sup> October, 1991. Shaimiev also banned some paramilitary organizations that belonged to the radical wings of the Tatar nationalists. However, a critical point of view about the violent street protest was expressed by Vladimir Belyaev, head of the *Soglasie* movement:

Most of the people who surrounded the parliament came from different cities by state buses and trucks. When I asked Nikolay Ivanovich, the director of KAMAZ, who had provided the vehicles and organized the transportation of people, he replied that it had been ordered by the regional government.

Belyaev's comment reveals that Shaimiev artificially organized the protests by instrumentalizing the radical wings of the Tatar national movement. Shaimiev pretended to the elites of Moscow that he was the only reasonable person with whom they could negotiate in Tatarstan. Sergey Sergeyev, Professor of Political Science at Kazan National Research Technological University and Member of the Democratic Opposition, also supported this opinion:

Shaimiev himself constructed his centrist position. Without the existence of the radical Tatar nationalists Shaimiev would have become the most radical nationalist, so he needed a further radical nationalism to position himself as a centrist and moderate.

At the beginning of 1992, the radical wings of the Tatar national movement would pressure the ethno-national nomenklatura power of Shaimiev for the last time. They declared the independence of Tatarstan and the foundation of the *Milli Meclis* (Tatar National Assembly). The *Milli Meclis* did not recognize the legitimacy of the Tatarstan Supreme Soviet (Gibadullin 79). However, *Milli Meclis* remained as a symbolic challenge against the ethno-national nomenklatura established order. The referendum in March 1992 also became a disputed issue among the three actors. TOTs demanded

the establishment of a constitution in Tatarstan in the referendum. The Democratic Opposition, on the other hand, demanded the issue of secession be clarified through the referendum. Shaimiev again resorted to a referendum with a vague question. The referendum question “Do you agree that the Republic of Tatarstan is a sovereign state, a subject of international law, building its relations with the Russian Federation and other republics and states on the principle of equal rights?” was accepted by 61.4% of the voters with an overall turnout of 81.6% (Kondrashov 184). After March, 1992, the ethnic tension in Tatarstan began to decrease dramatically. The demand to upgrade the autonomy level to ‘SSR’ status dissipated after the collapse of the Soviet state. The ethno-national nomenklatura won the power struggle in the period of ethnic mobilization. The negotiations with Moscow to decide the autonomy structure of Tatarstan also consolidated the power of Shaimiev. Nevertheless, due to the political uncertainty in Moscow, until the February Treaty of 1994, the relations between Moscow and Kazan remained tense. Tatarstan and Chechnya refused the federal treaty offered by Moscow in 1992. During 1993, Tatarstan boycotted Yeltsin’s referendum. However, after Yeltsin survived the political turmoil in the federal center through terminating a parliamentary alternative in Moscow, Shaimiev declared that an agreement had been reached with Moscow. After that moment, the already weakened Tatar national movement was quickly marginalized and lost its grassroots and relative public hegemony. The February Treaty, in this sense, can be conceived as the culmination of the ethnic mobilization period between 1988 and 1994.

The fall of the Tatar national movement and Democratic Opposition can be explained by several factors. With regard to the non-nomenklatura oriented Tatar national discourses, it can be stated that the separation alternative was always disadvantageous due to the ASSR status of Tatarstan. The institutional administrative structure of the Soviet nationality policies closed the separatist alternatives. Reaching SSR status was a reasonable target for the Tatar nationalists, but the USSR ultimately collapsed. Consequently, only one alternative remained: independence from Russia. Due to the structural deficiency, the Tatar nationalist could not be consistent when pursuing this target. The Tatar nationalists were always dependent on the ethno-national nomenklatura. There were several moments in which the Tatar nationalists could have bypassed Shaimiev’s power, but they did not

make serious attempts to overthrow him. The Tatar nationalists provided the space for Shaimiev to instrumentalize them. As Gibadullin points out, in Kazan, Shaimiev achieved control over the national movement, while only in Naberezhnye Chelny did the national movement remain independent. For this reason, the interethnic tension was higher in Chelny. Shaimiev skillfully balanced the Tatar nationalists and Democratic Opposition. As Iskhakov identifies, “Until the 1990s, Shaimiev had a pro-Tatar position. However, in 1990, he had a centric position and after 1991, he had a pro-Russian position.”

