Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	**252**
Land:	Rusland
Kilde:	Minority Rights Group International
Titel:	World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples – Russian Federation: Overview
Udgivet:	1. august 2011
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	30. maj 2012

Refworld
The Leader in Refugee Decision Support

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Title	World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Russian Federation : Overview
Publisher	Minority Rights Group International
Country	Russian Federation
Publication Date	August 2011
Cite as	Minority Rights Group International, *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Russian Federation : Overview*, August 2011, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4954ce18c.html [accessed 6 November 2011]
Disclaimer	This is not a UNHCR publication. UNHCR is not responsible for, nor does it endorse, its content. Any views expressed are solely those of the author or publisher.

World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Russian Federation : Overview

Updated August 2011

Environment

The Russian Federation, formerly the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR), stretches from Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic states in the west, to the Pacific coast in the east and from Finland and the Arctic Sea in the north to the Caucasus, Central Asia and China in the south.

Peoples

Main languages: Russian

Main religions: Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Shamanism

According to the 2002 national census, the main minority groups include Tatars 5,554,601 (3.8%), Ukrainians 2,942,961 (2.0%), Bashkirs 1,673,389 (1.1%), Chuvash 1,637,094 (1.1%), Chechens 1,360,253 (0.9%), Armenians 1,130,491 (0.8%), Mordovans 843,350 (0.6%) and Avars 814,473 (0.6%). Other groups comprise 13,321,012 people or 9.2% of the total population.

Minorities that have been granted territorial recognition can be broadly divided into two categories: religious and linguistic minorities. This distinction does not reflect any official division between groups based on religion or language, but rather the primary element around which group self-identity is formed in each case.

Religiously defined groups form the largest set of minorities. The RF contains a number of Buddhist groups, mostly of the Lamaist faith, including Buriats, Kalmyks, Tuvans. Since the late 1980s, there has been a strong revival of Buddhism.

There are also substantial Muslim populations, and after the collapse of the Soviet Union there has been a revival of Islam and Muslim culture. Most Muslims are of the Sunni branch of Islam. A number of Muslim political parties have been formed. The territorially based Muslims can be subdivided into two main geographical groups: Tatars and Bashkirs of the Middle Volga, and peoples of the North Caucasus.

Dagestan in the North Caucasus is one of the most ethnically complex areas of the former Soviet Union. The republic has no titular population (pop. 1,802,188: Avars 28 per cent,

Dargins 16 per cent, Kumyks 13 per cent, Lezgins 11 per cent, Russians 9 per cent, Nogai 2 per cent, others 21 per cent). Except for Russians, the largest groups – Avars, Dargins, Kumyks, Lezgins – are all Sunni Muslim.

Linguistically defined groups form the second main category of minorities. There are 16 Finno-Ugric ethnic groups within the former Soviet Union. Although there are nearly 16 million Finno-Ugrians in the former Soviet Union, they are only in the majority in Komi-Permiak.

Among the many groups that lack an officially recognized homeland are Jews, Ukrainians, Belarusians and Kazakhs; Russian or Volga Germans; Meskhetians or Meskhetian Turks; Roma; Cossacks; and most of the smaller native peoples of the north, Siberia and Far East.

History

The consolidation of the Russian State by Ivan the Fourth (the Terrible) in the 16th century was brought about by the conquest of the Muslim Tatar khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan on the river Volga. The Tatar elite retained their language and religion on condition that they served the Tsar, Thus, Russia has since that time had a large Tatar population, Tatars are now the largest ethnic minority in Russia after Ukrainians. According to the 2002 census, there are now five and a half million Tatars by self-identification living in Russia, about 3.8% of the total population. The conquest of the Kazan Khanate in 1552 opened the way to Russian expansion into Siberia, which brought new communities under Russian control. The conquest of the Caucasus region in the nineteenth century, accompanied by the incorporation of a variety of Central Asian populations, further shifted the ethnic composition of the empire. By the end of the nineteenth century, the expansion of the Russian Empire had brought several hundred different ethnic communities and a variety of religious minorities under Russian control.

Although incorporation into Russia marked the end of independence for the conquered peoples, initially little was done to extinguish their separate identity. Indeed, provided these groups were prepared to accept the authority of the Tsar, representatives of the minority communities could advance to high positions within the imperial order. From the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the processes of urbanization, industrialization and the migration of Russians to the new 'Russian lands' gathered pace. For the first time, local identities and ways of life faced a serious challenge.

1830s onwards: Russification

From the 1830s, the Russian authorities began to promote Russification and conversion to Orthodoxy, especially among Muslim Tatars. This initial drive led to civil unrest and the policy was moderated. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, Russification was again pursued, although, at this stage, the idea of creating a specifically ethnically Russian order was balanced by the aim of building a powerful imperial state.

Growing national sentiment among many of the minority populations in the Russian Empire was accelerated by the collapse of the tsarist order in 1917. In the civil war that followed, the Bolsheviks developed a pact with leading ethnic groups that offered these groups territorial advantages in return for their allegiance. With the eventual triumph of the Soviet forces, the practice of granting ethno-territorial autonomy to leading ethnic groups was institutionalized as an organizing principle of the Soviet state.

Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic

In 1918, the predominantly ethnic Russian core territories of the Russian Empire were reconstituted as the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic. Within the RSFSR a wide variety of groups were awarded varying degrees of territorial autonomy, marking an important distinction from the imperial administrative structure. In place of the pre-revolutionary arrangement of provinces (guberniya), the Soviets introduced an administrative system built around a structural asymmetry based on ethnicity. Although this system underwent a prolonged evolution, ethnicity remained a central principle at

the heart of the Russian administrative order. By the 1980s, the RSFSR was organized into 88 administrative components (subjects) of higher than city and district level. These subjects were divided into two categories.

