

ЯЗЫКОВАЯ ПОЛИТИКА

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THE ADOPTION OF LANGUAGE POLICIES IN THE REPUBLICS
OF POST-SOVIET RUSSIA: ACTORS, DEBATES, DECISIONS

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In the early 1990s, political actors in Russia's republics proposed alternative, and sometimes mutually exclusive, solutions to language issues for their adoption as a public policy. The purpose of this paper is to understand how and why it was still possible, despite the conflicting interests, to build a coalition and adopt the policy in the republics. I use the method of discourse analysis of official documents and political debates. I analyse the data on the circumstances of the policy adoption in republics in order to understand the general trends in what and how compromises were reached. The official designation of state languages came to Russia's republics as the main policy devised "from above", the central authorities, but it had to be specified and adapted locally. From an instrumentalist perspective, some Russian scholars have argued that the adoption of such a language policy of designating state languages compulsory for use should be seen as a milestone in power struggle. Yet, I argue in this paper that a much wider range of issues were on the table and the compromise had to be reached on what the designation of state languages meant in different contexts. The findings of the study should contribute to the debate about the role of language in politics during the USSR disintegration and the early national-state building in Russia and its republics. When at some point in the future Russia enters another circle of political transformation, the issues in focus would again become highly topical on the political agenda.

Keywords: *policy adoption, language policy, public policy, ethnic republics, Russian Federation*

ПРИНЯТИЕ ЯЗЫКОВОЙ ПОЛИТИКИ В РЕСПУБЛИКАХ ПОСТСОВЕТСКОЙ РОССИИ: АКТОРЫ, ДЕБАТЫ, РЕШЕНИЯ

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В начале 1990-х политические акторы в российских республиках предлагали альтернативные, а иногда и взаимоисключающие решения языковых вопросов для их принятия в качестве государственной политики. Цель этой статьи — понять, как и почему в республиках, несмотря на конфликтующие интересы, оказалось все-таки возможным создать коалицию и принять соответствующую политику. Используется метод дискурс-анализа публичных дискуссий и официальных документов. Для понимания общих тенденций того, какие компромиссы и каким образом они были достигнуты, анализируются данные об обстоятельствах принятия политики в республиках. Политическое решение установить государственные языки пришло в российские республики «сверху», из Центра, но оно должно было быть уточнено и адаптировано на местном уровне. Российские ученые утверждали в рамках инструменталистского подхода, что принятие такой политики следует рассматривать в качестве вехи в борьбе за власть. Однако в данной статье автор показывает, что затрагивался гораздо более широкий круг вопросов, и необходимо было найти компромисс в отношении того, что означало в разных контекстах установление государственных языков.

Ключевые слова: *принятие политики, языковая политика, государственная политика, национальные республики, Российская Федерация*

Introduction

Policy adoption involves deciding which specific solution from among alternative proposals will be used to handle a problem. Policy adoption is determined by its own set of policymakers with embedded disagreements, their environment and their ability to reach an agreement. Public officials, first of all, legislators, the parliaments and deputy corps, take policy decision [Anderson, 2010]. The peculiarity of language policy adoption in Russia's republics was that it took place at the time of political transition, when not only the deputy corps changed quickly and their ideologies evolved but also the legislatures themselves transformed. Under these changing conditions, there was a need for developing support and building majorities in parliaments to adopt the preferred and passable policy alternative.

Decision-making as a collective process is influenced not only by rational choice but also other factors or “decision criteria” that characterize the policy environment and motivate actors. First of all, the inherent contradiction was sharp in Russia in the 1990s between policy as the government action and politics as the struggle for power around the government action [see Gelman, 2019, ch. 5]. Further, policymakers may act according to their perceptions of the public interest. Whereby, the relations between policymakers and the public are a complex one. In making decisions, public officials consider and may take into account public opinion, that is, the public perspectives and viewpoints on

policy issues. While policymakers would typically use the rhetoric of acting in the public interest, their actual motives often go unstated. Policymaking in the republics was much a “top-down” process. While it is difficult to have a look into the “black box” of “top-down” decision-making and to reconstruct internal politics that took place behind the closed doors in power corridors, it is possible to study policy as reflected in political and public discourses.

When tackling language issues, policymakers in republics were confronted with the situation of a value conflict as expressed in language ideologies. The conflictual situation included a set of actors, their interactions and issues at stake, when the sides had a positional difference regarding social and linguistic values. Communism, liberalism and nationalism were three ideologies widespread at the time. The Party and nomenklatura used to compose an ideologically unified communist elite. Yet, among the politicians, there was a large group of “pragmatists” who would opportunistically stand under ideological banners if it benefitted them, for example being the Communist Party members. In the situation of an ideological crisis of the late 1980s, many became disenchanted with communism or just dropped cynically kept masks of devotees and shifted towards pragmatism and opportunism.