### **Sovereignty of Tatarstan in the Parade of Treaties (1994-2000)**

During the 1990s, the federal center in Russia had a weak state capacity. Hence, Moscow could not offer a cohesive federal arrangement that bounded the periphery to the center (George 5-19). On the brink of the collapse of the Soviet state, national movements demanded economic and cultural autonomy. The national mobilizations during this period can be summarized under three main sets: *Suverennitet*, *Federalizatsiya* and *Provovogo Gosudartva* (Kahn 374-384). In the Yeltsin era, the ethnic republics successfully instrumentalized the weak capacity of Moscow for their own gains. The federal treaty signed in 1992 reflected the asymmetrical nature in Russia. The treaty granted many concessions to the autonomous republics, which caused grievances among non-ethnic regions (Danks 33). The autonomous republics were granted the usage of natural resources and land ownership. Furthermore, the republics were recognized as sovereign states with the right to self-determination and the ability to establish bilateral treaties with foreign countries. Apart from Tatarstan and Chechnya, all ethnic republics signed the federal treaty, although Bashkortostan and Sakha signed with reservations (Danks 24-25).

In 1994, Tatarstan and Russia determined their federal legal status with the February Treaty. Articles 10, 11, 12 and 13 gave substantial autonomy to Tatarstan with regard to intra/interstate economic and administrative relations. The treaty paved the way for Tatarstan to participate in international affairs and establish relations with foreign countries (Sharafutdinova, *Paradiplomacy* 617-618). While the February Treaty clarified the amorphous relations between Russia and Tatarstan, the treaty itself in fact created new contradictions. Both Moscow and Kazan interpreted the grey areas of the

treaty in their own favor (Kahn 164-167). The ethno-national nomenklatura network of Shaimiev pushed the asymmetry as far as the red lines of Moscow., in the Tatarstan case, increasing asymmetry caused the enrichment of the ethno-national nomenklatura. The ethno-national nomenklatura to a large extent did not distribute the wealth that was gained from Moscow to the Tatarstani people. The asymmetry had almost no effect on people's lives. In other words, the potential of the asymmetrical federalism was largely wasted by the nomenklatura tradition of the Shaimiev network, which acted in the same way as the authoritarian federal elites of Moscow. Nevertheless, Shaimiev implemented a distinct economy model, which should be mentioned as one of the most significant gains of the federal asymmetry. The alternative protectionist economic model of Tatarstan aimed to achieve a 'Soft entrance into the market' (*Myagkogo Vkhozdeniya v Rynak*) by securing social policies and a welfare state. During the author's interview with Rafael Khakimov, former chief advisor of Shaimiev, the question was asked whether the social economic model was successful. His reply was as follows:

Absolutely it was successful. Tatarstan protected its agriculture and constructed highways and bridges. Tatarstan provided an alternative economic policy and a special social policy. Tatarstan imposed special taxes for firms in exchange for reconstruction of Kazan, and Tatarstan implemented special programs to support the poor. We implemented alternative policies regarding privatization. For example, we stopped the privatization of TATNEFT, while Bashkirs had to sell BASHNEFT to the federal company ROSNEFT. The KamAZ plant is also a very important enterprise. They wanted us to sell it. However, we supported it. KamAZ was rescued by the support of the regional government.