First, ethno-territorial units: 16 autonomous Soviet socialist republics (ASSRs) – based around sizeable non-Russian ethnic groups and considered the embodiment of the national statehood of their titular populations; 5 autonomous oblasts (regions) (AOs) – smaller ethnic-based units; 10 autonomous okrugs (districts) (AOks) – the lowest level ethnic units, situated within an oblast or krai (province). Second, the remaining areas of the RSFSR, comprising most of its constituent members and accounting for about 70 per cent of its territory and more than 80 per cent of the population, was divided into territorial formations: 6 krais (mostly large and lightly populated areas), and 49 oblasts – largely ethnically homogeneous, Russian-populated districts. In addition, Moscow and Leningrad (now St Petersburg) were given a status broadly equivalent to that of an oblast. Despite the fact that the Soviet constitution accorded Russia the status of a federation, the federal structure of the RSFSR was largely a fiction. Regional and minority interests were subordinated to the security, economic and diplomatic concerns of the Soviet government. Steps were taken to ensure that the ethnoterritorial units did not develop as centres for nationalism.

A wide variety of minority populations were subject to deportations – notably peoples of the North Caucasus and Volga Germans – and to forced assimilation to the prevailing Russo-Soviet culture. From the 1930s, teaching of Russian became compulsory and many native languages disappeared from schools. The migration of Russian-speaking Slavs to the previously non-Russified regions reinforced the process of Russification.

Despite these measures, from the 1960s a growing ethnic and then national awareness came to characterize many of the minorities in the RSFSR. The emergence of indigenous political and cultural elites within many of the minority territories during Leonid Brezhnev's tenure as General Secretary of the Communist Party further accelerated these developments. In the 1980s, the combination of growing nationalist sentiment, the emergence of a reformist General Secretary (Mikhail Gorbachev), and the ethno-territorial arrangement of the Russian Federation provided the conditions for minority issues to assume central significance in the RSFSR.

The perestroika period

Under Gorbachev, rising ethnic tension on the periphery of the Soviet Union was accompanied by increasing tension in the RSFSR itself. In the latter years of perestroika, the nominally federal structure of the RSFSR assumed a real significance for the conduct of domestic politics. Following the elections for the Russian Supreme Soviet in 1990, a strong movement for increased regional powers, built on an alliance between regional economic interests and local nationalist groups, developed in the ethnic territories, especially the ASSRs.

Emboldened by the new freedoms of the period, this movement was further encouraged by the struggle for power between Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin. Russian democrats saw the haemorrhage of power to the regions as a means to undermine further Gorbachev's position. As a result, substantial autonomy was granted to the republics by Yeltsin and the Russian Parliament. In a speech in Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan, in September 1990 Yeltsin called on the republics to 'take as much independence as you can handle'.

Gorbachev, too, sought to use the republics, but his plan was to enlist them against the Russian democrats and thereby prevent the disintegration of the Union. In the All-Union Law on the Delimitation of Powers between the Soviet Union and the Subjects of the Federation (26 April 1990) the ASSRs, like the Union republics, were described as 'subjects of the federation'. The first draft of the Union treaty (November 1990) put the ASSRs on a par with the Union republics – both were described as republics and as sovereign states.

The opportunity for increased autonomy created by the political struggle at the centre accelerated moves to assert local control. The drive for greater autonomy was led by the ethnic republics, particularly Tatarstan, with Bashkortostan and Sakha-Yakutia close behind. In summer/autumn 1990, following the Russian Declaration of Sovereignty, a

number of the ethnic republics adopted declarations of sovereignty. The extent of powers claimed in these declarations varied considerably, with Karelia acknowledging that some powers would be delegated to the RSFSR and to the Soviet Union and Tatarstan adopting a declaration that failed to mention the RSFSR at all.

Russian independence

The collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991 marked a new phase in the development of the minorities issue in Russia. The final demise of the Soviet system led to the creation of a new Russia but this was not a nation state, rather a multiethnic, multi-religious and multicultural state. After independence, Russians and minority populations faced two principal and interrelated challenges.

First, the position of ethnic Russians, Russian culture and history, and the Russian language in the new Russia needed to be determined. In the late 1980s, while powerful ethno-national popular fronts emerged in the Union republics, the multi-ethnic nature of Russia militated against this in the RSFSR. Instead, a Russian democratic movement was formed around a civic notion of Russia. After independence, growing ethno-nationalism induced the disintegration of the democratic movement. Determining the nature of Russian national identity – whether it is to be centred on ethnic Russians or incorporate the diversity of peoples and cultures of the Russian Federation (RF) – became one of the central issues in Russian politics.

Second, due to the link between territory and political/economic rights that developed in the late 1980s, the administrative arrangement of the RF became extremely important. The contradiction between the Kremlin's desire to maintain dominance over the regions and the wish of many of the minorities for autonomy or even independence fostered a power struggle heavily informed by ethnicity between federal and regional authorities. The issue of who has a right to an ethnic territory and the rights and obligations of these regions became a dominant theme in Russia.

In response to these challenges, a formal constitutional process developed to try to remake Russia and to define the position of the minority populations. This process involved changes in the rights of some ethnic territories and peoples, the negotiation of a federation treaty, the April 1993 referendum and December 1993 parliamentary elections and a new constitution, and the negotiation of a series of bilateral agreements between Moscow and the republics. Change has involved large-scale migration and bloody conflict.

Forging a new Russia

After independence the central authorities were committed to the idea of moving the foundation of the federation onto a territorial, rather than ethno-territorial, basis. However, the conflict between the executive and the legislature in Moscow from early in 1992 initially encouraged a further disintegration of the federation. Both branches of central government offered increased rights to the regions in return for their support.

The first republics to challenge Moscow were Chechnya-Ingushetia and Tatarstan. In November 1991, the leadership of Chechnya-Ingushetia declared independence from Russia and immediately set about consolidating its independence and securing international economic and political support.

