

# Sovereignisation and State Languages: Early Formation of Language Policy of Russia's Finno-Ugric Republics in the Conditions of the USSR Disintegration

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## **Abstract**

In order to understand contemporary language politics in Russia's national republics, one should, among other things, reconstruct the details of initial language planning in the Autonomous Republics at the late 1980s – the early 1990s. From an institutional and comparative perspective, the article explores how and why the Finno-Ugric languages were designated the state languages in the republics' declarations of the state sovereignty in the second half of the year 1990. The study demonstrates that the status of the republic as a form of national statehood was both the precondition and the justification for the designation of the state languages. The analogy in the status of Union and Autonomous Republics opened possibility for such designation in the latter category of Republics. However, unlike in the Union Republics, this possibility was used in the Autonomous Republic, even in Tatarstan with the strongest national movement, only by designation of the co-official titular and Russian languages. In the Finno-Ugric Republics, where national movements remained undeveloped, the official status was arguably granted to the titular languages only because both Russian and national elites needed it as an attribute of the national statehood to bargain more regional power in the face of the federal centre.

**Keywords:** state languages, sovereignty declarations, language policy, Finno-Ugric republics, Russia

## **1. Introduction**

At the late 1980s, the nationalities question came again to the forefront of political life in the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). A process of political change in regions, which was later called 'parade of sovereignties', led to adoption of sovereignty declarations in the Union and Autonomous Republics (SSRs and ASSRs) of the USSR between the years 1988 and 1991.

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One of its outcomes was the language reform that spread also to the ASSRs in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). A key of the language reform laid in convergence of the territorial principle of statehood with the official status of the languages. Since the year 1990 and for the following decade, 'linguistic state-building' became the leading policy in post-Soviet Russia's Republics (Neroznak 2002: 8–9). What were the reasons for linking state and language in the language reform?

The language reform has been the issue for an extensive research. In social sciences of post-Soviet Russia an instrumentalist approach to ethnicity became predominant when the leadership changed in the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IEA RAS), an academic body that was simultaneously the think tank for elaboration of Russia's nationalities policy. Contrary to the 'primordialist' view, that arguably dominated Soviet ethnography, 'instrumentalist' view understands ethnicity as a resource for political mobilization of the masses used by national elites for achieving their own political goals. From an instrumentalist perspective, Michail Guboglo, Deputy Director of the Institute at that time, explored the link of sovereignisation and language status planning. He considered the processes not just within a language policy study, but in a wider context of nationalism studies. He labelled this connection as 'mobilised linguicism', seeing in establishment of state languages selfish interests of national elites to preserve or attain power behind their rhetoric about 'language revival' (1998). This line of reasoning stayed within the 'narrative of catastrophe' genre, describing the collapse of the Soviet Union as an outcome of the alliance of regional national elites and Moscow 'democrats'. However, this is only one possible view on the language reform. Some scholars from other disciplines (law, sociolinguistics, political science) admitted the possibility of other motivations for the language reform than political self-interest of elites, including the need for protection of linguistic ecology, cultural sustainability and human rights (see, e.g., Neroznak 1996: 4–5). It seems that an interdisciplinary study could provide a broader perspective on how establishing of the state languages became political and institutional mainstream solution to national challenges.

It is remarkable that the instrumentalist theories, including those on language politics, were typically based on extensive research of the developments in the Republics with a high level of popular support for nationalism, such as the Baltic Republics among the Union Republics, Bashkortostan and Tatarstan among the Autonomous Republics (e.g. Gorenburg 1999). In the latter category, not only the ASSRs with strong national movements, but also those ASSRs, where support for nationalism was low, i.e., because titular groups constituted a minority in the total population, as in the Finno-Ugric Republics, established their state languages. In minority situation it would be much more difficult for

national elites to pursue their 'selfish interests'. Is the instrumentalist argument of national elites' interests in designation of the state languages valid to understand the processes in the Republics with low public support for nationalism? To what extent alternative (or complementary) legal, sociolinguistic and other explanations are applicable?

The focus of this article is on the early language status planning in the Finno-Ugric Republics. At the late 1980s the language issues were actualised both in a vertical and a horizontal dimension of power relations: between the federal centre and the Republics as well as between regional elites within the Republics. The centre-periphery relations, addressed in the first section of this article, are relatively well studied (for the development of the debate on the issue see: Dusseault 2010: 59–71; for a case study, for example: Kempton 1996). The first section will reconstruct the historical developments in relations of the USSR and its Union and Autonomous Republics in the late 1980s that narrowed the policy options to the language status planning approach. It is argued here that the possibility to establish the state languages in the ASSRs was created by the analogy in the statuses of the SSRs and ASSRs.

The second section will examine on the basis of case studies how this possibility of languages designations became reality in the Finno-Ugric Republics. The section will analyse the framing of national movements in the Republics and the special role in this process of the CPSU Republican Committees (further – *Obkom*, more precisely – *Oblastnoj Komitet Kommunisti českoj Partii Soveckogo Sojuza*). It will further trail when and how the demands for the status of the state language of the Republics were proposed in the negotiations of the regional elites and set in the political agenda; how the ideas fit the ethno-political landscapes and what obstacles the recognition faced. Yet, the aim here is not to present an all-inclusive survey of neither the ethno-political landscapes in the Republics nor the dynamics of ethno-political struggles. The functional method of comparative analysis is used to organise the data. With the help of this method it is possible to focus on legislation in different places as different solutions to the same problem (Michaels 2006). The analysis reveals some ethno-political and sociolinguistic variables that defined the threshold for establishing the state languages.

The third section will discuss the data presented in the previous section. The interaction between regional elites and the role of popular movements in settling of national and linguistic issues are less studied by academics. The findings in this section are assessed from the instrumentalist, institutionalist and constructivist viewpoints (Gorenburg 2003, Hroch 1985, Smith 2001 and others). Theories of sociolinguistics and sociology of language are employed for the interpretation of sociolinguistic variables (including language attitudes and language standardization vs. dialects) and the findings concerning linguistic,

semilinguistic and extralinguistic factors which predetermine sociolinguistic or instrumentalist types of language planning (Kirkwood 1989: 1). Finally, the results of the study are summarised in the conclusion stating, i.e., that while the instrumentalist line of argument has certain relevance for understanding the divergence in the interests of national elites and popular movements, it may oversimplify the actual course of events, setting these interests in opposition, even if they have not been, at least, by the adoption of the sovereignty declarations. In doing so, it misinterprets the motivation of national elites and understates their links to national movements.

## **2. State and language: none, one or two and more state languages?**

### **2.1. Union Republics: from non-regulation to the sole state languages**

The processes of the dissolution of the USSR led to the creation of the independent states separated along the borders of the Union Republics. Quite the contrary to the Soviet Union where, with some exceptions listed below, language status planning was not in use, in all the former Union Republics it became the dominant policy approach; whereby the language issues were typically regulated by the designation of the state languages. Why so? Was there a Soviet legacy for such an outcome in language politics?

The Union and Autonomous Republics were created after the October revolution first and foremost on the principle of ethnicity. The SSRs and ASSRs were titled after their biggest autochthonous groups. Thus, despite the proclaimed principle of ‘equality of the peoples of Russia’, there was hierarchy of these groups and their languages. The idea of Russian as a state language was not taken into use by the establishment of the Soviet statehood (including the first Soviet constitution of 1924) due to the position of the first Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin, who saw in such proposals a manifestation of Great-Russian chauvinism and an obstacle for ideology of internationalism and ‘friendship of peoples’ (Lenin 1958: 295). Official use of non-Russian languages was promoted as a part of the campaign for ‘indigenization’ (*korenizacija*), that is, the policy of ensuring the political representation of the Soviet nationalities that included extending education among nationalities by their own national languages. However, this was the issue of practical measures and not of language status planning. In the 1920s there was an attempt to designate Bashkir and Russian as the official languages of the Bashkir ASSR, seen as an instrument ‘to breathe life into a Bashkir national identity distinct from the Tatar national identity’ (Simon 1991: 43–44). Even though its regional parliament, the Supreme Congress of the Republic, adopted the according provision in the constitution of 1925, it was not approved by the Moscow authorities. The 1936 Soviet Constitution defined languages territorially introducing the terms ‘languages of the SSRs’, ‘of the ASSRs’ and other territories.

The last USSR constitution of 1977 still recognized the fifteen Union Republics as sovereign entities. Only the Trans-Caucasian Union Republics since the revolution times had the sole state languages designated in their constitutions. They retained the sole state languages even by the revision of republican constitutions of 1978 after protests in Georgia against the plans of the state languages removal (Simon 1991: 331; Dorovskich 2005: 56–77). Yet, all-in-all, the language issues were largely non-regulated and unsurprisingly so, because the task of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) became ‘accelerated drawing together up to full merger of nations’ into ‘a new historical entity of the Soviet people’ which has ‘Russian as the second mother tongue’ (Third CPSU Programme 1961: 115–119). In administrative practice its implementation implied valorisation of Russian: in particular, free choice of instruction language was intended to promote language shift toward Russian and over time accumulated inter-ethnic tensions.

The Soviet national-state building (*nacional’no-gosudarstvennoe stroitel’stvo*) provoked resentment and nationalist sentiment in the Republics. In the new era the Union Republics raised the issue about the discrepancy between the Soviet constitutional provision on sovereignty and the actual Soviet practice. Raising this issue did not imply the challenge of the existence of the Union itself right away. Sovereignty was initially rather interpreted as power to decide over the regional issues, in particular, more autonomy over linguistic and cultural affairs. As weakening of cultural characteristics was viewed as an effect of the Soviet modernization policy, linguistic issues became the very core of the political agenda. At the *perestrojka* times the State tolerated the language demands as the only channel to express dissatisfaction with the state of nationalities affairs (as it is again in nowadays Russia). The SSRs started their way to independence i.e. by introducing the sole state languages in their language legislation. In effect, the use of state languages in public life became compulsory, while Russian was typically defined with a rather vague Soviet formula of ‘the language of inter-nationality communication’ with no compulsory use.