For some, liberalism and nationalism provided an alternative vision of the future instead of the communist ideology. Popularized through social movements, these new ideas spread also in power corridors resulting in the emergence of politicians who were labelled as “democrats” by themselves (“federalists” by the opponents) and “nationalists” by the opponents (“nationals” by themselves – in Russian “*natsionaly*”). With some exceptions, the confronting interests in the field were usually not institutionalized through political parties. In some cases, like in Tatarstan, at times parliamentary factions could be easily associated with the groups of democrats and nationalists. However, they remained relatively few in number. Thus, I use hereafter the terms “democrat” and “national(ist)” to refer to the respective social movements and some of their representatives among the deputies. More typically for other cases, it was the establishment with no strong allegiance to the ideologies who decided over policy issues. Accordingly, I refer to the pressure groups in the establishment who attempted to influence policy in their favor as to “titular” and “Russian” pressure groups consisting of politicians and activists, among whom (Russian and titular) nationalists were in a minority. The pressure groups operated within the existing system of formal institutions and informal clientelistic networks.

By the multiplicity of group interests, taking decision typically included coalition building. Among the modes of collective decision-making, political bargaining was often the most common style, although persuasion and command also took place, especially in the hierarchical structures. Bargaining is defined as a process in which two or more persons in positions of power adjust their at least partially inconsistent goals in order to formulate a course of action that is acceptable but not necessarily ideal for all the participants. The main result of bargaining is usually compromise [Anderson, 2010: 146].

While diverging interests laid in ideologies provoke a conflict that would never find a solution, certain historical circumstances could facilitate a compromise. The role of language in nation-building and state building in Russia and its republics under the conditions of the USSR collapse are relatively well studied, although more so for Tatarstan than other republics (see, for example, [Alpatov, 2000]). The late 1980s – early 1990s were characterized by the situation of uncertainty when the existing institutions were failing. At the core of the demands of nationalist movements put forward to republics’ authorities was “language revival” as part of “national revival”. Accordingly, the choice made in the 1990s and 2000s to pursue “language revival” as a government policy was due to its central place in

nation-state building projects. While only in some republics national movements reached the stage of mass mobilization, political process with weakening institutional restrictions had an elitist nature and was prone of elite competition (see p. 9 below). Yet, the fact that the policies were adopted reveals a level of consensus reached in the republics. To overcome the crisis, new constitutive documents had to be passed, so the compromise had to be reached also on language issues.

At the same time, the formation and adoption of language policies remain understudied. In my earlier research, I showed that one device to reconcile the interests was to agree and fix only most general principles and to delay the practical decision on contested issues wherever possible. Accordingly, policy decision in the republics took form not of one but of three acts that envisaged three different types of recognition of the official status: symbolic designation in the declarations of state sovereignty, formal designation in the constitution and legal designation in electoral and languages laws [Zamyatin, 2014a]. I studied extensively each of the three steps of policy adoption in the republics titled after the ethnic groups speaking Finno-Ugric languages [Zamyatin, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c]. The peculiarity of these republics is that their titular groups are in the numerical minority in the total republic's population. Because of demography, titular pressure groups were doomed to lose in the legislative procedure with its majority vote and their demands to be ignored. Thus, it would have been impossible to use language status as an instrument in the republics with the titular groups in a minority. However, it was possible to designate the state languages in each step also in most of these republics, although some language laws were passed only in the early 2000s. While the analysis of individual cases reveals the range of possible scenarios, a synthesis is still missing that would include the cases of republics with the titular majority and minority and, thus, provide a representative sample of the republics' language policies. How compromises were reached at every step?

The aim of this paper is to study comparatively policy adoption in Russia's republics in order to understand what policies were adopted and why. My case studies are the Finno-Ugric republics of Karelia, Komi, Mari El, Mordovia, Udmurtia and the Volga-Turkic republics of Chuvashia, Bashkortostan and Tatarstan. In this article, from my systemic dataset I give only the most interesting illustrations of the political process in these and some other republics that are relevant to the argument. My primary sources are official documents and their drafts as well as supplementary materials published mainly as document collections in a series of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences and some others from the republics' research institutes (see [Karely, 2005; Karelskoe nacionalnoe dvizhenie, 2018; Shtrikhi etnopoliticheskogo razvitija Komi respubliki, 1994, 1997; Obshchestvennye dvizhenija v Mordovii, 1993; Nacionalnye dvizhenija Marij El, 1994; Fenomen Udmurtii, 2002, 2008; Suverennyi Tatarstan, 1998; Etnopoliticheskaja mozaika Bashkortostana, 1992; Parlamentarizm v Bashkortostane, 2005; Chuvashskaja Respublika, 2005]).

I also studied shorthand notes and minutes of parliamentary and committee sessions on declarations, constitutions, electoral and language laws. Short-hand notes of the parliamentary discussions were available in full for the parliament of Russia [Pervyi Sjezd, 1992, 1993]. Only occasionally these documents and some other official correspondence materials were accessible in republics, for example Tatarstan and Karelia, usually in the current archives of the republics' agencies on nationalities policy and files on public authorities of the main archives of republics.