As the drive for autonomy gathered pace in the RF, the fight for ethnic territories became more intense, particularly in the North Caucasus. In early 1992, following failure over Chechnya, which had separated from Ingushetia, and as other republics pushed for increased rights vis-à-vis the centre, Moscow began to campaign for the implementation of a new federation treaty. In negotiations, the ethnic republics proved the most intransigent and the central authorities eventually gave in to a number of their demands; in particular, in the treaty the republics were described as 'sovereign' republics within the Russian Federation. In its final form, the federation treaty consisted of three sets of agreements reflecting the unequal distribution of power between levels of administrative units. Each agreement outlined a different distribution of power between Moscow and the regions, with the ethnic republics receiving the greatest autonomy. At the end of March 1992, the treaty was signed by all the subjects of the Russian Federation, except Chechnya, Ingushetia and Tatarstan.

Overall, the new federation treaty did little to clarify the division of powers between the centre and the regions. The delegations from the republics of Bashkortostan, Karelia and Sakha only agreed to the treaty when President Yeltsin and Ruslan Khasbulatov, Speaker of the Supreme Soviet, signed bilateral addenda granting them additional rights.

By January 1993, the politics of ethno-regionalism had produced a situation in which the Russian central authorities had recognized the special nature of most ethnic-based administrative units within the RF and had given some of the AOs the status of republics. Republican status had been reached by 21 units, leaving six *krais*, 49 *oblasts*, one autonomous *oblast* and 10 autonomous *okrugs*. Of the 21 republics, 17 had formerly been ASSRs (Chechnya-Ingushetia was divided) and four were former AOs once attached to *krais* (Altai from Altai Krai, Karachai-Cherkessia from Stavropol Krai, Khakassia from Krasnoiarsk Krai and Adygeya from Krasnodar Krai) which had been elevated to republic status. Tatarstan won a series of special treaties with Moscow, giving it a very high degree of autonomy.

Prior to 1993, Yeltsin and his team had, at best, a poorly developed nationalities/regional policy for Russia. Following fighting between North Ossetians and Ingush (November 1992), the first signs of a change at the centre began to emerge. Sergei Shakhrai, a specialist on ethnic issues, was placed in charge of regional and nationalities policy and a more directed and coordinated policy began to develop. In April 1994, a decree established the Ministry of Nationalities and Regional Policy. The foundation of this new approach was to be a new Russian constitution. In early 1993, when a constitutional assembly convened to work out the final draft of the new constitution, one of the central issues was the distribution of powers between the centre and the regions.

President Yeltsin's decision to abolish the Russian Supreme Soviet in October 1993 halted, at least temporarily, regional challenges to central authority. Following the use of force against the White House, Yeltsin moved against the regions, disbanding the local soviets and transferring power to the head of the local administration. The system of executive power was then used to generate support for the new Russian constitution, which was meant to institutionalize a shift in power from the regions back to the centre.

The North Caucasus

The North Caucasus was annexed by tsarist Russia in the early nineteenth century but not fully pacified until the 1860s. In the twentieth century the region has been subject to a range of turbulent developments ranging from the civil war to deportations (1940s). Since the demise of the Soviet system, the North Caucasus has emerged as the most ethnically volatile region in the RF. The area is riven with territorial and border disputes involving many of the more than 60 distinct national, ethnic and religious groups (Christian and Muslim) in the region. In response to the new challenges that have faced the peoples of the region, a number of initiatives to create organizations to challenge Moscow's control of the region have been launched.

The First Congress of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus met in August 1989 with the Abkhazia region in Georgia playing a leading role. The aim of the congress was to work towards the creation of a Caucasian Federal Republic. The emergence of this organization was a sign of the growing discontent of the local leaders with the RF and a response to the emergence of Cossacks as an organized force. At the end of its Third Congress in November 1991, the congress became the Confederation of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, incorporating 16 nations. In October 1992 it became the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus. The Congress created a Confederation of Caucasian Republics – continuing the tradition of the Union of Mountain Peoples created in 1917. Despite efforts to present a unified political front, it has proved difficult to establish a common agenda and internal rivalries over territory and relative influence in the region remain intense.

Beyond the Caucasus area, people from the region have faced popular prejudice and harassment by the Russian authorities, in part because of the conflicts in the Caucasus and in part reflecting the widespread perception that people from the region are involved in criminal activities.

The Dagestan ASSR in the North Caucasus was established in January 1921. The republic declared its sovereignty in May 1991. The complexity of minority issues in Dagestan – there are at least 32 separate ethnic groups within its borders – and the close identity between many of these groups and certain territory led to calls for the republic to become a federation. Establishing a balance of ethnic groups in the republic proved to be a particularly difficult and delicate task. Dagestan is the centre of Islam in the North Caucasus.

The north, Siberia and Far East

The native peoples of the north, Siberia and the Russian Far East have been under a variety of economic, linguistic and cultural pressures since Russian expansion into their homelands in the twelfth century. Their shamanist practices have been repeatedly attacked. Under the Russian and Soviet empires, the image of these regions as frontier zones and state subsidies encouraged in-migration by Slavs.

Within the Soviet Union, native peoples were gradually pushed towards extinction by policies promoting modernization, forced settlement and russification. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, these peoples were able to organize themselves more effectively and Russian migration and industrial exploitation slowed. However, native peoples also had to face a new set of challenges, the most important of which, land privatization, threatened the security of their land rights and their aim of creating 'reserved territories'. The growing demands for access to the resource-rich areas of the north by domestic and international mineral extraction companies has raised the issue of what rights the native peoples should have in the future economic exploitation of their homelands.

The centrepiece of the Russian government policy was the Council of Ministers decree (11 March 1991) 'On the State Programme for the Development of Economy and Culture of the Minority Peoples of the North 1991-5'. The Committee for the North and Minority Peoples was created in the Council of the Federation in April 1994. The Russian Parliament passed a law 'On the Foundations of the Legal Status of the Indigenous Peoples of the Russian North', although President Yeltsin vetoed it in the summer of 1995 under pressure from the oil and gas lobby.