The Estonian SSR was the first among the Union Republics on this route. Under pressure of the national movement the delegation of the CPSU Estonian Central Committee presented in July 1988 in its recommendations to the 19th CPSU Party Conference the demand to guarantee the sovereign rights of the Union Republics. One of the suggested guarantees was the designation of their state languages (*XIX konferencija* 1988: 75). Ignorance of these recommendations arguably triggered the move of Estonia towards a more radical stance of sovereignisation (Šachraj and Stanskich 2010: 135). In September 1988 the Estonian Central Committee ‘recognised the advisability of granting Estonian the status of state language on Estonian territory’ (Kirkwood 1991: 75). A popular referendum on the language issue was held on 30 October 1988. The

Supreme Council of the Estonian SSR passed the Declaration of Sovereignty that proclaimed i.e. the supremacy of Estonian laws over Soviet ones but did not mention the state language (16 November 1988). In the Constitution of 1920 and the Language Law of 1934 of the Estonian Republic Estonian was designated as the sole state language. The soon official adopted concept of legal continuity with the pre-war Republic of Estonia arguably covered also the language issues. The Amendment to the Constitution on Estonian as the state language was passed by the Supreme Council (6 December 1988; see: Rannut 2004). The Language Law was adopted (19 January 1989) as ‘an understandable reaction on the catastrophic growth of Russian monolingualism’ and designated Estonian as the sole state language; ‘language policy was the main cornerstone in the modification of Estonian society that started in 1988’ (Siiner 2005: 165). The two other Baltic states, Lithuania and Latvia, followed the same way: by summer 1989 their constitutions were amended, language laws adopted and sovereignty declared. It should be mentioned here that, despite its initial effect of equating the position of Estonian and Russian in the public sphere, in a few years the language law started functioning as a mechanism of ‘Estonianisation’ and narrowing the use of Russian (Guboglo 1998: 334–335).

If the function of constitutions and laws as legal acts is clear, then what kind of document is a declaration of state sovereignty? Jeff Kahn defines it as an act of defiance, ‘the public announcement by a subordinate government of the fact or intention that its relationship to the once-higher authority has been or is about to be deliberately and unilaterally changed’ (2000: 59). In that it differs from the declaration of independence, as the latter is a policy document with clear intention to create a state, a state with certain characteristics which justify its creation on the ruins of the previous state in that territory. Both types of documents need justification for their action or intention. Sometimes these are justification for internal use and concern, for example, the change from an authoritarian or totalitarian to a democratic regime. Justifications for external use are important in the case of separation from a bigger state or devolution of power. The history of statehood, religion, ethnicity, language and other social markers were arguments typically used for this type of legitimisation of the demands for self-determination.

In the ‘parade of sovereignties’, both types of justifications were in use for the creation of the Republics as new polities. In the conditions of disintegration of the Soviet Union and unclear future perspectives, the republican elites tried to justify the emergence of the new polity. If economic interest and popular support for separatism were the most important driving forces towards sovereignty and independence, then the historical continuity with the Soviet Republics and the corresponding political status were arguably the most important justifications of such steps. The ethnicity of the groups was used as justification, because

according to the principle of nationalism it was the precondition for the very existence of ethnically-based political entities. Moreover, from the position of linguistic nationalism language was also in use as a justification for sovereignty (Guboglo 1998: 222).

The CPSU leadership realized the need to react and to place the party 'at the head the reform processes'. A policy document, the CPSU Platform on the nationalities policy, admitted that the sovereignty of the Republics became largely formal as a consequence of erosion of the competences division according to the 1924 USSR constitution. Among the measures to overcome shortcomings in nationalities policy it suggested 'advisability' of the recognition of the state languages of the nationalities that gave names to the SSRs and ASSRs. It also recommended that the status of Russian as the nation-wide state language (*obščegosudarstvennyj jazyk*) should be enshrined in law and that it should function on equal-in-rights footing with the state languages of the Republics (CPSU Platform, 20 September 1989; Vdovin 1990: 13).

Therefore, the idea about the need to establish state languages was rooted in history of some Republics. Then it proliferated by analogy from a republic to republic as a 'cascade effect' and was postfactum sanctioned by the central authorities (see the next section). Moreover, the languages of the Union Republics were designated as the sole state languages, officially because it was assumed that Russian would be the state language of the Soviet Union. Among the actual reasons might have been the concerns that a co-official status of Russian and the Republic's language would not prevent shrinking in official use of the latter and the conviction that only the sole state language status would enhance its promotion (*Obzor pisem* 1989: 153–154). The argument was that the normalization of those Republics' languages was needed that were minoritised during the Soviet times (Rannut 2004). Unsurprisingly, this normalization implied narrowing of the Russian language use, that Russians unused to be in minority situation perceived as discrimination.

## **2.2. Russia: sovereignisation without state language**

The formation of the language policy in Russia was also a part of historically determined democratization processes during disintegration and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Among the Union Republics, Lithuania took over the leading role and was the first to adopt the Declaration of Independence already on 11 March 1990. In most emerging states, the nation that gave it the name was proclaimed as the bearer of its sovereignty and its language was designated as the sole state language (with the exceptions of Belarus, where Russian is the second state language). By May 1990 all the Union Republics but Russia adopted their language laws (Alpatov 2000: 143). What was the reason for the absence of state languages in the early language planning of Russia?



In the RSFSR the dynamics of political life of that period was determined by confrontation between Union authorities and Russian authorities. The RSFSR, the biggest Union Republic of the USSR, was itself nominally a federation composed of the Autonomous Republics, Autonomous Districts (*Okrug*), Autonomous Regions (*Oblast'*) as well as ordinary Regions and Territories (*Kraj*). Geographically, three large areas of Russia could be distinguished, in which the groups of the autonomous territorial units were situated: 1) the European part of Russia (the North-West and the Volga belt), 2) the North Caucasus, 3) Siberia and the Far East. Out of the first group, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Chuvashia are Turkic Republics, while Karelia (RK), Komi (KR), Mari El (RME), Mordovia (RM) and Udmurtia (UR) are Finno-Ugric Republics. Additionally, in the European part there were the Nenets and Komi-Permyak Autonomous Districts also titled after Finno-Ugric peoples. Along the weakening of the central authorities, the regional elites in Russia's Autonomous Republics became stronger in changing political landscape and, in particular, after first free elections in spring 1990.

To prevent centrifugal processes, the Union authorities followed the recommendations of the CPSU Platform and adopted in April 1990 a number of laws addressing the nationalities problem (Walker 2003: 74). In order to gain support of the Autonomous Republics, the USSR Law recognized the status of both Union and Autonomous Republics as the Subjects of the Federation (26 April 1990). Moreover, the USSR Language Law gave the SSRs and ASSRs the right to define their state languages, while Russian was designated as 'the official language of the USSR' (24 April 1990, Article 4). There was no definition of the term 'state languages' in the Law. The 'state language' in this context refers to more or less the same phenomenon, what internationally is referred as 'official language' of a state, that is, a language used in parliament, administration and courts. However, according to UNESCO experts opinion of 1953, the term 'national language' has additional connotation, emphasizing the fact of existence of the state, that is, bears the function of a symbol of the national identity (see the definitions in: Neroznak 1996: 5; 2002: 12–13). The developers of the Law had this distinction in mind when assigning Russian with the more neutral term 'official language', because the term 'state language' (*gosudarstvennyj jazyk*) would have provoked further confrontation with the Republics (Dorovskich 2005: 90–91) ('national language' (*nacional'nyj jazyk*) in the Russian context is reserved for 'native language' one identifies with and a language of national group). Exactly this extra meaning of the 'state language' as a symbol of the national identity was arguably the actual reason for the designation of the state languages in the Union Republics and its initial absence in Russia. The Russian leadership considered the ASSRs as



allies against the Union centre and did not want to lose their support designating Russian as the state language.

The process of sovereignisation within Russia officially began on 12 June 1990, when the First Russian Congress of People's Deputies adopted the Declaration of State Sovereignty in face of the Soviet Union. The Declaration recognized a multinational people of Russia as the bearer of its sovereignty; it also recognized the individual right to freely develop and use one's native language and the right of peoples to self-determination in chosen national-state and national-cultural forms (RSFSR Declaration, 12 June 1990, Para 3 and 4). The document established supremacy of the Russian legislation over the Union one (Para 5). Moreover, the Congress 'confirmed the need of substantial broadening of the rights of autonomous republics' and other regions (Para 9), which did not, however, include a more radical proposal on supremacy of the legislation of autonomies over the Russian laws (Šejnis 2005: 319–320). In its wording the Declaration was not the post-factum document, but rather a policy document. The provision about its immediate enforcement was not included to the final text (Šejnis 2005: 322). Despite the adoption of the declaration, Russia did not become independent until December 1991, when the Soviet Union ceased to exist. It is remarkable that the Russian authorities did not use the right to designate the state language(s) and there was no according clause in the Sovereignty Declaration.

The designation of Russian as the state language was done only in October 1991 in the Declaration on the Languages of the Peoples of Russia and the Russia's language law (25 October 1991), when, after the August *coup d'état* attempt, it became clear that the USSR will dissolve. This was a time when the ideology of Russian nationalism was generated by elites as a reaction to nationalisms in the Republics in ethno-political pendulum and the process of recentralisation was initiated (Pain 2003: 18). On the one hand, the creation of the Russian civic political nation and the Russian nation-state with Russian as the state language became the goal of official ideology. On the other hand, the Russian ethnic nationalism emerged as a political movement (see discussion on Russian elites below in section 4.2). The Law was an outcome of compromise and contains contradicting ideas from the Soviet times, for example, about equality of languages and hierarchy of their statuses, state support for language revival of some languages and prohibition of discrimination. Therefore, status planning though recognition of the official status of languages became one of the cornerstones of the Russia's language legislation with a delay.