In the second half of the 1990s, the principles of the soft entrance into the market began to be loosened and the economic enrichment of the ethno-national nomenklatura gained momentum from the end of the 1990s onwards. During the 1990s, the nomenklatura patronage in Tatarstan was consolidated and this represented the end of a democratic federalist alternative in Russia. Shaimiev continued the Soviet type authoritarian political traditions and established one-man rule in Tatarstan. One-man rule in Tatarstan under the cult of Shaimiev was formed in three ways. The first way involved territorial gerrymandering and overrepresentation of the

rural districts in the regional parliament. Secondly, the path dependency of the Soviet era political culture pressured the Tatarstani people to remain passive and to obey the demands of the regional elites (Hale 31-56). Finally, the regional nomenklatura were enriched through the instrumentalization of the public resources for their own benefit. Farukshin (3-15), Matsuzato (47-77) and Sharafutdinova (*Getting the 'Dough'* 507-529) highlighted how the Shaimiev network dominated the election results through territorial gerrymandering and patron-client relationships. During the 1990s, the Shaimiev network created a monopoly on both state institutions and the regional media. Regional television stations were under the control of the regional elites while almost all of the newspapers were monopolized by the ethno-national nomenklatura (Matsuzato 47-77). As Farukshin (3-15) highlighted, the oil trade between Tatneft and the regional government was one of the significant factors behind the enrichment of the Shaimiev family and the nomenklatura network. The nomenklatura oligarchical nature of the Tatar elites hindered the constitution of a hegemonic federal alternative in the Russian Federation. Hence, they remained vulnerable to a central attack, which would de facto transform the issue of federalism into the Soviet type of federalism promoted by Vladimir Putin.

### **The Fall of Sovereignty under the Putin Regime (2000-2015)**

Putin's rise to power coincided with the improvement of the Russian economy after the 1998 crisis and growing oil revenues due to the increase in the prices on the global market. Russia's ascending state capacity can be measured in three ways: Extraction of resources, legitimacy and monopoly on violence. Although the measurement process is not straight-forward and can be complex, Russia's state capacity clearly ascended in terms of GNP, per capita GDP, extraction of tax revenues, government effectiveness, rule of law, control of corruption and monopoly on domestic violence when compared to the Yeltsin era (Ganguly et al. 56-66). Hence, the resurgent Russian state capacity and economy provided the opportunity for Putin to reestablish federal relations. In this context, the relationship between the center and regions can be described by pendulum oscillations considering that the trends of the 1990s and 2000s were almost opposite (Petrov 147). Putin simply readjusted the Soviet type of federalism to post-Soviet Russia; in other words, cultural autonomy was allowed under strict central political

control by Moscow. Putin initially emphasized judicial dissonance between the federal center and the republics and regions. Yeltsin's policies, which were embodied under the title of 'Parade of Treaties', had already created judicial asymmetries in Russia. Putin mentioned that the primary objective of his federal reforms was to create a unified economic, legal and security policy within the state by enhancing the central control over the regions. Hence, Putin named his policies 'Power Vertical' and forced the regions to adopt the central judicial enforcements of Moscow (Ross 138). In May 2000, Putin attacked the Russian Federal system through a presidential decree, which placed the control of 89 federal subjects under seven federal districts. The Yeltsin era's 89 special presidential representative structure was abolished. Instead, seven presidential envoys or plenipotentiaries (*polpredy*) were appointed to posts in the seven federal districts. The main aim of the new super-regional structure was to increase the ability of the center to coordinate the operations of the federal agencies in the regions under the absolute control of the Kremlin (Petrov and Slider 63-83). In line with the overcentralization policies of Putin, the number and functions of federal agencies outnumbered the republican state apparatuses. For instance, the number of federal officials increased from 348,000 to 616,000 between 2001 and 2006. Moreover, Russian federal agencies in the republics and regions operated in many fields and severely intimidated the regional autonomy. They not only acted for law enforcement, but also in many fields similar to a parallel state. Currently, there are 2.5 times more federal administrative employees than regional or republican governmental employees. The officials of the federal agencies are paid by Moscow and they are required to report the regional information to the relevant departments in Moscow (Slider 157-173).

According to Khakimov, the overcentralization, which bypasses the regional and republican governments, is far from solving the regional problems. The new system, which requires the central distribution of budget, is not transparent and is open for corruption. Likewise, Slider (157-173) stated that: "The pattern of numerous vertical channels of control and finance creates massive monitoring and coordination problems, which contributes to corruption and the misallocation of resources."