Several years later the situation of the peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East was still 'critical' according to some analysts. Accounting for only 300,000 people, these peoples currently live across areas covering more than half of the territory of the Russian Federation. Russia has not signed the only international instrument explicitly addressing the rights of indigenous peoples, the Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries. However, nominal progress has been achieved in the expansion of national legislation dealing with these peoples. In 1999 Russia adopted the Federal Law on the Guarantees of the Rights of Indigenous Numerically Small Peoples of the Russian Federation, which established a wide range of rights for numerically small peoples. In 2000 the Federal Law on General Principles of the Organization of Communities of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East was adopted; in 2001 a Federal Law on the Territories of Traditional Nature Use by Indigenous Numerically Small Peoples of the North Siberia and the Far east was adopted.

Despite these positive legislative steps the lack of implementation at the practical level has limited the potential benefits to the numerically small peoples supposedly the beneficiaries of these laws. By 2004 no federal funding had been allocated for the realization of indigenous rights and federal laws had not been backed up by national, regional or local enforcement laws or mechanisms. The small peoples of Siberia, the North and the Far East continue to confront serious problems of discrimination, land use and ownership and environmental damage caused by the activities of Russian and multinational enterprises exploiting oil, timber, coal, mineral and gas reserves in the region.

The issue of land rights is perhaps the most fundamental. Although the 2001 Federal Land Code gives a priority right to the acquisition of land to those already having possession rights on this land, a provision which benefits indigenous communities, indigenous communities are generally too geographically dispersed, remote from administrative centers and ill-informed of legal developments to take advantage of this provision.

Regional and local authorities have done little to remedy this situation as they often stand to benefit from the activities of private companies using indigenous lands for industrial production.

Governance

The disintegration of the Soviet order, coupled with the radical political, economic and social reforms instituted in Russia since the late 1980s, has exacerbated inter-ethnic tensions and highlighted the complex ethno-political inheritance from the Russo-Soviet imperial order. The principal legacy of this earlier period is an intricately interwoven set of ethno-territorial units, sizeable minorities outside or lacking their own 'homeland' and significant populations opposed to rule from Moscow. Since independence, minority communities have had simultaneously to redefine their relationship with Moscow and begin to come to terms with the Russian colonial past. Negotiating the process of building a new multiethnic, multicultural Russia has generated a wide variety of problems and, on occasion, violence.

The constitution, which was adopted in December 1993, contained important changes from the draft produced by the constitutional assembly in the summer. The principle of equality for all regions, which aimed to stem the disproportionate drift of power to the ethnic republics, was established. At the same time, the non-ethnic Russian character of the federation was acknowledged (sovereignty was located in the 'multinational people of the RF'). The constitution also guaranteed the language rights of the non-Russian populations, thereby reinforcing the Declaration on the Languages of the Peoples of Russia (25 October 1991), which granted all peoples the choice for their language of education and upbringing. However, the previously guaranteed position of minority representatives in the legislature was ended when the Council of Nationalities was replaced by an upper chamber with each subject of the federation electing two representatives.

In fact, the new constitution failed to clarify the precise division of powers between the federal centre and the provinces. Despite the equality among the subjects of the federation institutionalized in the constitution and the apparently clear delimitation of authority, relations between the centre and the regions continued to be characterized by a struggle for power. This situation led Moscow and some of the republics to conclude bilateral treaties. The first treaty to delineate responsibilities and powers between the federal and republican authorities was signed with Tatarstan in 1994 and was followed by treaties with other republics. Following treaties with the republics, Moscow concluded bilateral agreements with many of the oblasts.

While the struggle for power between the ethnic republics and Moscow was taking place, there was also a general revival of the linguistic, cultural and ethnic practices of minority populations in the RF. Religious organizations also emerged in all the main minority groups. A relationship of 'confessional coexistence' developed between the Russian Orthodox Church and many of the other faiths of the RF. Some sections of the Orthodox movement, however, called for the prohibition of 'non-traditional religions' such as Mormons, Hare Krishna and Protestant groups and have promoted anti-Semitism.

Russia joined the Council of Europe in February 1996. It ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities on 21 August 1998, with the declaration that the 'Russian Federation considers that no one is entitled to include unilaterally in reservations or declarations, made while signing or ratifying the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, a definition of the term 'national minority,' which is not contained in the Framework Convention.' This declaration was ostensibly aimed at neighbouring states containing substantial ethnic Russian and Russian-speaking populations in the so-called 'Near Abroad' (independent states formerly constituting parts of the Soviet Union).

Position of minorities

The ambiguous, and often contradictory, rights allocated to the ethnic republics in the main agreements regulating centre-regional relations have further reinforced the pyramid of inequality which has developed among the minorities in the RF. Those

minorities with their own officially recognized territory ('homeland') usually enjoy considerable advantages over the other minority populations in the RF. However, the titular groups of autonomous areas with high concentrations of Slavic settlers have often faced problems similar to those of minorities lacking a formal homeland.

Although Moscow has taken some important steps to create an environment supportive to the development of minority groups, those groups that lack their own homeland face particular problems. Many of these groups do not have compact forms of settlement and therefore face the prospect of assimilation.

Indigenous Peoples

Native peoples have been active in their own defence, establishing organizations to campaign on their behalf. The First Congress of the Northern Minorities took place in March 1990. It called for a return of historic lands and the creation of traditional tribal councils. Russia recognized only a limited number of native peoples, leaving more than 20 unrecognized. Some of those who were recognized have their own autonomous areas, but even here they are usually heavily outnumbered by Slavic settlers.