### **2.3. Autonomous Republics: from non-regulation to the co-official state languages**

The Declarations of State Sovereignty were proclaimed in all of Russia's Autonomous Republics, with the exceptions of Mordovia and Dagestan, where the according documents did not declare sovereignty but only defined their new political status. All the Autonomous Republics, including former Autonomous Regions (as well as some Autonomous Districts) adopted their declarations after the Russia's declaration, in the second half of 1990 and the beginning of 1991, and most of them designated their state languages in this document. If it was done, these were always both Russian and titular languages. Why was it still possible for the Autonomous Republics to designate their state languages, even if the RSFSR has not designated state language(s) in its declaration?

The answer should be sought in circumstances of sovereignisation. As the timing suggests, regional elites in the Autonomous Republics did not hurry to follow the path of the Union Republics, because they 'needed evidence that their preferences for more autonomy were actually attainable'; they obtained necessary assurance for the move towards sovereignisation only after the adoption of the RSFSR declaration at the First Russian Congress in June 1990, where delegations of regional elites actively participated in discussions (Kahn 2000: 60–61). They considered Russia's sovereignty declaration as the legal basis for the proclamation of the analogical declarations in the ASSRs (Chakimov 2009: 121). There is no consensus on the legal status of the sovereignty declaration, i.e., because their unilateral adoption contradicted the Soviet legislation. Even if they were first of all political acts, their legal effect had to be that they were proclaimed as the basis for elaboration of the constitutions.

At a particular moment in history when the decentralizing tendencies in the Soviet Union started to overwhelm the state structure, the Russian centre had no other choice but to grant the Autonomous Republics 'as much sovereignty as they are able to swallow' in the words of Boris Yeltsin, then-chairman of the Russian Supreme Council, in August 1990 during his visit to Tatarstan and Bashkortostan as a part of the tour in the Russian regions. In the conditions of the clash between the Union authorities of Michail Gorbačëv and the new Russian authorities of Boris Yeltsin, the latter identified the regional elites as power centres that could deliver support he needed both in elections and, in particular, in the Union Treaty draft process (Mucharjamov 2000: 26; Michajlov 2011). One after another the Republics began taking advantage of the moment and proclaim their declarations of sovereignty. North Ossetia was first to adopt its declaration on 21 July 1990, arguably, because of the wish of elites to proclaim territorial integrity of the Republic in its territorial conflict with the neighbouring Ingushetia (Michajlov 2011).

Starting from the 1920s and throughout the Soviet history Tatarstan sought the status of Union Republic, because it met all criteria (never made formal), such as the size of the population and economic sustainability, except external border. With Yeltsin's encouragement and the formal sanction of the USSR Law of 26 April 1990, not only Tatarstan, the planned recipient, but also the other ASSRs began to equate their status with that of the Union Republics, in order to overcome the Soviet hierarchical distinction between the Union Republics and Autonomous Republics (Gorenburg 2003: 201; Chakimov 2009: 133). The term 'titular nations' of the Republics came into use to raise the status of their 'indigenous populations'; similarly, the Soviet terms of the 'languages of the SSRs' and 'languages of the ASSRs' were gradually substituted in public discourse with that of 'titular languages' (Neroznak 1996: 5).

In every ASSR it was not the titular people, but 'the people of the Republic' that was proclaimed the sovereign and the sole source of state power (in some ASSRs – 'multinational people' as a political entity of individuals *and* nationalities and not 'multiethnic people' as an entity of individuals of different ethnic origins, see Chakimov 2009: 8, 39). The civic nation solution was taken because in Tatarstan and elsewhere the adoption of the sovereignty declaration was portrayed 'as the successful outcome of a struggle by all democratic forces, not just the national movement' (Gorenburg 2003: 89). At the same time, the definition of the bearer of sovereignty in the ASSRs was borrowed from Russia's declaration of sovereignty (Kahn 2000: 74–75). In other words, the ASSRs declarations reflected most provisions of the RSFSR declaration. However, the provision on state languages, if included, was formulated after the declarations of Union Republics. The 'cascade effect' in such designation proliferated from Union Republics to Autonomous Republics after the difference between the Union and Autonomous Republics was reconsidered and the designation was sanctioned by the central authorities.

As in the case with the Russia's sovereignty declaration, the proclamation of the declarations in the Republics did not mean the actual sovereignty right away. The available research has demonstrated that sovereignty in many former Autonomous Republics was actually envisioned by most segments of regional elites as simply a way to place pressure on and ensure a greater self-governance vis-a-vis the federal centre. Most existing studies on centre-periphery relations argue that the declarations of most Autonomous Republics did not necessarily signify a push towards independence, but were rather an attempt to force the federal authorities into granting a higher level of self-governance and better 'rules of the ethno-political game' that would allow regional elites to control and manage their economic resources (Smith 2001: 121; Leprêtre 2001; Söderlund 2006: 62; Dusseault 2010). It seems, however, that centre-periphery studies underestimate the role of nationalist sentiment in sovereignisation. Nationalism

studies find better explanatory variables for understanding of ethno-political aspects in these relations, including stronger demands for the sole state language in some Republics.

#### **2.4. Autonomous Republics: higher threshold for designation of co-official state languages**

The co-official status of the nation-wide and regional language in provinces is not an indispensable solution: among numerous examples of regions with regional language as the sole official language (Finland, Belgium etc.) the most famous one is the Canada's province of Quebec, where regional authorities operate only in French as official language, while the country's federal authorities and regional authorities of the New Brunswick province are bilingual and the other regional authorities are monolingual English. Will Kymlicka, a leading Canadian political philosopher, argues that 'it may not be enough... for the minority simply to have the right to use its language in public. It may also be necessary that the minority language be the *only* official language in their territory. If immigrants, or migrants from the majority group, are able to use the majority language in public life, this may eventually undermine the predominant status, and hence viability, of the minority's language' (2001: 79).

As the Union authorities, that were late with the adoption of their language law in April 1990, the RSFSR authorities adopting the Language Law in October 1991 legalised backwards republics' designation of state languages. By that time three Autonomous Republics, the Chuvash SSR in November 1990, the Tuvian ASSR in December 1990 and the Kalmykian ASSR in January 1991 have already adopted their own language laws. Only the Tuvian ASSR, the remote republic with a high share of the autochthonous population, designated in its law Tuvian as the sole state language of the Republic, while Russian was defined as the nation-wide state language (14 December 1990). The example of Tuva demonstrates that actually in the year 1990 it was possible to introduce the sole state language also in the ASSR. After that in all other Republic (except Karelia), in the sovereignty declarations and/or language law, both Russian and titular languages were designated the state languages. Why in the ASSRs of Russia it became possible in practice to introduce only the co-official languages and not the sole state language as in the SSRs?

Among explanatory variables for stronger provisions of the sovereignty declarations are suggested time of their adoption, ethnic composition of the republic and strength of the national movement. Jeff Kahn argued that ethnic composition of the republican population is not a very strong variable for the timing of the declarations' adoption (2000: 63). However, while the early adoption of the declarations had meaning for the strength of the demands, so did the ethnic composition. Dmitry Gorenburg (2003: 205), comparing the develop-

ments in the Autonomous Republics of Russia titled after the Turkic peoples, notes that 'the strength of the local nationalist movement and the demographic balance in the region were the most important factors in determining the nature of sovereignty declarations in Russia's ethnic regions'. Strong national movements had a stronger say in drafting the documents, but 'after the publication of these drafts, the nature of the final draft depended more on the demographic balance between the titular and Russian populations than on the strength of the nationalist movement' (Ibid.: 205).

Central authorities had monitored the processes in regions *inter alia* through the scientific networks and were taking this information into account in their counter-activities aimed at preserving territorial integrity (e.g., Materials of the Political Monitoring, Institute for Humanities and Political Studies, Moscow, 1992–1999). According to their data, indeed, different Republics strived at different goals because their politico-economic resources were dissimilar. In opinion of Russian experts of that time, among the most important grounds enhancing the support of regional elites for sovereignty was not only economic sustainability of the Republics but also popular opinion in favour of sovereignty reinforced by nationalism on the part of the titular group.

According to findings of regional reports (finalised in Senatova 1993), among the Republics of the European part only Tatarstan and Bashkortostan were counted as ones which had sufficient economic resources and public support for sovereignty to endure as independent states (besides these, only Chechnya and Yakutia qualified for the same in Russia at large). Udmurtia, Karelia and Komi were assessed as having sufficient resources in terms of both leadership and population benefiting from economic separatism, but only in the case that they remained within Russia's economic space because of their dependency on donations from Moscow for loss-making sectors of the economy. Chuvashia, Mari El and Mordovia were assessed as lacking the economic resources to sustain sovereignty. Furthermore, Mari El and Mordovia were assessed as not having any remarkable economic potential. Despite economic dependency public support for sovereignty in Chuvashia was as strong as in the other two Turkic Republics. Popular opinion in the Finno-Ugric Republics was against sovereignisation.

However, high public support for sovereignisation did not automatically mean high support for the state languages. Measuring popular support for nationalism was continued by later quantitative researches on different groups. For example, the data of Dmitry Gorenburg confirm the conclusions on high popular support for sovereignty in Turkic Republics and low one in Finno-Ugric Republics. Unsurprisingly, the local Russians in the Volga Turkic Republics showed practically no support for the sole state language (2003: 160–162, 235–237). Among important reasons were the fears on the side of the Russians

who in 1990 have already been aware about language conflicts in the Union Republics (Tatarstan President Šajmiev in his public lecture at Harvard University on 3 October 1994 mentions the designation of the sole state language as a reason for a negative course of events in Moldova). Yet, according to the data of Gorenburg, quite many Russians supported sovereignty declarations in Autonomous Republics (as they did in the Union Republics, too).

This support is explained by ability of political elites to present sovereignty as a public good benefiting all ethnic groups, for example, in Tatarstan (Giuliano 2000: 308–313). However, Gorenburg witnesses a low popular support for the titular language as the sole state language in most republics, including Turkic, even among the titular populations (2003: 235–237).