This qualitative study will compare the data synchronically across the republics and diachronically following the acts of policy adoption. I will explore sequentially and to some degree chronologically

the political process to reveal the reasons for policy adoption in its chosen configuration. In each of the following sections on the acts of policy decision, I will analyze 1) the sides, 2) issues, 3) conflicting interests, 4) legislative process, 5) common interests and 6) compromise decisions, searching for answers to the questions: 1) what was the political environment both in the vertical dimension of the center-periphery relations and the horizontal dimension of regional politics and who were the legislators at the time, 2) what issue was at stake, 3) why it was difficult to reach the decision and what cleavages caused political conflicts, 4) in what circumstances the documents were passed in individual republics, 5) what was the style of overcoming conflict and what coalitions were still built, and 6) what decisions were taken. I will identify common factors across the republics that predetermined the choice of official bilingualism as a model for the language status planning. There was more than one reason for the designation of state languages in individual republics.

1. The Year 1990: State languages as an attribute of national statehood in the Sovereignty Declarations

1) *Context.* The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and its branches (“Obkoms”) at all levels of the nominally federal structure from the Union republics (SSRs) and autonomous republics (ASSRs) controlled the political system through directly appointing its members to key administrative positions. Party appointees interconnected through patron-client relations were jointly referred to as “Soviet nomenklatura”. The Supreme Councils (Supreme Soviets), Soviet-style quasi-parliaments, nominally held the legislative power but de facto were subordinated in a hierarchical structure of “democratic centralism” to the Party and nomenklatura and rubber-stamped their decisions. Their deputies, many of whom were members of nomenklatura themselves, worked elsewhere and from time to time gathered to the session but the actual work was done by the Presidium. The deputies were de facto nominated on a non-alternative basis, and a complex scheme that ensured balanced representation on the principles of education, gender, ethnicity, occupational and others.

As a part of the solution of nationalities issues the authorities of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) were careful to reflect the ethnic composition of the republican populations in the CPSU and state apparatus, including the Supreme Councils, which was often even higher than the share of titular groups in the total population (see Table 1). However, the Supreme Councils were only nominal representative bodies, while the real power was in the hands of the CPSU.

Table 1. Ethnic representation in parliaments and among top officials

The years of election cycles	Share of the deputies of titular nationality in the parliament of the Republic (% and the year of the election)/ Top official of titular nationality (Obkom secretary-Supreme Council Chairman-President) (Yes or No and the year of the election)					
	Share of the titular group in the total population of the republic according to the census (%)					
Republic	Komi	Mari El	Mordovia	Udmurtia	Karelia	Tatarstan
1985 elected/ appointed (1)	37 % Yes	42 % Yes	>30 % No	42 % No	>30 % Yes	49 % Yes
Population census 1989	23,3 %	43,3 %	32,5 %	30,9 %	10 %	48,5 %

1990–1991 elections (2)	32 % (1990) No (1990) –	30 % (1990) Yes (1990) Yes (1991)	35 % (1990) Yes (1990) No (1991)	26 % (1991) Yes (1990) –	7 % (1990) Yes (1990) –	57 % (1990) Yes (1990) Yes (1991)
1993 elections	– –	46 % (1993) –	– Yes (1993)	– –	– –	– –
1994-1996 elections	28 % No (1994)	25 % (1996) No (1996)	33 % (1995) Yes (1995)	16 % (1995) No (1995)	13 % (1994) Yes (1994)	n/a (1994) Yes (1996)
1998–2000 elections	n/a (2000) Yes (2000)	37 % (2000) No (2000)	39 % (2000) Yes (1998)	11 % (2000) No (2000)	6 % (1998) No (1998/02)	75 % (1999)
Population census 2002	25,2 %	42,9 %	31,9 %	29,3 %	9,2 %	52,9 %
2003-2004 elections	13 % (2003) Yes (2004)	21 % (2004) No (2004)	n/a (2004) Yes (2004)	6 % (2004) No (2004)	n/a (2004) No (2004)	n/a (2004) Yes (2004)

(1) In the last 1985 Soviet elections, the people formally elected the deputies and the Supreme Councils their chairmen but they were in fact appointed with the real power in hands of the first secretaries of the Obkoms.

(2) In 1990, the Supreme Councils elected their chairpersons, who became the first figures in power along the first secretaries; in 1991, some republics also elected presidents who became their highest officials.

With the start of perestroika, the CPSU under the leadership of its general secretary Mikhail Gorbachev introduced the policy of democratization and publicity in 1987. As a result, social movements emerged that under democratization banners started as campaigns to support environmental, democratic, national(ist) and other demands and, thus, challenged authority of the CPSU and nomenklatura. In 1988, the Obkoms created on order from above their sectors on nationalities relations and the Supreme Councils of the ASSRs created their commissions on internationality affairs. After the Plenum of the CPSU Central Committee in 1989, the respective plenums were also held in Obkoms. The Supreme Councils developed the action plans “on the improvement of internationality relations”, which demonstrated the official recognition of the problems (see, for example, for Udmurtia [[Fenomen Udmurtii 2–1, 2002: 52–62](#)]). Accordingly, for example in Udmurtia, the number of media publications on the topic increased from only a handful in 1988, to a hundred in 1989 and two hundred in 1990 [[Fenomen Udmurtii 6, 2008: 11](#)].