Certain of the more numerous native peoples have been granted territorial recognition. Most of the smaller groups (Nanai, Nivkhi, Selkup, Ulchi, Itelmen, Udegei, Sami (Lapp), Inuit, Chu-van, Nganasan, Yukagir, Ket, Oroch, Tofalar, Aleut, Negidal, Ent, Orok) have not. While the larger sedentary groups have often assimilated to Russian life, this is not the case with the less numerous peoples. Their small numbers, however, suggest they have a precarious future. Scattered across the north, Siberia and the Russian far East, the largest group without an official ethnic homeland, the Nanai, has a population of 12,021, while the smallest, the Orok, number just 190.

The Russian Federation & Minorities' aspirations

Since the early 1990s, the struggle for power between the federal authorities and the ethno-territorial units has gradually transformed the RF from a unitary empire into something that resembles a federation. However, although the struggle for a genuine federation has fostered a transfer of powers to the ethnic republics, it has also reinforced the link between control of territory and the power and rights that minorities can enjoy. In this way it has accelerated the competition between ethnic groups to claim their own 'homeland'. Faced with these problems, the federal authorities have repeatedly stressed the need to move the basis of the federation away from the ethnic principle and on to an arrangement in which all subjects would have equal status. Such a change would, however, require minority groups to abandon their aspirations for nation-hood.

The ethnic republics have fiercely resisted any moves to undermine their position. The conclusion of a series of bilateral treaties with the republics indicates that federal authorities have accepted that these areas cannot be forced to participate in the federation. The continuing struggle between Moscow and the ethnic republics, especially the decision to invade Chechnya in 1994, suggests, however, that basic problems remain.

Minority issues cannot be tackled effectively until the distribution of basic powers is resolved and, in particular, the issue of the relationship between rights and territory is decided. Most politicians concede that, at a minimum, borders will have to be redrawn, especially in the North Caucasus. Moreover, until the ethno-territorial principle is reconciled with individual rights, the RF will continue to be characterized by a two-tier system of minority rights.

Determining the federal structure of the RF will not, however, solve the basic question about the dominance of Russians. The 'race for sovereignty' in the early 1990s helped provide many of the leading minority groups with a guaranteed legal status and, in principle, republican-level support for the development of indigenous cultures and languages. In many of these regions, however, the numerical dominance of ethnic Russians and other Slavs ensures that ethnic autonomy is largely a fiction. For those without an officially recognized homeland, the pressures to assimilate are even greater.

In an important development which represented a break with Soviet nationalities policy, which focused on territorial autonomy for 'titular' nations, Russia enacted in 1996 a Law on National Cultural Autonomy. In the absence of a law on national minorities, this experiment in 'personal cultural autonomy' has become the centre point of Russia's two reports (2000 and 2005) under the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which Russia ratified on 21 August 1998. According to the Ministry of Justice of Russia, by 2003-2004 16 federal NCAs had been created and function in the Russian Federation. These were (1) the Russian Germans; (2) the Russian Koreans; (3) the Russian Ukrainians; (4) the Tatars of the Russian Federation; (5) the Russian Belarusians; (6) the Jewish community of Russia; (7) the Russian Azerbaijani; (8) the Russian Roma; (9) the Russian Kurds; (10) the Russian Armenians; (11) the Russian Chuvashes; (12) the Russian Karachais; (13) the Polish Congress in Russia; (14) the Lezgin NKA; (15) the Russian Serbs; (16) the Russian Lithuanians. Moreover, there are 173 regional and 315 local NCAs in the regions of the Russian Federation.

The Putin era

Since the accession of President Vladimir Putin in 2000 the Russian Federal Government has followed a politics that seeks to guarantee equality rather than granting concessions to ethnic minorities. While ethnic minorities still retain some positions of power in local governments, President Putin has opposed special privileges for ethnic minorities and ethnic regions as part of his larger efforts to funnel power into a vertical, federal structure with federal districts governed by presidential representatives. Tax systems have been restructured, and restrictions have been put on governors to inhibit regional autonomy in favour of greater federal control.

Across different political domains, the Putin era has been characterized by renewed efforts to centralize political authority and marginalize opportunities for dissent. Trends towards a centralization of political authority have been observed in a number of fields. Putin's second term has seen a tightening on freedom of expression; while a diverse print media may exist, electronic media rarely criticize the president and routinely criticize his opponents. Restrictions were also imposed on NGOs and civil society groups, above all those funded by Western institutions, by a controversial NGO law. The political party system was also reconfigured. The threshold for representation in the Duma was raised to 7 per cent. From 1 January 2006, a new law came into force requiring all parties to have at least 50,000 members and branches distributed across at least half of the federation subjects – a move precluding regionally or ethnically based parties.

Re-centralization has also been evident in Putin's management of Russia's federal system. The regime effectively abandoned the mechanism of bilateral treaty ties between Moscow and federal subjects in favour of concentrating political power in individuals or institutions more amenable to central control. At the end of 2004 the system of directly elected regional governors was abolished in favour of a presidential appointee system. Regional governors now appoint senators to the Federation Council, and regional laws are required to comply with federal legislation. Nonetheless, regional parliaments still play a role in appointing half of the Federation Council's senators and approving presidential nominees for the post of governor.

These moves may be seen as encroaching authoritarianism; yet they may also be seen as countering what many Russians saw as a dangerous slide towards territorial disintegration in the 1990s. At the same time the Putin regime was shaken in 2004 by a series of domestic disasters highlighting centrifugal forces, including the assassination of pro-Moscow Chechen President Akhmed-haji Kadyrov in May, a Chechen militant raid into neighbouring Ingushetia in June, bombings of passenger jets in August, the Beslan hostage crisis of September and continuing social unrest in the North Caucasus. These developments, appended in official government discourse to the global 'war on terror' have certainly motivated further moves towards centralization of power without addressing their underlying causes: inefficient and corrupt government, especially at local levels, economic hardship, a fundamental policy crisis with regard to Chechen secessionism, institutionalised xenophobia within prominent Russian political and cultural institutions and growing tensions between titular minorities within national republics and local Russian populations.