Why even in Tatarstan, a republic with a strong national movement and favourable ethnic composition, the titular population was satisfied with co-official status of languages? At the raise of the national movement, Tatar Public Centre (TOC), the major Tatar national organisation, in its Thesis for the Preparation of a Platform suggested Tatar as the sole state language, while Russian should have been given the status of the language of internationality communication (Shamiloglu 1989: 11–12). At TOC founding congress in February 1989 a moderate programme was adopted that proposed to grant Tatar the status of state language but did not say anything about Russian. In 1990 the idea of two state languages prevailed in the TOC and state bilingualism was defined as its goal (Cashaback 2008: 254). In April 1990 a radical wing left the TOC and created the '*Ittifak*' National Party which also for some time supported the idea of two state languages, although as a temporary solution only (Ischakov et al. 2005: 24).

Arguably, such a shift was an outcome of the split within the Tatar population. Elise Giuliano argues that state bilingualism was in interest of urban russified Tatars that dominated the national movement. This moderate segment of the national elites wanted it as a symbolic act but due a lack or poor language knowledge did not envisage this act as an ethnopolitical resource in struggles for power or a sociolinguistic tool of language revival (Giuliano 2000: 304–308). Unsurprisingly, the position of collaborating segment became government's agenda and some of its members were co-optated into political and ruling elite. It was possible to present state bilingualism as a public good, so that more than half respondents of both Tatar and Russian nationality started supporting it (Ischakova 2002: 12). Therefore, in Tatarstan both public opinion and national movement were in favour of two state languages.

### **2.5. Autonomous Republics: lower threshold for designation of co-official state languages**

Nevertheless, low popular support for sovereignty in the other Republics did not become an obstacle not only for sovereignisation but also designation of state languages. If in Republics with majority titular population and the according domination of the national elite among the regional elites, voting for cultural and linguistic aspects of sovereignisation should not have been a problem, then in other republics Russian elites would have not voted for the state language. Why it was still possible to designate the state languages in the latter category of Republics such as those titled after the Finno-Ugric peoples?

Argumentation of Jeff Kahn might be useful for explanation of this rather unanticipated outcome. According to him, sovereignisation was a very elite-dominated process, where the public did not have much say. His argument coincides with seeing economic interest as the main driving force, along with political benefits, when he suggests the interest of elites as a variable for explaining earlier sovereignisation of economically rich regions and, thus, with most advantages for the elites. As he points out, the declarations were typically drafted by appointed commissions of the Supreme Councils and adopted with an overwhelming majority, because the regional *nomenklatura* elite ensured this way democratic legitimisation of their power over regional resources. However, further he argues that national and other popular social movements ‘were rarely given opportunities for meaningful involvement in crafting the final product’ (Kahn 2000: 64–67). Contrary to this view, Dmitry Gorenburg assesses, based on the evidence of public action in support of sovereignty declarations organised by national movements in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, their adoption as ‘one of the key accomplishments of the regional nationalist movements’ (2003: 124–127, 158).

Kahn’s argument can still be valid for other republics. However, it must be qualified that the national elites have not been indifferent about the interests of their titular group and strived ‘to implement ethnic revival programmes despite the danger of alienating non-titulars’ (Gorenburg 1999: 269). They were represented among the ruling elites and had a say, although to different extent, in drafting the declarations. From an instrumentalist perspective, one could argue that the national elites demanded the establishment of state languages, first of all, because in their view the knowledge of languages could then hypothetically become a tool for ensuring their political participation. This might be true in the case of the adoption of the republican constitutions (see Zamyatin 2013, forthcoming), but the declaration was only a statement of intention with contested legal nature. Moreover, a novelty of the ASSRs declarations in comparison to the RSFSR declaration but also to the declarations of other Union Republics was the designation of the titular languages as the state languages on par with



Russian. That precluded a hypothetical use of the language requirements for the officials as an ethnopolitical resource. Even the national elite in Tatarstan, well represented among the ruling elites, rejected as a non-realist the demand of national movement to proclaim the titular language as the sole state language. Given the ethnic composition of population and the elites, it was impossible to ignore public opinion that was not in favour of the sole state language. Here is where the common wish of regional elites to demonstrate separateness stopped and the manifestation of linguistic nationalism began.

Some Autonomous Republics nearly ended up reaching independence, because the driving force of nationalism was strong there. For example, Tatarstan and Chechnya did not participate in the negotiations on the Federation Treaty (30 March 1992), which in their opinion would have placed restrictions upon Republics' already achieved sovereignty, and did not sign it. Instead, in May 1991, Tatarstan joined the negotiations around a Union Treaty draft (Petrov 2001: 112). In doing so, it sought to create the phenomenon of 'dual subject status', that is, of simultaneous horizontal relations with both the Union and the RSFSR (Mucharjamov 2000: 27–33, 51; Ischakov et al. 2005: 33–34).

None of the former Autonomous Republics became independent and following the sovereignty parade, when the stabilizing political system included the principle of federalism as one of its cornerstones, all they were listed in Russia's Constitution (12 December 1993) as the 'constituent Republics of the Russian Federation' among other federative unites. Later, out of 89 constituent entities ('subjects of the federation'), those which were ethnically based were 21 Republics, 10 Autonomous Districts and one Autonomous Region. Among the Republics are four former Autonomous Regions out of five that the Russian Supreme Council upgraded in July 1991 to the status of 'constituent Republics of the Russian Federation' and, thus, legitimised their state languages. Neither Autonomous Districts nor the remaining Autonomous Region were allowed to have their state languages: their titular languages can have only some official functions.

Due to the Russia's political landscape the Autonomous Districts were only the national-territorial units and not the national-state unit as the Republics. That is why in the Autonomous Districts the titular languages could not become the state languages, even if some of them adopted declarations of sovereignty. For example, in the Komi-Permyak Autonomous District the titular language was not in a worse position than the titular languages in the Finno-Ugric Republics from the sociolinguistic point of view. Unlike in the Finno-Ugric Republics, in this District the titular population was in majority. And the regional legislative authority would have been voted in favour of a higher political status of the region and the state language. However, despite the public dissatisfaction with the current political framework and the adopted sovereignty declaration,

economic dependency did not allow creating the Republic and establishing the titular state language (Lallukka – Nikitina 2001: 142). Overtime the economic dependency became fatal for the Komi-Permyak Autonomous District and was used as the reason for the merger of this District into a larger unit of the Perm Territory in 2005.

Therefore, the status of the Republic as a form of national statehood and not just a territorial unit was a precondition and the only channel for the establishment of the state languages. However, not all the Republics used this possibility, namely, Karelia did not. What were ethno-political and sociolinguistic variables of the lower threshold for such designation? In the next section a comparative analysis of processes around inclusion of the provision on state languages in the sovereignty declarations of Finno-Ugric Republics.

### **3. State languages in the sovereignty declarations of the Republics**

#### **3.1. Karelia**

The Karelian language was practically absent from public domains, i.e., because, after a short lived attempt to standardise it the 1930s, the language did not have a written form until 1989. Historically the literary languages in the territory of Karelia used to be the Russian and Finnish languages. At the time of the first attempt of language promotion in the 1920s in the debate concerning the language planning in Karelia, the Karelian language was officially considered as a dialect of Finnish. However, the struggle for recognition of Karelian continued and there was a short-lived attempt to create a standard language for all Karelians in the 1930s. Standardization of Karelian became a central issue in the language planning (Anttikoski 2000). Since 1940, when the Soviet Union planned to annex Finland, and throughout the Soviet times, Finnish and Russian were used in the official spheres in the Karelian-Finnish SSR until 1956 and later in the Karelian ASSR (Õispuu 2000: 144–145; Taagepera 1999: 126–128). Instead of one common literary language for all Karelian varieties was maintained. As a result, Karelian was considered a language, which is not sufficiently developed for the official use (Laine 2001: 54).

The efforts for creating a literary standard resumed in the late 1980s. At the *perestoyka* times the language issues was raised first in 1988 in the journal *Neuvosto-Karjala* (Õispuu 2000: 146). The creation of the Karelian national movement was influenced by the Veps activists, who organized a conference on own issues already in October 1988. In May 1989 the resolution of the scientific conference ‘Karelians: Ethnos, Culture, Language, Economics: problems and perspectives of the development in the conditions of the improvement of inter-ethnic relations in the USSR’, and arranged jointly by the Republican government and the Institute of the Language, Literature and History of the Karelian Scientific Centre of the Russia’s Academy of Sciences, laid down

the foundations of national revivalist views of activists of the new-born Karelian national movement for the preservation, development and usage of the cultural-language heritage of the Karelian people. In public sphere the resolution suggested the authorities among other things to raise the legal status of the Karelian language and the issue of the creation of a foundation for culture and language revival of the indigenous nationalities. In language planning the resolution suggested to immediately initiate the creation of the Karelian written language; to introduce the Karelian language as a subject for ethnic Karelians in primary school in areas with predominant Karelian population; to elaborate and to publish ABC books and school dictionaries in the dialects of the Karelian language; to create the terminology-orthography commission, to increase the share of TV and radio broadcasting in the Karelian language and other measures (*Karel'skoe nacional'noe dviženie* 2005: Part 1).

One immediate result of the conference was that the Society of the Karelian Culture was created there. Later in 1989 it was transformed to the Union of the Karelian People (*Karjalan Rahvahan Liitto*) and philologist Pekka Zajkov became its chairman (Öispuu 2000: 146). Another result was that by the authorities' decision the Karelian language was re-established as a literary language on the basis on the Latin script, but in two literary forms, Karelian Proper and Olonets Karelian, which reflects the weakness of the overall Karelian identity. Lude is one more variety, which some researchers count as a dialect, but the others think that it is a separate language (Öispuu 1998). At that time the Karelians constituted only 10% of the Republican population, and only half of them reported knowledge of their native language. Partly this could be understood as a consequence of intensive ethnic and linguistic assimilation into Finns and Russians due to the border position of Karelia between Finland and proper Russia as well as the consequences of the WWII, when those parts of the population that died, were deported to Siberia or left for Finland were substituted by migration masses sent from other regions for the post-war development of forest industry. The language contact situation is complicated by the presence of the more prestigious Finnish language, which Karelian had to compete with in recognition (Khairov 2002).