The further step on the way of liberalization was political pluralism launched in the first alternative elections of the all-Union congress of people’s deputies in spring 1989 and then of the SSR’s and ASSRs’ Supreme Councils in spring 1990. The Supreme Council of the largest and most complexly federated SSR or the Russian SFSR (RSFSR) established two chambers: the Council of the Republic and the Council of Nationalities. The institutional changes were followed by the introduction of the freedom of speech since August 1990. The emergence of a multitude of partially autonomous groups created the first precondition for political bargaining. Another precondition for bargaining emerged as a result of the gradual transformation of the Supreme Councils from decorative bodies into the centers of power and a gradual power shift from Obkoms to the Supreme Councils, thus, the dispersion of political power both in vertical and horizontal dimensions. The first elections in the republics in March 1990 marked the beginning of the transition to the dual power of the Obkoms and the Supreme Soviets of the republics.

The elections were alternative but still not free. Democrats as a social movement and the reformist

wing of the CPSU were successful in inspiring liberal mobilization only in Moscow and Leningrad but hardly where else [March, 2002: 19–22]. In the RSFSR in general and especially in its ASSRs, mostly CPSU members and government officials as well as directors of industrial and agrarian enterprises were elected the people's deputies. Thus, the republican establishment composed of nomenklatura, or "conservatives" and "apparatchiks" as referred by their opponents, continued to keep power. But the social background of the new deputies was a drastic contrast with the Soviet practice of proportional representation of workers, peasants and intelligentsia. Ethnic representation remained relatively proportional in some ASSRs but not others. For example, out of 250 deputies standard for the ASSRs Supreme Councils, ethnic Tatars received in the elections 142 seats or 57 % deputies, that is, more than their share in the population, and ethnic Russians occupied 97 seats or 39 % [Kondrashov, 2000: 135]. At the same time, the share of the people's deputies of the titular nationality in the Finno-Ugric ASSRs fell down (see Table 1).

It would be misleading, however, to think that ethnicity or "nationality", that is, not simply ethnic but ethno-national identity, would automatically define ethnic voting. As a result of the late-Soviet policy of "merging nations and nationalities into a single Soviet people", if graduated on the scale from deep divisions to social cohesion, societies in ASSRs became relatively cohesive. The elites also gravitated towards each other. Their ethnic background was often mixed. Due to decade-long assimilation, many among the titular elites were Russian-speakers, or "Russified mankurts", as now sometimes described by titular nationalists. On a much smaller scale, but still some Russian nomenklatura members were also integrated into the titular communities. First of all, the behaviour of elites was defined not by nationality but by their belonging to the establishment.

Among the nomenklatura, two segments had opposing views on the nationalities issues. One segment was "national cadres", hereafter conventionally referred to as "titular" segments of political elites, who emerged as a social strata as a result of the early Soviet policy of indigenization of state apparatus and often originating from the agricultural sector. These sympathised with the national demands, themselves often entering the establishment on ethnic quota, but were careful do dissociate themselves from the national movements in order not to jeopardize their belonging to nomenklatura [Zamyatin, 2013a: 15–151]. The ethnic Russian segments, hereafter "Russian" segments of political elites, were often dominant in urban surroundings, especially in industry, among engineering-technical workers and technical intelligentsia. These were used to the dominant societal role of the Russian culture and language and considered it as a natural order of things and, thus, were suspicious of any grassroots "nationalist" initiatives. The establishment as a whole, however, did not have strong opinions and graduated towards the centre. The mainstream translated official ideology and acted on the recommendation of the central authorities.

Two other groupings that emerged among the elites were democrats and nationalists, but even in the Tatar ASSR they were in a significant minority. Half a dozen nationalists were elected to its Supreme Council, including the leaders of organizations representing both radical and moderate wings of the national movement, who formed a growing parliamentary faction. Two dozen democrats were elected and formed somewhat later a parliamentary faction considered by the opponents as among the "worst Russian chauvinist forces in Tataria" [Kondrashov, 2000: 134–135]. In other republics, democratically or nationally minded independents typically got just a few or hardly any votes (see [Parlamentarizm v Bashkortostane, 2005: 168]).

The CPSU functionaries and nomenklatura in republics perceived the democrats and nationalists as a threat to their power but also as a potential resource. There was a level of cooperation between political and cultural elites that composed pressure groups. The “titular” pressure groups claimed to represent the interests of “titular nations” understood as ethnic nations and shared the value of the preservation of their languages and “national self-consciousness”. For these politicians and activists the status of the “titular nations” implied not just the fact that the territory was titled after the autochthonous group (*korennoi narod*) but also that the latter fact meant the entitlement of the group virtually to “possess” a republic, the title of land. They considered the republic to be “their own”. The imagination of this view perhaps is exemplified at its utmost by a reference to “the Republic of Tatarstan, which is itself surrounded by the Russian Federation” [Garipov, Faller, 2003: 173].