Putin's United Russia Pary overwhelmingly won December 2007 parliamentary elections, which came as no surprise given state repression of the opposition and the state media's glowing coverage of the regime, in addition to an economy buoyed by an influx of income from rising global oil and gas prices. Putin favourite Dmitry Medvedev predictably won March 2008 presidential elections, and Medvedev succeeded Putin as president in May. However, the extent to which Medvedev enjoyed individual authority remained unclear, as Vladimir Putin took up the position of prime minister, a position from which many observers concluded he would continue to control the state. In 2008 Russia signalled new assertiveness in the international arena, including through its conduct of the war with Georgia, overt warnings to Ukraine and Poland regarding their relationships with the west, and announced intent to dramatically increase military spending. However, as oil prices fell and the global financial crisis roiled Russian stock markets in late 2008, it remained unclear whether Russia could engage in what some commentators warned could be a new cold war.

Current state of minorities and indigenous peoples

Due to the wide range in size, settlement patterns and administrative entitlement, minorities and indigenous peoples in Russia face a diverse set of current problems and challenges. Five main strands may be identified. First, violent secessionism and a resulting deterioration in basic security, with corresponding costs in terms of social cohesion, afflict several minorities in the North Caucasus, the most troubled region of the Russian Federation. Second, increased racial discrimination and xenophobia across the Russian Federation have serious implications for many members of minorities living outside of their traditional homelands or in large cities. Third, identity loss, language shift and assimilation confront many of the smaller minorities in the Russian Federation, particularly in the Russian North, Siberia, the Far East and the North Caucasus. Fourth, government attempts to define and channel debates on national identity continue to posit problematic distinctions between ethnic Russians and other citizens of the Federation. Finally, attempts to abolish or downgrade the level of administrative entitlement for a number of smaller minorities in the name of consolidating territorial units threatens their capacity to defend and promote their rights.

North Caucasus

The North Caucasus continues to suffer from the knock-on effects of the Chechen conflict and the radicalization of the region as a whole. Despite a number of setbacks, including the assassination by Russian special forces of key leadership figures, the Chechen resistance still succeeded in mounting operations exporting the conflict to other areas of the North Caucasus. In October 2005 over 130 people were killed in militant raids in the Kabardino-Balkarian capital Nalchik; tensions between representatives of Islamic associations and groups and state law enforcement agencies were also reported in Adygheya, Karachaevo-Cherkessia and Dagestan. North Ossetia was also the site of numerous bombings in 2005-6. Most analysts agree that there has been a rise in the number of militant Islamic *djamaats* or communities across the North Caucasus, although Russian state propaganda may exaggerate the significance of the threat they pose. There has been a concomitant decline in the influence of state-sponsored religious organizations, particularly the Muslim Spiritual Directorate. The Chechen conflict is one source of instability in the North Caucasus; ongoing competition and rivalry between intersecting ethnic and mafia networks are another. This is particularly the case in the region's most ethnically diverse republic, Dagestan, where 80 political assassinations were reported in the first six months of 2005. The Russian state also encountered the first serious legal sanctions deriving from human rights violations in the Chechen conflict in July 2006, when the European Court of Human Rights ruled the Russian government responsible for the disappearance and death of a young Chechen man. The case is expected to be the first of many similar claims.

Human Rights Watch issued a report in November 2006 based on extensive interviews in Chechnya, finding that the Moscow-backed Chechen government and federal forces were employing the widespread and systematic use of torture, with no accountability for the perpetrators. The Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg, echoed those findings on a visit to Chechnya in March 2007, noting that

every single prisoner he had spoken with had complained of abuse. In a landmark case in July 2007, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that the Russian government was responsible for the 'disappearance' and death of a young Chechen man, Khadzhi-Murat Yandiev, in 2000. It was the eleventh ECHR ruling against Russia for disappearances, deaths and disproportionate use of force stemming from the Chechen conflict; 200 similar cases were still pending. Moscow has not complied with the rulings. In June 2007, however, there was a rare conviction of four Russian soldiers in a domestic court for the killing of Chechen civilians in 2002.

In November 2010 the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly's (PACE) Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights issued a report on the implementation of judgements of the ECtHR and found that 'extremely worrying delays in implementation have arisen' in Russia. After the PACE visit to the country in the same year, PACE Rapporteur Christos Pourgourides urged Russian authorities to end serious violations of the European Convention in the Chechen Republic and to speedily implement ECtHR judgements, including mechanisms to monitor implementation. In a 2010 report Amnesty International (AI) noted the continuing of serious human rights violations, in particular enforced disappearances. AI also highlighted the failure of Russian authorities to conduct effective investigations into violations established by the European Court of Human Rights.

Discrimination against minorities

Even though the Russian Constitution prohibits discrimination based on nationality, Roma minorities, as well as minorities from the Caucasus and Central Asia, face widespread governmental and societal discrimination. Racially motivated violence has also increased, and Muslims, Caucasians and Jews continue to encounter prejudice and societal discrimination. Legislation prohibiting racist propaganda and racially motivated violence is only invoked infrequently, and police regularly designate racist attacks as 'hooliganism'. Discrimination against ethnic minorities has been most acute after terror attacks in Russian cities. Following the February 2004 subway bombing in Moscow, the media were filled with popular demands to forbid any Caucasians from entering Moscow, while Moscow's Mayor Luzhkov promised to clamp down on illegal migrants in Moscow, and President Putin announced that Chechen separatists were to blame for the attacks.