After the Beslan massacre, the Federal center accelerated its overcentralization

policies. The Beslan terrorist attack was used by Putin as an excuse to increase the pressure on the republics and regions. Putin ended the popular elections of regional executives and instead introduced the appointment system. In order to decrease the tension, Putin allowed the continuity of the loyal regional and republican leaders for a successive period (Slider 160). Ultimately, in the Medvedev period (2008-2012), most of the governors and republican presidents were forced out. The victims of the liquidation included Murtaza Rakhimov, President of Bashkortostan since 1989; Mintimer Shaimiev, President of Tatarstan since 1989; Yuri Luzhkov, the Governor of the city of Moscow; and Yegor Stroev, the Governor of the Orel Oblast. Most of the heads of the regions and republics submissively accepted the replacements and voluntarily resigned from their posts with the only exception of Yuri Luzhkov. From 2004 onwards, the issue of the sovereignty for the autonomous republics in the Russian Federation began to significantly dissipate. The removal of the long tenured regional leaders became another turning point with regard to the contradiction of the issue of sovereignty. The last pressure applied by Moscow on republics would occur during the second period of Putin in 2013. All the titles of the leaders of the republics were changed from 'President' to 'Head' (*glava*) apart from Tatarstan, which was allowed to use the title of President. This situation reveals that even symbolically, the established order of the Putin regime cannot tolerate the sharing of power with the autonomous republics. Furthermore, the exception of Tatarstan also reveals that among the autonomous republics of the Russian Federation, Tatarstan had the strongest sovereignty project, which was respected even symbolically. Nevertheless, the reactions of the ethno-national nomenklatura against the contraction of the sovereignty also generally remained symbolic.

Surprisingly, the Tatar state elites exhibited adoptive behavior in regard to the centralization policies of Moscow. The ethno-national nomenklatura did not take risks by resisting against the federal center. From 2000 to 2004, the issue of legislative and constitutional harmonization dominated the regional politics. The Russian Constitutional Court ordered the Tatarstan Constitutional Court to review and harmonize the constitution of Tatarstan. The republican parliament spent the majority of its time on harmonizing the legal dissonance. As Galimardanov reported, 89 out of 115 conflicting documents were harmonized with the federal law of 2001. In the same



year, out of 73 problematic laws, 31 were amended and 17 were rescinded (Graney 31). In 2002, the constitution of Tatarstan was also amended. The disputed articles 61 and 62 of the 1992 constitution, which emphasized the association of Tatarstan with the Russian Federation, was changed. Instead of 'association', the term 'united' was utilized in the amended constitution of 2002 (Graney 129). The February Treaty was also impacted by the centralization policies. The federal center abolished the asymmetrical federalism in the Russian Federation by forcing bilateral treaties in line with the federal law which was enforced in July 2005.

In regard to the economy, the reformation of the federal tax system also damaged the autonomy of Tatarstan. Due to the unified federal tax system, Tatarstan had to relinquish the privileges it had gained through the February Treaty. Some estimations highlighted that the new tax code would send 70 percent of the revenue to Moscow leaving 30 percent of the tax income in Tatarstan, which was almost the opposite tax distribution between Moscow and Kazan during the 1990s (Graney 122). However, the increase in the federal economic revenues due to the rise of oil prices allowed the Putin regime to compensate for the losses of Tatarstan and other republics and regions. For example, while in 2002 the regions received just 200 billion rubles of federal assistance, the 2003 and 2004 budgets allocated 700 and 813.97 billion rubles, respectively. In the case of Tatarstan in particular, Moscow generously rewarded the Tatar elites for their cooperation. For instance, in the 2002 Russian Federal Budget, Tatarstan received the equivalent of 408 million dollars in federal funds, while the rest of the 88 regions received only 176 million dollars (Chebankova 111-133).