Titular cultural activists, or the “symbolic elite”, started to institutionalize national movements in form of “national organizations”. Titular politicians, “national cadres” of nomenklatura, or “national communists”, would often support or even inspire “from above” the creation of these organizations, although not everywhere. For example, the First Secretary of the Obkom in Udmurtia resisted the creation of a national organization. Occasionally, they even formed deputy groups, as in Udmurtia in November 1991, and voted en bloc. Some titular cultural activists, or “national intelligentsia”, typically presented themselves as “national democrats” and initially acted as part of democratic movements but soon their alliance failed, divided inter alia, over the language issues.

The Russian nationalists also became public from 1989 with the era of publicity. They formed their organizations, for example, the Society of the Russian Culture in Udmurtia in 1990 or the social movement Rus’ in the Mari republic in 1991 and in Bashkortostan in 1992 “to protect the rights of ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers”. Since early 1992, there was a counter-mobilization of ethnic Russian nationalists in the ASSRs who formed organizations similar to Interfronts, or “internationalist fronts”, that acted earlier as pro-Soviet movements in the Baltic SSRs and Moldavia [Beissinger, 2002: 385–400]. They were referred to as “great-power chauvinists” by their opponents. Their message resonated with the Russian part of nomenklatura who were aware that with the introduction of language requirements many ethnic Russians lost their posts in the Baltic republics. The “Russian” pressure groups claimed to stand for the interests of ethnic Russians and the freedom to speak Russian everywhere without the need of learning other languages. These people wanted to live in Russia and in their imagined world republics had no more meaning than just of administrative divisions. This value was shared by Russian nationalists, the conservative Russian nomenklatura and Russian democrats.

It has to be noted that democracy and nationalism are connected both historically and functionally. Not only, according to Liah Greenfield [Greenfield, 1992], was nationalism the form in which democracy appeared to the world, but also a shared sense of national belonging often is considered as a precondition for democratization. The proponents of both ideologies strived to reform the Soviet system and shared some basic ideas of how it should be done, inter alia, via return to democracy and federalism. Accordingly, there were also democratically minded nationalists or nationally minded democrats. The Moscow democrats saw nationalists in republics as their allies and supported them against the regional nomenklatura.

However, the responses to the nationalities question diverged on how diversity should be institutionally accommodated and what is the meaning of sovereignty in relation to nation and statehood. Many democrats stood on the classical version of liberalism. For them, central liberal ideas included

democracy, equality and the prevalence of individual rights over collective rights. According to this worldview, the issues of ethnic identity were only a private matter. In effect, Russia as a whole had to become a nation. In contrast, the nationalists' worldview was grounded on the ideas that were laid down into the foundation of the Soviet state, inter alia on the equality of peoples and their right to national self-determination proclaimed in the 1917 Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia. In the new times, nationalists represented their goal as a national liberation now from the Soviet empire. For them, republics was a form of national statehood of their peoples in line with the early Soviet model of nationalities policy. Again, deputies' ethnic background was mixed. The proponents of these ideologies were not necessarily of the respective nationality: there were both titular nationalists and ethnic Russian nationalists as well as titular democrats and ethnic Russian democrats. Nevertheless, there was a clear tendency of parliamentarians to divide along ethnic lines when voting on national and linguistic issues, which on itself, however, does not explain why the decisions were taken. It should be further studied what of the described clusters of elites entered a coalition in the case of each decision.

2) *Issue*. One consequence of the liberalization at the centre was the proclamation of a series of the declarations of state sovereignty in the SSRs in 1988–1990 as well as ASSRs and autonomous districts in 1990–1991, later called the “parade of sovereignties”. To prevent centrifugal processes, the Union authorities, putting into action the recommendations of the CPSU Platform, adopted in April 1990 a number of laws addressing the nationalities problem. In order to gain support of the ASSRs, a new USSR Law On the Distribution of Powers Between the USSR and the Subjects of the Federation (26 April 1990) recognized the status of both the SSRs and ASSRs as the Subjects of the Federation. Moreover, another new Law on Languages of the Peoples of the USSR 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].

Despite these efforts, the First Congress of People's Deputies of Russia also passed the RSFSR declaration of state sovereignty in June 1990, in effect, opening the door for its ASSRs to join the “parade of sovereignties” [Pervyi Sjezd, 1993]. Notably, Russia's declaration said nothing about the status of its republics. Furthermore, Russia became the only SSR not to establish the state language(s) in its declaration. There were some motions to declare Russian as the state language, which would have been a similar statement to what the declarations of other SSRs had, while some other motions were to recognize state languages of the autonomies. These were not included in the final text and laid aside taking decision on the issue until the adoption of a language law. The declaration included only a general statement on free development and use of native language [Pervyi Sjezd, 1992: 467]. One controversial issue was the recognition of the symbolic status of Russian as a national language demanded by some that might have provoked tensions with the ASSRs and further centrifugal processes. Furthermore, at the background was a more general “Russian question” of how much ethnically Russian Russia should actually be.