Discrimination and marginalization also affects minorities within their traditional homelands. In May 2005, the European Parliament adopted a resolution criticizing Russia for violating the rights of the Marii, a Finno-Ugric nation living mostly in the Marii-El Republic around 800 km east of Moscow. Citing the difficulty the Marii people face in being educated in their own language, political interference by the local administration in Marii cultural institutions and the limited representation of ethnic Mariis in administrative posts in the Republic, the resolution also lamented the lack of a free press in the Republic and called attention to the severe beating in February 2005 of Vladimir Kozlov, Editor-in-chief of the international Finno-Ugric newspaper Kudo+Kodu and director of Merkanash, a national public organization of Marii in Russia.

In 2010 CEDAW (the UN's Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) called on Russia to adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation paying special attention to the needs of ethnic minority women and making special reference to Chechen, Roma and women of African origin. Multiple forms of discrimination experienced by particular groups of women and girls including female domestic workers, asylum-seeking women, refugee women, internally displaced women, and girls living in the street', as well as violence, police harassment and discrimination against lesbian, bisexual and transgender women was highlighted as a particular concern. In their reports to the CEDAW, Amnesty International, the Russian LGBT (Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender) Network and the ANNA National Centre for the Prevention of Violence voiced their dismay on Russia's non-compliance with its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Protecting the rights of women in Chechnya was also a focus of the country monitoring work of Human Rights Watch (HRW) in 2010. In November HRW urged the Russian government to end discrimination against women who choose not to wear headscarves in Chechnya. Although the freedom to choose how to dress is guaranteed to all women, including those in Chechnya, and is enshrined in Russian law as part of the constitutional right to freedom of conscience, recent years have seen increasing state-endorsed harassment and

discrimination against those who do not follow a certain dress code. Without headscarves, women are prohibited from working in the public sector or attending classes at schools and universities.

Racism

Continuing trends established in the late 1990s, violent racist attacks have increased. In October 2005 the trial opened of eight teenagers accused of stabbing a nine-year old Tajik girl to death in St Petersburg in February 2004. Only one of the accused was charged with murder, while the others were charged with 'hooliganism'. In the verdict the jury found the seven guilty of hooliganism and acquitted the eighth defendant. Racially motivated murders have been reported across Russia, with representatives of Caucasian, Central Asian or Far Eastern nationalities – as well as foreigners – especially at risk.

The acting Interior Minister at that time, Rashid Nurgaliyev, admitted that 'acute manifestations of extremism' towards visible minorities existed in the country. Incidents of racial violence were identified as 'extremist crimes' that were threatening the security of the country. The term 'extremist crime' was used in the national report submitted to the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Russian state authorities officially acknowledged the existence of such crimes and provided some statistics: 'Extremist crime in Russia is on the rise. In 2004, 130 extremist acts were carried out; in 2005 152 were registered, while the figure rose in 2006 to 263 and in 2007 to 356. In the first half of 2008 alone, 250 were registered.'

The Russian non-governmental organization SOVA prefers the term 'hate crimes' and recorded 539 such attacks on ethnic minorities, including 54 murders, over the course of 2006. In 2008 SOVA reported 525 victims of racist violence, of whom 97 died. According to their research 71 people had been murdered and more than 330 injured in 36 Russian regions as a result of racist attacks by the end of 2009. Many violent attacks are reported against members of the Armenian, Jewish, Muslim and non-Russian Orthodox Christian communities. In 2010 SOVA reported on 82 convictions and 283 sentencing in cases involving violence with ethnic hatred as a motive. Fifty-two trials were conducted against 62 people on charges of incitement to hatred and four charges were issued for the distribution of xenophobic propaganda.

Russian human rights activists claim that skinhead gangs operate under conditions of broad impunity, and have raised concerns regarding possible links between the Kremlin-sponsored 'youth movement' Nashi ('Our People') and xenophobic gangs. Human rights organizations believe that local authorities' silent endorsement of violent racism has fostered a climate of impunity for those perpetrating such attacks; as noted above, redress for victims of such attacks is minimal or non-existent.

The Russian authorities have also been accused of targeting visible minorities for racial profiling, resulting in unnecessary registration and passport checks, searches and even arbitrary arrests. Few discrimination cases are prosecuted in Russia because there is no comprehensive network of anti-discrimination laws, and lawyers and judges are not trained in litigating human rights issues within Russia. As a result, in most cases of ethnic discrimination, individuals are unable to obtain justice in Russia and their only recourse is then to the European Court of Human Rights. In 2008 Russian NGOs presented an alternative report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) that examined Russia's compliance with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The Report points out that in spite of an increasing persecution rate, hate crimes have been growing by about 20 per cent a year and have become increasingly violent, often involving weapons and explosives.

Religious discrimination

Domestic human rights groups, as well as international bodies such as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, have also accused the Russian state of discrimination on religious grounds. Although 1997 legislation concerning religious practice grants protected status to the four religions recognized by the state (the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), Buddhism, Islam and Judaism), human rights reports note the privileged status accorded to the ROC, including official arrangements to provide spiritual

counselling and conduct religious education. Government funds are allegedly allocated only to the ROC, while other denominations face widespread difficulties in registering, renting premises, and organizing meetings with foreign representatives of their faith (who are increasingly refused visas). Non-Russian Orthodox religious establishments have also faced a rise in vandalism; quiescence in the face of such vandalism by the ROC leadership has strengthened reactionary forces both within and without the ROC. Anti-Islamic feeling has grown considerably since the September 2004 Beslan tragedy. This is reflected in the rising number of trials of Muslims accused of membership in Hizb ut-Tahrir, an organization classified as terrorist by a court order following a hearing held in secret of which no notice was given.