This complexity of the ethno-linguistic situation in the Republic limited opportunities for language revival (Strogal'sčikova 2005: 281–282). Despite the relative success in formation of the national movement, the national elites did not demand yet the status of the state language for Karelian as one of the issues at a time of discussions on the declaration of sovereignty (*Karely* 2005). They wanted guaranteed political representation of 'indigenous peoples'. This proposal was included in the initial draft declaration. Further, it was planned to equate in the sovereignty declaration Republic's status to that of a Union Republic. Formally, Karelia had a better justification at least in part of such

possible equation for this act than even Tatarstan, because, indeed, Karelia has in 1940–1956 been the Union Republic. Furthermore, Viktor Stepanov, an ethnic Karelian (*Karely* 2005: 186), a former head of the *Obkom* department and the head of the republic since 1989 in post of the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Council, touched in mass media the language loss in connection with the loss of the Union Republic's status. However, neither the provision on the representation of indigenous peoples nor that on upgrading of the status to the Union Republic was not included in the final text (Golyševa 2011: 52–54).

In accordance with the USSR Law of 26 April 1990, Karelian ASSR was the second among the Republics (after North Ossetia) to declare sovereignty on 9 August 1990, when its Supreme Council established it as a legal, democratic, sovereign state and a constituent part of the RSFSR and the USSR. The Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Karelian ASSR was passed earlier than that of most other Autonomous Republics, but it did not contain any provision on the languages (Karelian ASSR Declaration, 9 August 1990). It only guaranteed the 'revival of national originality of indigenous peoples'. The absence of the provision on state languages might have caused by its absence in the RSFSR declaration which served as a pattern.

### 3.2. Komi

The creative intelligentsia (writers, scholars) played an important role in raising the ethnicity issues on the Republic's political agenda (Tsypanov 2001a: 113–114). The idea of the status planning for the Komi language was publicly articulated first at the scientific conference 'Problems of functioning of the Komi language in present-day conditions' in March 1989 (Cypanov 2001b: 185). The national organization *Komi Kotyr* was created in December 1989, headed by Gennadij Juškov, a writer, and defined in its statute the revival of the Komi nation, language and culture as the aim of its activities. Among the other things demand for the reunification of the Komi homeland, that is, of the Komi ASSR and the Komi-Permyak Autonomous District, in one state was discussed. The program of the organization included as one its goals the recognition of the Komi language as a state language in the Republic (Popov & Nesterova 2000: 58–59).

The issue of language recognition came in question, when national activists managed to raise it on the Republic's political agenda (Müller 1998: 406). The Komi national movement as a political force was born in 1989 out of two groups of interests: the first grew out of the anticommunist democratic movement and was headed by Nadežda Mitjuševa; the second was formed out of the regional Soviet *nomenklatura*, where according to the Soviet principle of the 'indigenization of cadres' were many ethnic Komi, for example, Vitalij Osipov, the second secretary of the *Obkom* and Aleksej Beznosikov, former

vice-chair of the Republican KGB and later the *Obkom* secretary responsible for ideology. When in the spring 1990 the Russia's and regional elections took place, this principle of representation was broken and ethnic Komi but also communists largely failed to pass to the newly elected bodies, this segment of the *nomenklatura* turned to the national issues and started to see their resource in it (Il'in 2–1993: p. 2.1.).

The language issue was raised when the draft declaration of sovereignty was discussed, which had to become the basis for drafting the constitution. However, the Supreme Council rejected the two alternative draft declaration of state sovereignty. The first draft was composed by before mentioned writer, Gennadij Yuškov who was also the principal founder of *Komi Kotyr*, and proposed the principle of sovereignty based on the right of self-determination of the Komi people (Popov & Nesterova 2000: 59). The second draft by Vitalij Osipov, co-chairman of *Komi Kotyr* at that time, proposed to create a bicameral legislature where one of the houses would be composed of ethnic Komi with the right of veto. The propositions of the alternative drafts were not included, despite calls for public participation in discussions over the official draft prepared in the parliament (Kahn 2000: 67). A part of Russian political elites, that had special economic interests vis-à-vis the central authorities, found to some extent regional separatism to be useful for them and supported it. But they were against the more substantial political and linguistic demands of national elites. Political elites wanted the language as a symbol of regional separateness from federal authorities, but not as a manifestation of linguistic nationalism.

Nevertheless, as a result of activities of *Komi Kotyr* and other national organizations as well as overall historical developments in the country, the Republic joined 'the parade of sovereignties'; and the Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Komi SSR was adopted by the Republican Supreme Council on 29 August 1990, one day before Tatarstan. The Declaration dropped the term 'autonomous' (the first ASSR to do so), approved supremacy of the Republican laws over Union ones, and even the right to secede was discussed although not included. It proclaimed that the two state languages equally function in the Republic are Komi and Russian (Para 2, 3, and 15, Declaration KR, 29 August 1990). The same session of the Supreme Council dropped on 23 November 1990 the term 'autonomous' from the name of the Republic (*Istorija Komi* 2000: 540–541).

### 3.3. Mari El

At the end of the Soviet epoch the titular nationality was quite well represented among top officials in the Mari ASSR. Grigorij Posibeev was the first secretary of the *Obkom* and Nikolaj Rybakov was the Chairman of the Supreme Council; both were of ethnic Mari origin. At the beginning of the new epoch regional democratic and national movements were not strong enough to initiate the

change in the Republic, and the change came from Moscow. In March 1990 there were first alternative elections to the Supreme Council and Posibeev became its Chairman (Belokurova & Denisova 2003: 40–44).

The formal birth of the national movement took place in April 1990, when the Youth organisation *U vij* initiated the creation of the democratic organization *Mari Ušem*. The organization *Mari Ušem* was also created under supervision of the *Obkom* (Kasimov 6–1992a: p. 2.2.3.). At the beginning of the year 1990 compulsory bilingualism of officials was mentioned among the goals of the Draft Program of the Mari national movement *Mari Ušem* (Statute and Program Draft 23 January 1990: 14). The resolution of the constituent assembly of the Mari national movement *Mari Ušem* (9 April 1990) demanded the official recognition of the Mari language as a state language and advocated for the adoption of the language law. The issue of the need to switch the Mari language to the Latin script was also discussed. At the time of its creation the organisation had only limited political influence (Kasimov 6–1992a: p. 2.2.3.). However, *Mari Ušem* planned to cooperate first with the CPSU and later with the new authorities for solution of the proposed goals (Belokurova – Denisova 2003: 29).

Due to economic and political dependence on the federal centre the Republic only followed the steps of Tatarstan and the other Republics, when these steps were already endorsed by Moscow. The change in the Mari ASSR accelerated in August 1990, when Posibeev had to leave his post as the Chairman of the Supreme Council and instead Vladislav Zotin, another ethnic Mari and the CPSU functionary, was elected. This substitution signified diminishing of influence of the *Obkom* and growing authority of the Supreme Council (Belokurova – Denisova 2003: 39–44). Later Zotin was elected the first republican president. Unlike in the other Finno-Ugric republics, in Mari El arguably it was the rise of national movement that brought Zotin to power.

The Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Mari SSR was adopted by the Supreme Council only on 22 October 1990. It declared the Mari SSR to be a sovereign state based on accomplishment by the Mari nation of its inalienable right to self-determination (Para 1). The citizens of all nationalities were proclaimed to the people of the Mari SSR and to be the only bearer of its sovereignty (Para 2 and 3). Among other things it guaranteed the equal functioning of Mari Hill, Meadow and Russian as the state languages of the Republic (Para 5).

### 3.4. Udmurtia

Among the other democratic organisations, the *Iževsk city Club of the Udmurt Culture* was arranged by national intelligentsia in 1988 as an anticommunist organisation, headed by Vasilij Osipov. The *Club* members joined later the *Society of the Udmurt Culture (SUK)*, although believed it to be a creation of the *Obkom*. Indeed, according to its programme, the *SUK* took the CPSU

Platform (20 September 1989) as the basis for its activities. It is interesting that unlike in the other Republics, first secretary of the *Obkom* Pëtr Griščenko in 1985–1990 opposed the creation of this organisation. Griščenko, an ethnic Russian, who had been sent by Gorbačëv to ‘strengthen Party cadres’, tried to change the balance of the regional elites and became an estranged person in the republican establishment.

At the same time, the *SUK*, headed by Karl Ponomarëv, the secretary of the *Obkom*’s ideological department in 1974–1980, was supported in the *Obkom*. Another ideologist of the national movement Kuz’ma Kulikov worked until 1974 as the secretary of the *Obkom*’s ideological department (Egorov – Matsuzato 2000: 274–281). The *SUK* first recognized advisability of the status of a state language of the Republic for the Udmurt language along with Russian and bilingualism (Statute and Program of the Society of the Udmurt Culture, 10 December 1989). An important factor, which reinforced the strength of Russian regional industrial elites, was the concentration of Soviet military industry in Iževsk, capital of Udmurtia. Unlike middle-sized (200.-300.000 inhabitants) capitals of the other Finno-Ugric Republics (Petrozavodsk, Syktyvkar, Saransk, Joškar-Ola), Iževsk is a more than twice as big and a modernised industrial city with vast Russophone majority and almost invisible Udmurt speaking minority.

In such political and cultural settings the introduction of the Udmurt language as the sole state language of the Republic was not an issue of political discussion. Rather the discussion was, if there is the need to introduce the titular language as the state language of the Republic at all. Russian politicians advocated the Russian language to be a sole state language in the Republic (Christoljubova 2008: 68). Part of subregional elites from the ethnically Russian districts was strictly against the official status for the titular language. The deputies from the town of Sarapul supported later by the deputies from the other ethnically Russian towns and the South-East districts, warned that the districts would leave the Republic in the case of including the provision on the Udmurt language as one of the state languages of the Republic (Ponomarëv 1992: 92).