After the Beslan massacre, the Tatar ethno-national nomenklatura continued to be submissive to the centralization attacks of Moscow. The former discourse of federalism and sovereignty had been abandoned. Instead, the Tatar state elites focused on milking the federal center through regional economic projects, which would be supported by Moscow. The Tatar state elites began to highlight neoliberal discourses of economic technocratization, innovation and attracting capital instead of the economic protectionism of the 1990s. The ethno-national nomenklatura assigned special importance to lobbying to convince Moscow to implement regional economic projects. Hence, as Sharafutdinova (*Getting the 'Dough'* 507-529) highlights, the

'Politics of Rentierism' is particularly suitable for enabling the ethno-national nomenklatura's lobbying for regional projects. From Shaimiev to Minnikhanov, the Tatar ethno-national nomenklatura flexibly adapted to the new conditions of the Putin regime. Informal networks between Kazan and Moscow facilitated the political rentierism. In this period, Tatarstan managed to host two giant projects via the support of the federal center. The 1,000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the city of Kazan in 2005 and the Universiade games in 2013 are two significant examples of mega projects conducted in Tatarstan. The cost of the 1,000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kazan was estimated to be approximately 80 billion rubles or 3 billion dollars. From this large investment, the city of Kazan not only benefited from the new Kazan Metro underground transportation system, but also new roads, hotels, the restoration of historical buildings and an overall boom in construction. Likewise, in 2013, Kazan held another mega event, Universiade Games. The Tatar ethno-national nomenklatura skillfully convinced Moscow to represent Russia at the Universiade. In total, around 228 billion rubles was spent on the Universiade. Apart from the increased international exposure for Kazan and Tatarstan, Kazan gained many new facilities including a reconstructed airport with a new rail line that connects the city center to the airport and a 45,000 seat modern stadium, the Kazan Arena. As a result of the Universiade games, Kazan now hosts numerous sporting venues, including one of the largest aquatics centers and an entire village or campus for athletes, which was converted to dormitories after the Universiade.

With regard to the political elite continuity, in March 2010, a significant event occurred. Shaimiev was forced to resign, similar to the other regional and republican heavyweights. However, Shaimiev was able to ensure that this prime minister, who was from the nomenklatura network, was appointed as the President of Tatarstan. Unlike the other republics, Shaimiev's continued to assert his influence in the new era. In the other regions and republics, the nomenklatura network crumbled after the change of governors and presidents. For example, in post-Rossel Sverdlovsk, in Bashkortostan and in post-Luzhkov Moscow, conflicts and scandals emerged. In the case of Tatarstan, however, the nomenklatura network survived the change of leadership. Political rentierism continued under the leadership of

Minnikhanov. Shaimiev became the advisor to Minnikhanov and remained in his office in the Presidential Palace. Hence, leadership change was more inclined towards cooperation than competition. In fact, Minnikhanov was well matched with the characteristics of the neoliberal economic trend. His background was not in politics and instead he focused on the economics and economic diversification of Tatarstan. Shaimiev also refrained from criticizing his successor in public. Shaimiev appeared at cultural events, such as the restoration and protection of historical sites and monuments (Sharafutdinova, *Political Consequences* 96-133). Hence, Tatarstan became a distinct example among the autonomous republics on the issue of the nomenklatura continuity as well as symbolic sovereignty by securing even the title of 'President' for a few years after 2013.

## **Conclusion**

This study analyzed the intertwined concepts of ethnic mobilization and sovereignty in the case of Tatarstan. Within these two intertwined concepts, this paper highlighted that the Tatar state elites pursued a pragmatic and adoptive political strategy for their elite survival and self-gain. During the ethnic mobilization period, the discourse of the Tatar nomenklatura elites dominated other national discourses of TOTs and the Democratic Opposition. The more than a quarter century long post-Soviet sovereignty experience revealed that there has not been an antagonistic relationship between the Tatar and Russian state elites. Instead, in several difficult moments, they found dispute settlement grounds due to the Tatar ethno-national nomenklatura's adoptive strategy when faced with the new political circumstances. The scope of this research, which analyzed the rise and fall of ethnic mobilization and sovereignty, overlapped with the patterns of the reproduction of ethno-national nomenklatura. For the near future, the dynamics of the regional politics in Russia in general and in Tatarstan in particular seem not to have changed due to the loss of sovereignty and the Tatar ethno-national nomenklatura's submissive acceptance of the deterioration of the asymmetrical federalism of the 1990s. However, this Soviet type sham federation of the Russian established order could be more vulnerable than it seems when Moscow loses its state capacity.