The 2009 United States Commission on International Religious Freedom report notes the 2002 Law on Extremism (amended in July 2006) for its impact on religious minorities, particularly the Muslim community, by allowing the criminalization of a wide spectrum of speech and activities. The law was mentioned as risking the encouragement of racial and religious discrimination. The report highlights that security services tend to treat the leaders of some Islamic groups, and groups termed as 'non-traditional', such as Jehovah's Witnesses, as a security threat. Increasing discrimination against the country's approximately 20 million Muslims are evident in particular in the regions of Kabrdino-Balkaria and Dagestan, where laws exist that ban Wahhabism, a term increasingly used by government officials, media and the public to mean Islamist extremism. The Russian NGO Memorial reports that Muslims considered 'overly devout' may be arrested or be 'disappeared', especially in the North Caucasus.

Language and identity preservation

Language and identity preservation among Russia's smaller minorities and indigenous peoples remains a prominent concern. According to research published in May 2005 only 47.5 per cent of children among indigenous peoples in north Siberia and the Far East were in fact studying their native language in schools. Even among the demographically more secure Buryat population in southern Siberia, only 40 per cent of local primary schools reportedly offer instruction in Buryat. Language shift is associated with the low prestige of smaller minority languages, ageing speech communities and economic incentives to attain proficiency in Russian.

In March 2006 vigorous debates ensued after the distribution of a draft law attempting to define Russian national identity. The draft bill, an initiative supported by President Putin, reportedly sought to claim a 'consolidating role' for the ethnic Russian nation and contained provisions requiring all Russian citizens to know the Russian language. The draft bill provoked particular resistance among Muslim peoples of the Russian Federation, especially in Tatarstan; neither did the idea behind the law have the support of leading experts on nationalities issues. President Putin's support for the initiative may have been prompted by growing concern in Russia over the country's demographic decline. Russia's population has decreased from 150 million in 1992 to an estimated 142 million today, although the number of Muslims is increasing both in absolute terms and as a proportion of the population. Reversing this overall decline was accorded the highest priority in Putin's state of the nation address in May 2006, an acknowledgement of an issue already seized upon by xenophobic groups.

Russia submitted the Federation's third State Report on the Implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) on 9 April 2010. The State Report describes national policies on the countries' national minorities, including measures aimed at preserving national minorities' culture and language and at counteracting xenophobia and extremism. It states that 'investigation and proper classification of extremist crimes has been gained, including hate crimes'. The report refers to the country's Constitution guaranteeing the rights of national and ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples and to the Criminal Code ruling out terrorism and extremist activities. As regards anti-discrimination measures no specific laws have been enacted, instead the report refers to legislation in the fields of education, labour, health care, judicial procedures, social protection and culture including measures to protect human rights.

Moscow's consolidation of control

President Putin's second term saw a renewed focus on reform of Russia's territorial-administrative system. Reported plans for a significant reduction in the number of Russia's administrative units in order to consolidate Moscow's control of the country have been reflected in a number of referenda on the unification of smaller units with larger regions. This development has primarily affected smaller ethnically defined territorial units.

The putative rationale for the merger of smaller units with larger ones is economic and administrative efficiency, as many smaller units are economically depressed and at the same time reportedly suffer from significant administrative overheads. The first unification came into force on 1 December 2005, when the former Komi-Permyak autonomous okrug was unified with neighbouring Perm oblast to form a new unit, Perm krai.

In 2005 the populations of the Taimyr autonomous okrug, the Evenk autonomous okrug and Krasnoyarsk krai voted in favour of the unification of the three regions, set for 1 January 2007. Due to the fact that titular ethnic populations are themselves minorities within their eponymous ethnic regions, majority votes in favour of unification cannot be read as indicating approval by the titular ethnic group. On the contrary, reports suggest strong resistance by titular ethnic groups to proposals for the merger of their regions with larger federal units. The proposal to merge the Republic of Adygheya with neighbouring Krasnodar krai, for instance, elicited strong resistance from ethnic Adyghey leaders in 2005. Conversely, Russian populations within some ethnic republics support their amalgamation with other regions as a remedy for perceived discrimination at the hands of titular groups, and claim a democratic principle securing the rights of the numerical majority should outweigh ethnic prerogatives.

Legal developments

On 24 February 2005 the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that the Russian Federation had violated the right to life, the prohibition of torture and the right to effective remedy in six cases concerning civilians in the Chechen conflict (Articles 2, 3 and 13 of the European Convention; the cases were *Khashiev v. Russian Federation*, *Akayeva v. Russian Federation*, *Isayeva v. Russian Federation*, *Yusupova v. Russian Federation*, *Bazayeva v. Russian Federation* and *Isayeva v. Russian Federation*). The court awarded financial compensation to the applicants in all six cases.

On 27 July 2006 the ECHR issued its first decision relating to a 'disappearance' in Chechnya. In the case of *Bazorkina v Russian Federation*, the ECHR ruled that the Russian Federation had violated the right to life, the prohibition of inhuman treatment and the right to liberty and security, in addition to the right to effective remedy (Articles 2, 3, 5 and 13 respectively of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms). The case related to the 'disappearance' of a young Chechen man, Khadzi-Murat Yandiev, in February 2000 during the preliminary stages of the second Chechen conflict and was brought by his mother Fatima Bazorkina. Many other similar cases are pending consideration at the ECHR. According to reports applicants to the ECHR in the Russian Federation have been subjected to various forms of reprisal, including intimidation, harassment, physical abuse and even death.

Russia signed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages on 10 May 2001; however, the process of ratification is proving to be complex and long drawn out. In September 2010 the Council of Europe reported on a series of events starting in October 2010 working towards the Charter implementation in the 'Minorities in Russia' Joint Programme. With the participation of local and regional officers and NGOs as well as federal judicial authorities a series of roundtables and information seminars were organised in October 2010, in order to raise awareness around the Charter and work towards its possible ratification.

In January 2010 Russia ratified Protocol 14 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights (ECHR), which paves the way to improve the efficiency of the Court. The Council of Europe has welcomed the decision of the Russian Parliament, the Duma. Russia was the last of the 47 member states to vote for the ratification of Protocol 14.

Copyright notice: © Minority Rights Group International. All rights reserved.