In August 1990 at the conference of the *SUK* Vasilij Osipov proposed the draft declaration of state sovereignty, where the Udmurt people was referred as the bearer of sovereignty of the Republic. At the conference the *SUK* demanded the recognition of Udmurt as the state language along with Russian. The issue was discussed that federal laws should be valid in the Republic only when confirmed by the republican parliament. In September 1990 the Supreme Council took as the basis the draft elaborated by its constitutional commission, where the multinational people of Udmurtia as the source of authority of the Republic, although the draft of the *SUK* was consulted (Egorov & Matsuzato 2000: 277–278).



As a result, the Declaration of State Sovereignty of Udmurtia proclaimed the Republic to be 'a sovereign state historically formed on the basis of the accomplishment of the inalienable right of self-determination of the Udmurt nation. The development of the Udmurt Republic... is exercised by equal-in-rights participation of its all nations and nationalities in all spheres of the state-building'. The CPSU interference in the state authorities was liquidated and the Supreme Council was declared as the highest authority.

The declaration proclaimed both Russian and Udmurt as the state languages of the Republic and promised guarantees for their equal functioning. There is only equal functioning of the state languages and no their equality stated. In addition, Russian was declared to be the language of inter-nationality communication (Declaration UR, 20 September 1990). One might notice that, unlike in Komi and Mari El, already the Declaration of State Sovereignty of Udmurtia, and later its constitution and language law, symbolically name first Russian, second Udmurt as the state languages of the Republic.

### 3.5. Mordovia

As in Mari El, the complication of the language situation in Mordovia was the existence of two titular languages with two written forms. Additionally, ethnonym and ethnic identity of the titular group as Mordva was competitive with Erzya and Moksha, which later led to political conflicts and rivalry among the titular elites (Kemal' 1996; Abramova 2011: 5). Initially activists presented only language and cultural demands, however, political issues were raised soon. A created in Spring 1989 Mordvin social Centre *Vel'mema* soon split in a language society *Vajgel'* and *Mastorava* (Abramova 2011: 4). In 25 October 1989, when there was no open conflict on language issue yet, the Erzyan-Mokshan social movement *Mastorava* was created. In addition to intra-ethnic cleavage, *Mastorava* was divided internally into followers of the Orthodox and Protestant religions, the democrats and communists. Professor Dmitrij Nad'kin, an authoritative national leader and Chairman of *Mastorava* was able to balance the contradictions in the emerging national movement at the early stages.

*Mastorava* identified the narrowing of the sphere of functioning of the Mordvin languages as one of three main problems and suggested to broaden this sphere by their recognition as the state languages (Utešev & Ščerbakova 2004: 137). According to its program, arguably drafted by participation of the *Obkom* (Kasimov 6–1992b: p. 2.2.), *Mastorava* planned to achieve the constitutional designation of the Erzyan and Mokshan languages as the state languages of the Republic and to revive language planning aimed at both-sided national-Russian and Russian-national bilingualism and the broadening of the functional

domains of native language use (Program, 25 October 1989/17 December 1989). Its initial action plan was restricted to cultural activities (Abramova 2011: 4).

On 5 August 1990 the Constituent Congress of the All-Union organization of national revival *Mastorava* reaffirmed the Program. At the Congress the Draft Declaration of State Sovereignty of the SSR Mordovia (Draft Declaration, 12 August 1990) and later the more radical Draft Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Mokshan and Erzyan Soviet Republic (Draft Declaration, 11 October 1990) were prepared and proposed to the Supreme Council of the Republic. According to this draft stated, the Republic had to become the sovereign state, its citizenship had to be given also to members of the Mordvin diaspora, in a two-chamber parliament the chamber of nationalities had to be filled with participation of diaspora. One of the demands of the latter draft was to designate the Erzyan and Mokshan languages as the state languages and to designate Erzyan, Mokshan, Russian and Tatar (later only in Tatar rural administrations) as the official languages (Iurchenkov 2001: 87). The idea of attributing the status of the official language to Russian originated from the USSR language law (see above), where Russian was designated as the official language of the USSR and the language of inter-nationality communication.

At the end of the Soviet times in Mordovia the agrarian national elites, in particular Erzya, were well represented in the *Obkom*. At the early stages the national movement was politically passive and did not take criticism of the CPSU. The administrative positions were filled mostly by ethnic Russians, including *Obkom* first secretary Anatolij Berezin, a local ethnic Russian but supportive to the Erzya elite. After elections in March 1990 he was elected Chairman of the Supreme Council but soon had to leave the post because the *nomenklatura* elites believed he was responsible for the relative success of 'Democratic Russia'. In October 1990 this post was taken over by Nikolaj Birjukov, an ethnic Moksha. Despite his support, by the gradual decrease of *Obkom* influence and substitution of officials of Erzya descent by Moksha, the national movement did not have strong influence neither in the Supreme Council nor in the government (Kasimov 6–1992b: pp. 1.4., 2.2., Polutin 2000: 154, 156).

Simultaneously with the other drafts, the Supreme Council prepared its own modest Draft Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Mordovian ASSR, which had to be adopted at its session. But publication of the radical declaration draft of the national movement provoked an intensive discussion in media. As a result, the alternative drafts instead of enhancing the declaration movement, like in Tatarstan (Kahn 2000: 71), but put a stop to its adoption. The regional department of the 'Democratic Russia' movement announced its position against sovereignty. The Russophones saw it as a threat to their rights and some even proposed the instead of the Republic. Some Russian political leaders proclaimed to be even willing to reduce their own power and advocated for the liquidation of the

Republic and creation of the Saransk oblast (Taagepera 1999: 193; Abramov 2004: 130–131). If the Russian political elites in the other Republics made use of the national activities, then it was not the case in Mordovia.

As a result, the adoption of the declaration in the Supreme Council was several times postponed. The next session of the Supreme Council, where the Draft Declaration had to be discussed, was held in December 1990. Nikolaj Birjukov, former member of the *Obkom* bureau and newly elected Chairman of the Supreme Council, supported the adoption of the declaration in press, which practically should have meant the victory of the declaration proponents. But two days before the session the still very influential *Obkom* appealed to the Supreme Council against sovereignty. At the day of the session there was a meeting against the adoption of the Declaration in front of the Supreme Council. This meant that against sovereignty were both communists and democrats (Polutin 2000: 162–164). It was due to the unity of Russophone forces and the weakness of the national movement that Mordovia became the only former Autonomous Republic of the RSFSR, where sovereignty was never proclaimed (Utešev & Ščerbakova 2004: 138–140).

Instead the Declaration on the State Legal Status of the Mordovian SSR was adopted, which still excluded the word ‘autonomous’ from the name of the Republic, declared Mokshan, Erzyan and Russian as the state languages of the Republic and guaranteed their equal-in-rights functioning in this status (Mordovian SSR Declaration, 7 December 1990). Even if this declaration was milder than in other republics, without any reference to sovereignty, its adoption turned out to be counter-productive for the national elites and prospects of language revival, because fears that sovereignisation provoked in ethnic Russians personified in election of anti-Mordvin minded president in 1991 (Matsuzato 2003: 5).

#### **4. State languages as an attribute of the national statehood**

##### **4.1. State languages: popular support or interests of elites?**

The analysis of the developments in Finno-Ugric Republics confirms the argument that the national movements did not have much influence on drafting the declarations. Most their demands were rejected. However, the demand for the state languages was included. This latter fact compels to re-evaluate the issue of distinguishing between popular support and will of elites behind language demands. Who backed inclusion of the provision on state languages in the declarations and what was the contribution of popular movement in different republics?

The *perestroyka* time was the second period in the history of Russia after the Revolution of 1917 when *vox populi* really mattered. First relatively free election in Spring 1990 inspired elites to compete for people’s voices. The

elites, pursuing their own interests, managed to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the people in terms of representing ‘the people’s interest’ under the flags of new ideologies (Smith 2001: 121). Popular support of regional separatism was important for initiation of the sovereignty parade. Was nationalism in Russia’s Republics a top-down or bottom-up phenomenon?

Miroslav Hroch defines popular national movements as organised efforts to achieve the attributes of a fully-fledged nation (1985: 66). His famous model of the formation of national movements provides a necessary understanding of interaction between elites and masses (1985: 67). He distinguishes Phase ‘A’, in which ‘activists devote themselves to scholarly inquiry into the linguistic, historical and cultural attributes of their ethnic groups’ from Phase ‘B’ in which, ‘a new range of patriots’ seek ‘to win over as many of their ethnic group as possible’. According to evaluation of Arne Kommisrud, in the Baltic Republics and some other Union Republics national movements very quickly reached Phase ‘C’ of mass mobilisation in form of popular fronts to demand re-establishment of their statehood that was ‘partly a spontaneous process, and partly a process initiated from above, in attempt to channel various grassroots initiatives into acceptable direction’ (2009: 104–105, 107). In some Autonomous Republics, such as Tatarstan, the process was at the stage, when national elites supported the creation of national movements, that is, the transition from phase ‘B’ to ‘C’.

In discussing nationalism in Eastern European, Hroch further writes about three levels of national political programmes: substitution, participation and secession. According to Hroch’s historical example of pre-revolutionary Russia, when an oppressive regime did not allow political activities, ‘linguistic and cultural demands temporarily substituted some functions of political aims’ (1985: 69–70). Arguably, this was the case also in the late Soviet Union and this way language issues became the very core of the nationalist agenda in the late 1980s.

In Finno-Ugric Autonomous Republics, national issues remained the concerns of national elites, although they imposed their will as the popular will. Phase ‘B’ appears to be applicable in the understanding of the activities of Finno-Ugric national intelligentsia who were expressing their concern over the language loss and assimilation, and the penetration of their ideas to politicians, who used ethnicity as the grounds for political mobilisation and presented linguistic demands on the political agenda. There was only limited dissemination of the ideas about national and language revival to a wider public. Thus, here one can speak about national movements only in the limited sense of Phase ‘B’. However, the distinction between Phases ‘A’ and ‘B’ appears to be a conventional one. Some writers, scientists and other national intellectuals collaborated with authorities and were rotated into national elites, in particular, in Komi. Even if soon the national elites distanced themselves from national movements, they continued to pursue ‘national interests’ within the state apparatus.