If the declarations of the SSRs reaffirmed the principles that were already enshrined on paper in their Soviet constitutions, the declarations of the ASSRs were intended based on the principle of the equality of peoples to upgrade their political and legal status to that of the SSRs by claiming “sovereignty” as an essential characteristic of a state. Jeff Kahn defines declaration of sovereignty as an act of defiance or “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” [Kahn, 2000:

59]. These policy documents contained the ideas that should have become the basis for the development of new constitutions. Among the principles, the ASSRs declarations also envisaged the state languages that was the decision also on language policy.

3) *Conflict*. Based on the USSR Law on the Distribution of Powers, the Tatar ASSR claimed as the first along with the Komi ASSR for an upgrade of its status to that of a union republic. Under the conditions of political transition, the “parade of sovereignties” of 1990 created a “window of opportunity” also for language policy formation also in autonomies of the RSFSR [Zamyatin, 2013a: 129–136]. In addition to the central issue about sovereignty, language problems also entered the political discourse and provoked a heated public and political debate. As status planning as the language policy approach was “recommended” by the Plenum, other possible solutions were not much discussed. At the core of the debate at this point was rather the question whether and how many languages should be made official.

The arguments how to solve language problems and proposed actions were rooted in nationalist and linguistic ideologies present in discourses. The titular and Russian interest groups lobbied for alternative political courses for the official recognition of languages. Radical titular organizations sometimes proposed the designation of the sole titular language that was part of the ideology about republics as an entitlement of the “titular nations”. Organizations of Russian nationalists sometimes, for example in Udmurtia or Karelia, proposed the designation of the sole Russian language because “we live in Russia” [Zamyatin, 2013a]. Yet, the main titular national organizations proposed official bilingualism.

4) *Legislative Process*. Right after Russia passed its declaration, which was done without consulting the Supreme Councils of the ASSRs, the similar discussions started in its ASSRs with the approval of their Obkoms. The titular national organizations typically proposed their own declaration drafts (see [Zamyatin, 2013a]). The drafts were made public and sometimes provoked heated debates. To quell the concerns in the ASSRs over this unilateral act and in search for their support, the RSFSR Supreme Council chair Boris Yeltsin went in August 1990 for a visit to Kazan and Ufa and famously proclaimed that the republic can take as much sovereignty “as they can swallow”, thus, encouraging them to follow the route of sovereignization.

Perhaps, the most dramatic turn the events took in the Tatar ASSR. Several drafts were prepared at all strands of the political spectrum. The ASSR’s Supreme Council created a working group that prepared and published a semi-official moderate draft. However, with massive rallies outside the parliament building, this draft was rejected at the parliamentary session. Instead, several alternative drafts were discussed, including the one prepared by the Obkom and the one of the mainstream national organization. The central issue was sovereignty and the upgrade of the republic’s status to a union republic, as proposed by nationalists, or the one within the USSR and the RSFSR, according to the democrats. Some democratic deputies suggested approving the declaration at a referendum intending to distract the process but this was rejected with the argument that RSFSR’s declaration also was not approved at a referendum.

The draft of nationalists proposed to declare “a sovereign national state based on the exercise of the unalienable right of the (ethnic) Tatar nation to self-determination” whose status as autochthonous to the territory was emphasized. The democrats insisted on instituting a civic nation that would include all nationalities. In the end, the compromise was reached by symbolically mentioning that the republic’s sovereignty was derived from the right to self-determination of the Tatar nation but indicating the

multinational people of the republic as the source of sovereignty.

In this setting, the language issue became a bargaining cheap. In the parliamentary debate, some deputies tactically proposed to abstain from designating state languages in the declarations and to leave also the language question for the referendum but had not succeeded. The retreat from the demand of the sole titular state language became a concession from nationalists and a gain for democrats. In exchange, the democrats agreed to exclude from the draft the proposition on the status of the republic within the RSFSR and/or the USSR. Thus, excluding some controversial clauses, it was still possible to reach a consensus in the conciliatory commission and to pass the declaration at the session almost unanimously [Kondrashov, 2000: 132–150; Tagirov, 2000].

The Supreme Councils of other ASSRs also rejected alternative drafts of the declarations prepared by titular and Russian nationalists and instead drafted their own semi-official texts in parliamentary commissions. In the end, the official draft texts published for discussion typically did not significantly differ from the final texts. Most republics agreed on the inclusion of the clause on state languages.

In Udmurtia, the parliamentary commission rejected alternative drafts of both national organizations and the Russian deputies. The most debated were the issues on including the reference to the right to national self-determination of the “titular” nation and on the designation of two state languages. The Russian nationalist deputies were either against sovereignization or insisted that also of the “Russian nation” has the right to self-determination. They also argued against the designation of Udmurt as a state language on the arguments that the titular group is in the numerical minority in the republic and that the titular language’s compulsoriness in the predominantly ethnically Russian urban and rural districts were unthinkable [Fenomen Udmurtii 2–1, 2002: 69–106].

In Mordovia, the publication of a radical declaration draft of a national organization for public discussion provoked a scandal and prevented the approval of the sovereignty declaration altogether. Exceptionally for a ASSR, only a declaration on state-legal status of the republic was passed.