## Notes

- 1 The terms ethno-national nomenklatura, regional elites, and (titular) state elites are randomly used to refer to the Shaimiev leadership and his bureaucratic network.
- 2 Author's interview with Damir Iskhakov, Kazan', 4 October 2016.
- 3 Author's interview with Rustam Gibadullin, Naberezhnye Chelny, 8 October 2016.
- 4 Pro-Russian Opposition and Unionist Opposition are also used by various political discourses to name the Democratic Opposition.
- 5 Author's interview with Vladimir Belyaev, Kazan', 11 October 2016.
- 6 Author's interview with Vladimir Belyaev, Kazan', 11 October 2016.
- 7 Author's interview with Vasil' Sakaev, Kazan', 12 October 2016.
- 8 Author's interview with Vladimir Belyaev, Kazan', 11 October 2016.
- 9 Author's interview with Sergey Sergeev, Kazan', 11 October 2016.
- 10 Author's interview with Rustam Gibadullin, Naberezhnye Chelny, 8 October 2016.
- 11 Author's interview with Damir Iskhakov, Kazan', 4 October 2016.
- 12 Author's interview with Rafael Khakimov, Kazan', 13 October 2016.
- 13 Author's interview with Rafael Khakimov, Kazan', 13 October 2016.

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# Tataristan'da Etnik Mobilizasyon ve Egemenliğin Yükselişi ve Çöküşü: Elit Devamlığı ve Hakimiyetinin Modelleri\*

Deniz Dinç\*\*

## Öz

Bu makale Tataristan'ın içiçe geçmiş etnik mobilizasyon ve egemenlik kavramlarının yükselişi ve çöküşünü mikro ve makro kronolojik bir açıdan incelemeyi amaçlar. Bu makalenin bulguları Tatar elitlerinin özerkliği şekillendirmede her zaman hegemonik ve belirleyici olduğunu göstermiştir. Etnik nomenklatura söylemiyle birleşen Sovyet ulus politikalarının patika bağımlılığı, Tatar elitlerine egemenliği genişletmek için federal merkeze karşı meydan okuma olanağı sağladı. Ancak Tatar elitleri, Putin döneminde Moskova'nın yükselen devlet kapasitesiyle karşılaştığında kendi elit güç ve zenginliklerini riske atmamak amacıyla uyumcu bir strateji izlediler.

## Anahtar Kelimeler

Etnisite, egemenlik, Tataristan, Rusya federalizmi, nomenklatura, siyasi elitler.

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# Взлет и падение этнической мобилизации и суверенитета в Татарстане: модели преемственности и доминирования элиты\*

Дениз Динч\*\*

## Аннотация

Статья направлена на изучение взлета и падения взаимосвязанных концепций этнической мобилизации и суверенитета Татарстана как с микро-, так и с макро-хронологической точки зрения. Выводы статьи указывают на то, что татарские элиты всегда были гегемонистами и решающими в формировании автономного суверенитета. Зависимость от пути советской национальной политики в сочетании с дискурсом этнической номенклатуры позволила татарским элитам бросить вызов федеральному центру за расширение суверенитета. Однако татарские элиты следовали адаптивной стратегии, чтобы не рисковать своей властью и богатством элиты перед лицом растущего государственного потенциала Москвы в эпоху Путина.

## Ключевые слова

Этническая принадлежность, суверенитет, Татарстан, российский федерализм, номенклатура, политическая элита.

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