As the data demonstrate, in every Finno-Ugric Republic the demand for the state languages was always formulated as a decision of the national organisation and later of 'people's congress' that claimed legitimacy to represent the interests of the 'people', that is, of the according 'ethno-linguistic community. A deeper reason might have been that national elites shared the view on language as the main marker of identity and positioned it as a central element of their national revival project.

#### **4.2. Regional ethno-political elites: titular national vs. Russian elites**

The data on the Finno-Ugric Republics support the argument emphasising the crucial role of regional elites in sovereignisation and establishing state languages. However, the term 'regional elites', which was used so far for all the republics, needs some qualification. In Republics with majority titular population, as in Tatarstan, on the foreground are interactions within national elites, between its collaborative with regional authorities moderate and radical segments. Their study helps to understand the main instances in the language policy formation, while study on inter-ethnic relations supplements the picture. In Republics with minority titular population, it is impossible to equate the interests of the national elites with popular will exactly, because the other elite segments form the majority. In the latter case the key for understanding the dynamics of transformations on national and linguistic issues lays in investigation of the intercourse between different segments of regional elites. What forces were dominant in the regional political landscapes?

The definition of the term 'regional political elites' and the classification of such entities is problematic, particularly when dealing with the initially non-formalised 'regional ethno-political elites' in Russia's Republics, because in the conditions of rapid transformations at the early 1990s, the formal characteristics of groups changed (Galljamov 2003: 286–290). The dynamics of transformations included, first of all, institutional change. After the gradual decrease of the *Obkoms* as the power centre, since their elections in March and April 1990 Supreme Councils started to fill this niche, turning from decorative to real parliamentary bodies; the process reaching its end in August 1991. In the analysis of elites it was important to study both election results and the representation of different groups in collegial bodies as well as the personalities of their leaders. That is why the facts about employment or party membership and the ethnicities of key figures were analysed to signify their belonging to a particular group of regional elites. Often, the first secretaries of the *Obkoms* became chairmen of the Republics' Supreme Councils during 1990. Since 1991, the power centre shifted once more, now from chairmen of Supreme Councils to Presidents, a process sometimes called 'presidentization' (Petrov

2001: 112). Both power shifts in regions reflected the analogous processes in Moscow (Easter 1997).

Within the institutional framework, depending on the grounds for classification, the following groups of regional elites are usually presented as opposing groups: old Soviet vs. new, communist vs. democrat, agrarian vs. industrial, and regional vs. sub-regional elites (Galljamov 2003: 288; Petrov 2001: 125–129). Leaving aside the discussion on the origin and nature of segments of republican elites, the current analysis is restricted only to the exploration of the ability of different segments to promote their position on national and linguistic issues in competition with other segments as a republican policy. The elites presented their visions and advocated for their adoption as a policy in the Republics. The policy was formed by the adoption of the official documents. Sub-regional authorities could also influence the policy-making, for instance, through participation of their representatives in work of the Constitutional Assemblies.

From this perspective the most important aspect for the current analysis of the regional political elites is the opposition of national elites vs. Russian elites. According to Dmitry Gorenburg (2003), ethnicity is mobilized into nationalism during times of institutional change. Those segments of republican political elites that chose the ideology of nationalism as their vision for the resolution of these issues in post-Soviet state-building in the former Union and Autonomous Republics are referred to here as national elites.

Of course, national elites were not homogenous themselves. An important division line laid, as it was demonstrated by researchers in the Tatar case, between native languagespeakers typically born in rural areas and urbanised Russian speakers of titular nationality. Further, it would be a simplified generalisation to mechanically ascribe politicians to the national elites after their nationality. In the conditions of ‘deideologization’ most late Soviet politicians were, first of all, pragmatists. Politicians would not openly express support for the ideology of nationalism, which would have been an act of political suicide in the still ‘internationalist’-dominated regional society. In the condition of constant transformation of elite groups, the importance of national issues changed over time. Nevertheless, along with the economic and other socially important issues of that time, certain segments again and again raised also the national and linguistic issues. The issue of which segments and what elite groups were proponents of the ideology of nationalism, is one for a separate research. For the purpose of the current analysis, these segments are referred as the ‘titular national elites’ as a descriptive category.

The peculiarity of the situation in the Finno-Ugric Republics of Russia is that among social cleavages ethnicity has largely not become the most important line of division in the society in 1990. The national vs. Russian division among republican elites was actualised only in some contexts. Usually the actualisa-

tion took place when the initial activities and proposals of titular national elites were being opposed by other segments of regional elites who were competing for political power. These elites could again be referred to descriptively as 'Russian', in opposition to the term 'titular national elites'. Sometimes these elites are referred to as 'Russophone' to emphasize the fact that in the Soviet Union, with its policy of mixing populations, in every region there were both ethnic Russians and individuals of other nationalities, including the assimilated members of titular group, who would speak Russian as their everyday language. The other term used for this group is 'pro-Moscow' elites, which emphasizes the active position of this group against the sovereignization, national and language revival of the titular nation. Both aspects are kept in mind in this article when using the term 'Russian elites', unless stated otherwise.

In general, the attitudes among Russian elites in regions of Russia towards the national and linguistic demands ranged from support (early Democrats) to indifference (most groups) up to outright denial (supporters of emerging Russian ethnic nationalism). In the latter case, Russian national interests were sometimes seen as opposing the interests of the titular nationalities. Some groups, such as the Russian national organisation *Rus'*, regional departments of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (*LDPR*) headed by Vladimir Žirinovskij and others (by the end of the 1990s also the Communists headed by Gennadij Zjuganov), have positioned themselves as pro-Russian.

When an ethnic and linguistic issue actualizes the line of division of the regional political elites to titular national vs. Russian (Russophone, pro-Moscow) segments, they are referred as the 'regional ethno-political elite' and defined as 'a social group, which performs the stabilising function in an ethnic society, is the most influential and has (economic, political, administrative and ideological) resources by political decision-making aimed at sustaining an ethno-political regime in a national-territorial unit' (Tažiev 2011). However, at the late 1980s and early 1990s the common interest of finding an ethno-political balance was undermined by diverging particular interests of different segments that wished to gain ground in the situation of social transformations.

#### **4.3. Greater self-governance as a common interest of regional elites**

In the conditions of diverging interests at a period of transition, there is a danger that groups in minority predeterminedly are to lose the political battle. How then it was possible to find consensus of regional elites and still to impose the state languages even in the Finno-Ugric Republics, if the national elites were in minority there and popular opinion was against the designation of state languages? What were the incentives to regain the ethno-political balance?

The fact that this or that policy was chosen in a Republic is an outcome of the interplay of different factors in the overall trends of historical developments.



The transitional period in regions was not the time of ‘war of all against all’ with the ‘winner takes all’ situation but included a variety of political regimes, where groups in minority had their say (Galljamov 2000: 315–316). At the beginning of the transformations, nationalism and democracy were perceived if not as synonyms, than at least as values of the same row. National intellectuals, being among democrats and supportive towards the national movements, struggled for minority rights as an aspect of human rights. The old *nomenklatura* elite were in power in many Autonomous Republics and used democratization, decentralization and sovereignization as a way to preserve and expand their power. Often after August 1991, old Soviet elites changed their faces, when after the prohibition of the CPSU the first or second secretaries of the *Obkoms* became the heads of the Republics. Some segments of the Soviet *nomenklatura* elite wanted to survive the times of change and became the other pillar of national elites.

Often those members of *Obkoms* of the titular ethnic origin were themselves nationally minded and advocated for the promotion of the titular language. Others viewed it as a social capital, that is, acted in a manner which in ethnology is described as ‘ethnic entrepreneurship’. Yet for the other segments of the republican elites, the state languages were valuable as yet another symbol of the new statehood. Moreover, the Russophone republican elites needed the support of national elites. As only intentions were expressed in the declarations, the republican elites were ready to make promises, without actual desire to fulfil them in the open future.

The word of national intelligentsia was valued a lot during the period between June 1990 and August 1991, when there was ‘power dualism’ of the *Obkoms* and the Supreme Councils. The national elites, supported by the *Obkoms*, demanded that the titular languages would be granted the status of state languages. The motivation of the segments of national elites supporting this action varied. CPSU functionaries might have used it pragmatically as a future resource, democratic national elites had national revival as their concern, and national intelligentsia envisioned the official status as the way to ensure ethnolinguistic vitality.

The terms ‘national elites’ and the ‘politicians of the titular nationality’ are not interchangeable. The ethnicity of a deputy does not mean that s/he would automatically support the national revival project, particularly at the stage of decline in political activities and their substitution with cultural activities. As Dmitry Gorenburg points out (2006), Soviet nationalities policy was more successful in the assimilation of minorities than is usually believed. In the conditions of centuries-long coexistence of ethno-linguistic communities, the rate of assimilation was high and the potential for political mobilisation of ethnicity was low particularly among non-Muslim populations. The processes

of 'sovereignisation' and disintegration of the Soviet Union had a dissimilar impact on political elites and the identities of different ethnic and national groups. Typically, in the Republics where the titular group is the minority, only some of the members of political elites of titular ethnic origin share national sentiment. One could argue that the potential of ethnic mobilization among other factors was directly dependent upon the share of the titular group in the population of a territorial unit.

Dmitry Gorenburg (2001) makes a distinction between support for ethnic exclusiveness and privileged status for the titular language (cultural nationalism) and popular support for increasing the status and power of statehood (regional separatism). According to Gorenburg (2001: 87), the first expresses an ethnic version of nationalism that seeks to improve the status of a particular ethnic group, while the second corresponds more to a state civic nationalism that seeks to gain benefits for all inhabitants of a particular region irrespective of their ethnicity. However, such a dichotomy seems to be a simplification, because in many aspects these standpoints of support do not contradict one another. Politicians can pursue both, as was in the case in the implementation of Tatarstan's nation-building project.