An interesting turn took the events in the Bashkir ASSR, where the most severe debates were about its future relationship with the RSFSR and/or the USSR from the perspective of an upgrade of the republic’s status to that of a union republic and about the language issue. The deputies in the end agreed on the status of the republic within the RSFSR and the USSR but no compromise on the language issue was reached. A peculiarity of the republic is that ethnic Tatars numerically are the second largest ethnic group in the republic after Russians. The Bashkirs themselves were only the third largest group after the Tatars and the Russian. Yet, the Bashkir deputies, while agreeing with a parallel status of the Bashkir and Russian languages, refused it for the Tatar language that already became a state language of the neighboring Tatar ASSR. This meant a stalemate on the issue, because in the ASSR’s Supreme Council, only 90 deputies or 34 % were Bashkirs, 93 or 35 % Russian and 59 or 22 % Tatar MPs [Parlamentarizm v Bashkortostane, 2005: 168–171, 188–189]. So, the declaration had to be passed without designating state languages.

In sum, the data from republics shows that the demand on the side of national organizations for the official designation of languages was a necessary precondition for including the clause on state languages in the declarations. Notably, the newly created Karelian national organization had not demanded yet the status of the state language for Karelian in 1990 inter alia because the language lacked a written form. Thus, the non-existence of the written form became an obstacle for designating the official status, although it was not a central one. Karelia was second to pass its declaration, but

its final text did not contain any provision on languages (for texts of alternative drafts, see [Karelskoe nacionalnoe dvizhenie, 2018: 25–28; Zamyatin, 2013a: 139–141]).

5) *Compromise*. Not only democrats and nationalists but also the republican establishment supported the idea of sovereignty because upgrading the republican status it could increase its own power. Furthermore, the nomenklatura was aware of language conflicts in some SSRs and shared the concern that language-related problems were present and needed to be addressed. Also, one ground for a certain level of consensus was ensured by the fact that visions of both groupings implicitly shared linguistic nationalism, that is, the belief in the assumed link between statehood, nationhood and the status of languages. Accordingly, they shared, although for various reasons, the vision that the designation of state languages is the appropriate solution. At the same time, some elements of communist ideology, notably socialist internationalism, continued to be shared and explicitly present in public discourse. So, the argumentation had to be carefully articulated because the accusation of the other side of nationalism continued to remain a standard rhetorical device.

Another conjoined point of consensus, also stemming from the communist ideology, was the idea about equality of “peoples” and their languages. Equality was perceived in public discourse as a fair way of resolving inter-ethnic tensions. The combination of the idea of equality with linguistic nationalism had such an effect that most of the elites in the republics supported the official designation of two state languages: Russian and titular language(s), while the interests of ethnic minorities in republics received much less attention.

Some representatives of the ethnic Russian segment of the republics’ nomenklatura saw their interest in support for regional separatism, above all for economic reasons, as a way to take over the control over union enterprises and other property in republics. From a perspective of the Russian nomenklatura, a symbolic act of the designation of state languages was a reasonable concession to titular interest groups for an overall gain in legitimacy of their claims of a higher political status of republics in the face of the center. Thus, there was a joint interest of the republics’ nomenklatura to increase the republic’s self-governance vis-à-vis the central authorities in Moscow [Zamyatin, 2013a: 151–153]. An important driver of consolidation of the nomenklatura by consensus was that its segments were aware of the challenge to their power from the democrats as well as titular and Russian nationalists and, accordingly, the need for cooperation in order to retain and increase their power resources.

Therefore, the nomenklatura remained in power and used democratization, decentralization and sovereignization as a way to preserve and expand their access to power. As the declarations were the policy documents that expressed intentions without immediate effects, the segments of nomenklatura were ready to make compromises also on the language issue. This compromise was made possible, in particular, because of the common belonging of the elite segments to the nomenklatura. Among other factors that influenced such an outcome, deference towards the recommendation of the central authorities played a role that mentioned the designation of two languages. Despite the political change, many deputies were used to operate in the hierarchical structure.

6) *Decision*. The North Ossetian ASSR was first to pass its declaration on 20 July. It was followed by the Karelian ASSR on 9 August. The Komi and Tatar SSRs passed their declarations, respectively, on 29 and 30 August dropping the term “autonomous” from their official name. Most other republics passed their declarations in autumn, including the Udmurt Republic on 20 September, the Bashkir SSR on 11 October and the Mari SSR on 22 October. Mordovia passed a declaration on its state legal status among

the last on 7 December 1990 and Dagestan with its many stakeholders passed a similar document only next year. The Supreme Councils raised the political status of the republics, thus, increasing their own power. The general atmosphere of the processes of disintegration of the USSR made possible the sovereignization of the (former) ASSRs and the increase of their political status to the republics within Russia with their constitutions and state languages as symbols of national statehood.