It would be another simplification to strictly distinguish between collaborating leaders of the national movement and the regional political elites. Some national intellectuals banded together with political elites and acquired the political power needed for the implementation of the nation-building project. In fact, these two kinds of support needed and reinforced each other in the face of the centre. While the collaborating national elite represented cultural demands, some of the ethnic Russian regional political elites saw their interest in support for regional separatism, above all for economic reasons, as a way to ensure the balance of power between the regional authorities and the central authorities in Moscow. So, there was a meeting point in the common interests of different segments of republican elites vs. Moscow. The prevalence of common interests of ethno-political elites over ethnic boundaries for different reasons was not a unique development for the Finno-Ugric Republics: for example, in Sakha (Yakutia) 'Sakha and Russians have presented a united front in their dealings with Moscow' (Kempton 1996: 590). From a perspective of Russian elites, a symbolic act of the state languages designation was a reasonable concession to national elites for an overall gain in legitimacy of their claims in the face of the federal center.

#### **4.4. The abrogation of the sovereignty declarations**

Due to the economic crisis at the beginning of the 1990s and in 1998 as well as the strengthening policy of recentralization in the middle and second half of the 1990s, the intensity of the rhetoric on nationalities issues decreased throughout

the country. When Russia's Constitution was adopted (12 December 1993), the previously signed Federation Treaty (30 March 1992) with its three versions for each type of subject of the federation, did not become its part, as there was hopes in some republics. The Tatarstani authorities continued negotiation with federal authorities regarding its asymmetrical status. A separate bilateral treaty on the delimitation of areas of authority and power between federal and Tatarstan authorities was signed on 15 February 1994. The other region signed similar treaties with the federal centre between 1995–1998 (Petrov 2001: 130–133). This way the change in direction of Russia's ethno-political regime was prepared.

The shift in the political regime, i.e. in federalism policy, nationalities policy and language policy took place with the election of Vladimir Putin as the new President of Russia in March of 2000, when the building of the 'power vertical' started. Shortly after the elections, seven Federal Districts (*federal 'nye okruga*) were set up in an attempt to overcome the national-state units by changing the federative structure of the state. Among the other systemic changes, the order of formation of the Federation Council, upper chamber of Russian parliament, was reorganized. The dissolution of most bilateral treaties with regions followed (Stoner-Weiss 2006: 148–149).

The federal agenda towards recentralization and limitation of powers of the Republics was formulated in legal terms in 1999, when federal authorities introduced rules and restrictions on regional authorities and regional political regimes (Federal Law, 6 October 1999). In the legal space the process of 'bringing regional legislation in compliance with federal legislation' was initiated. First, the Constitution of the Republic of Altay was recognized as contradicting the Constitution of the Russian Federation and federal legislation by the decision of Russia's Constitutional Court in 2000 and had to be amended (Resolution CC RF, 7 June 2000). In the case of the Komi Republic, Russia's Supreme Court stated that 'the bearer of the sovereignty and the sole source of power in the Russian Federation is its multinational people and not the population living on the territory of its subjects of federation' (Determination SC RF, 13 April 2001). Soon after, the other Republics' constitutions had to be amended as well. Finally, the republican declarations were proclaimed out of force. Sovereignty was declared as undivided and belonging exclusively to the Moscow authorities (Chakimov 2009: 134–141). What consequences the declarations abrogation had on the status of languages of the Republics?

In line with the policy of narrowing the competence of the subjects of the federation since 1999, there were attempts to redefine the role of state languages as only an additional and optional attribute of the Republics. Those scholars, who argue for optional character of the state languages, emphasize that the Russia's Constitution defines their designation as a right of the Republic and

not as an obligation (Voroneckij 2009). As the example of Karelia demonstrates, indeed, the state languages were not indispensable justification of statehood. But it was not indispensable only as exclusion. It could be that history of statehood in Karelia, which for some time was even a Union Republic, and the very existence of the Republic were replacement justifications in that case. Otherwise, as it is discussed in this article, the republican constitutions and the state languages are central to the Republics' constitutional status as the national-state units.

Some researchers argue that the status of state languages became problematic with this step, which might cause tensions in the future (Vojtovič 2006: 326; Bechterevev 2009: 31). The logic is following: if there is no sovereignty, then there is no state; and if there is no state, then there could not be state languages. Addressing this problem, some researchers suggest taking into use the term 'official languages' instead of 'state languages' (Vasil'eva 2007: 6). For the time being, the fact is to be recalled that justification for the official status of the language is historically rooted in the national statehood which, however, is itself under challenge at the time of President Putin's administration. So far Russia's constitution has not been amended and the official status of the state languages is still designated by the Republican constitutions.

## 5. Conclusion

Despite the condition of political oppression of the late Soviet period with its characteristic impossibility to express political demands, newly introduced *glasnost* allowed raising popular concerns regarding ecological, cultural and linguistic issues to embody themselves first in the Baltic Republics and soon in some other Union Republics in the emergence of environmentalist, national and other social movements in 1988. Under the societal pressure the issues of concern have become in some Republics already in a few months a part of the government agenda: the language laws were adopted in all Union Republics except Russia by May 1990. In Russia's Autonomous Republics national organisations also expressed, among others, concerns about language loss and proposed language revival projects. However, only in some ASSRs these demands became a part of the republican government agenda, but not earlier than by the end of the year 1990 and the beginning of 1991 with the adoption of language laws in Tuva, Chuvashia and Kalmykia. Even if earlier than in the other ASSRs, also in these three Republics the language laws have been adopted *after* the sovereignty declarations in 1990. What this different timing implied?

Unlike an important role of national movements in the SSRs, in the ASSRs sovereignisation was a project of regional elites initiated 'from above'. Its starting point in all the ASSRs was adoption of the declarations that contained

some political demands of public movements but were on the first hand in the interests of regional elites. Of course, national movements had their say: in those Autonomous Republics where public support for separatism was higher, the stronger demands entered the declarations. Despite the strong national movements, some factors such as a high share of Russians in the population of some ASSRs, notably in Tatarstan, became obstacles for including stronger demands. Their absence from the declarations delayed adoption of language revival as the government agenda.

For Tatarstan and some other Turkic Republics, the main goal of sovereignization was upgrading of their status to that of the Union Republics. If the adoption of sovereignty declarations in the Republics of Tatarstan and Yakutia was rather a side-step in the view of their main goal, then their adoption in the Finno-Ugric Republics meant a sure step forward towards more sovereignty, while the exclusion of the term 'autonomous' from the name of the Republics in the declarations (Komi, Mari, Udmurtia) did not mean automatic raising of their status to that of the Union Republics (Egorov & Matsuzato 2000: 293). The difference is that in the former Republics efforts of national elites were backed by national movements. In the latter Republics, including Finno-Ugric ones, the regional elites pursuing state-building, supported national organisations in their activities towards ethnic mobilisation and sometimes even initiated such activities, in order to gain benefits vis-a-vis the federal centre.

In the ASSRs language demands, if expressed earlier by the national organisations, were added to the package of political demands of the sovereignty declarations. Even if the declarations were adopted by the authorities unilaterally, the possibility of introduction the provisions on the state languages were already sanctioned by the Union authorities in the Soviet Language Law that granted to both the SSRs and the ASSRs the right to establish state languages. It seems that the designation of official languages was the only thing that was possible to achieve for language revival for national elites in those ASSRs, where they did not gain enough representation among the ruling elites. In the case, national elites were weak, they still managed to designate the state languages by appealing to equality of languages of the same category. Such appeals were heard, because the place in hierarchy of the Republics mattered. It is not a wonder, then, that some ASSRs pretended for a higher status of the SSRs.

The declarations were the documents that contained the demand for sovereignty from the federal authorities. In this context republican elites viewed the state languages as yet one more attribute of the national sovereignty needed to justify the emerging polity. There is no direct evidence that the issue of the state languages was used by the ruling republican elites mainly as a justification of the demand for sovereignty, that is, that language demands were subordinate to political demands. The elites needed justifications for the regime and the

state language was one of them. As our data demonstrate, the idea of the state languages was supported or even came from the *Obkoms*. This fact indirectly shows the importance of the state languages for the elites. On the other hand, in the uncertain situation political elites did not want to take upon themselves certain obligations. This was another incentive, why in the ASSRs the designation was done first in the declarations, while in the SSRs it was done in the language laws and constitutions. The language laws in the ASSRs were, without exclusion, adopted later than the declarations, sometimes much later.

As the other Republics, the Finno-Ugric Republics pursued their language policies and managed, all except Karelia, to promote the titular languages through the establishment of the state languages in the sovereignty declarations. In the Finno-Ugric Republics the titular languages were declared the state languages in the Republics on par with Russian. The fact that the two languages were designated implied that official bilingualism was a characteristic of the multinational peoples in the Republics. Why Karelia did not designate its state languages? What was the lowest threshold for the languages' official designation? This is not a legal question because no standards were established except of the fact that a candidate language should have been a titular language of the republic, although later, for example, in Dagestan all languages of the peoples were proclaimed the state languages. In the absence of formal criteria, some sociolinguistic criteria were later suggested that prevent Karelian from becoming a state language (Voroneckij 2009): 1) it has to be sufficiently developed for official use and 2) it has to be widely spread and massively claimed by population (*široko востреbovannym*).

The data of the study show that, indeed, the ethno-linguistic situations mattered for the establishment of the official status of languages. As the case of Karelia demonstrates, such a sociolinguistic variable as the existence or non-existence of the written form was at stake for designation of the titular language as the state languages, although it was not a central one. Rather it was essential for acquiring the official status that the sociolinguistically justified demand of the national movements was presented and could further serve as an issue for exchange in negotiations with other segments of elites. In Karelia non-existence of the written form only precluded the demand. As for mass popular claim, the demand of the national organisations was enough for symbolic recognition and this demand could be, in principle, generated by the elite itself. Also the next sociolinguistic variable, the competition of two language varieties (Mari El and Mordovia), did not become a decisive obstacle, because besides the symbolic recognition nothing was the issue of the immediate agenda. Moreover, because there was a need for justification of the national statehood, the demand on the national movement was taken into account, even if it was strongly opposed by the part of the Russophone subregional elites (Vörkuta miners in Komi,

South-East districts in Udmurtia). Only in Mordovia the strong Russophone elites managed to prevent sovereignisation in confrontation against the weak and divided national movement.

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