The declarations proclaimed state sovereignty of the republics. The multinational people was declared the bearer of republican sovereignty also in the ASSRs, so ethnic preferences were not on the agenda. There were some references to individual and collective language rights in the documents but language status planning became the foundation of “top-down” policy. As it was prescribed by the Law on the Languages of the USSR, most ASSRs declared in their declaration as the state languages both titular language(s) and Russian. In addition, it was explicitly stated in the declarations of some republics, for example, the Tatar, Komi and Mari SSRs, that the titular language and Russian as two state languages had to function on equal footing [Zamyatin, 2015: 297]. The declarations were also passed in those republics in which national movements were relatively weak and could not initiate mass ethnic mobilization. In these ASSRs, it was arguably the predominance of subject and parochial political culture combined with a vertical type of stratification that predetermined a low level of mass support for nationalist demands (for measuring support, see [Gorenburg, 2003: 118–119]).

The declarations were typically passed by an overwhelming majority, despite the fact that the public was mostly predisposed against sovereignization. This reveals the elitist nature of the politics (see [Zamyatin 2013a: 137–138]). Thus, according to Arendt Lijphart’s classification [Lijphart, 1977], it was not mass political culture, but elite political culture that was crucial in choosing a model for planning language status. In the view of Thomas Dye [Dye, 2001], public policy reflects the values, interests and preferences of the governing elite. He argues that even in a democracy like the United States, public policy is made from the top down, not from the bottom up. It was elite politics that mattered more than mass politics also in most ASSRs. The creation of national movements themselves in these republics was typically supported “from above” because the republics’ titular segment of nomenklatura needed their existence to justify their claims for power. The republican authorities supported the movements because they were interested in legitimizing the demands for the republics’ greater self-governance in negotiations with the central authorities [Zamyatin, 2013a].

2. Since 1990: State languages as a tool of “language revival” in the Language Laws

1) *Context.* The Soviet Baltic Republics passed their language laws and amended their constitutions within a couple of months after approving their sovereignty declarations in 1988–1989. For most RSFSR autonomies it took longer or much longer. The language laws in the ASSRs were adopted usually many months and years after the declarations, inter alia, because in the situation of uncertainty political elites did not want to take upon themselves certain obligations. The coup-d’etat of August 1991 led to the USSR collapse in December 1991. In the process of state-building, the Russian authorities passed the Declaration on the Languages of the Peoples of Russia and the Law on Languages of the Peoples of the RSFSR (25 October 1991). As a result, the ASSR when passing their language laws had to comply since April 1990 with the USSR language law and from October 1991 with the RSFSR’s language law.

The two laws were similar and recognized only some individual language rights. Language rights and principles enshrined the ideas of free choice of language use, equality of languages of the peoples of

Russia, state support for the development of all languages and language revival, support for bilingualism and multilingualism, prohibition of discrimination on the basis of language. However, simultaneously the legislation established a hierarchy of the status of languages. The RSFSR's language law designate the Russian language as the state language of the whole country and "the language of inter-nationality communication". Whereby, the latter status actually contradicted bilingualism and multilingualism, which the law did not envisage neither as a goal nor as a policy outcome, stating only that they "traditionally exist" in Russia. The law also recognized the right of republics to designate their own state languages, in effect sanctioning backwards what the republics had already done. Therefore, despite the inclusion of some elements of a rights-based approach, when individuals are empowered to claim their rights rather than simply wait for policies, the Russian lawmakers took not the rights-based approach but the policy-based approach through language status planning as the strategy to address language issues [Zamyatin, 2015].

The law formulated the principles of language use of state languages and other languages but did not provide a list of domains for compulsory language use. The wide scope of application is partly the reason why the structure of the laws only vaguely reflects the domains of languages use. Within the policy-based approach, provisions were formulated as future activities in law. Formulating norms, lawmakers used the language of the third person plural, or the passive tense: something "is being done", which should have meant a legal norm. However, the vagueness was a deliberate mode of framing compromise. This was a Soviet legacy that laws were framework documents while the actual regulations were found in numerous bylaws. Therefore, the symbolic and practical use of languages stemming from their official status were disconnected [Zamyatin, 2015].

In this legislative framework, the Supreme Councils of republics drafted their language laws. The period of a duality of power between the Obkoms and the Supreme Councils lasted until August 1991. The coup-d'état signified the final transformation of the Soviet nomenklatura into new political and economic elite, whereby there was a high level of continuity of the elite especially in the republics. The Supreme Councils now became the real centres of power but were still dominated by conservatives with the nomenklatura past. Political parties started to emerge and penetrate also regional politics, but it was belonging to "party of power", that is, the republican establishment that mattered.

2) *Issue*. The designation of state languages in the sovereignty declarations amounted to their symbolic recognition and implied the further development of their official status in new language laws and constitutions. Now, when drafting laws on languages and constitutions, it was necessary to formulate a policy regarding not only symbolic but also practical use. The central issue here was the compulsoriness of languages. The content and limits for bargaining were established in the RSFSR's language law. The law permitted the compulsoriness of titular languages in some domains, including education and the compulsory knowledge of languages by officials in the work environment but left their use otherwise largely unregulated. The issue of budget was not central because spending for the spread of titular languages in office had to be assigned not directly by laws but from the current budgets of authorities. The funds for other language planning activities were to be assigned through governmental executive programs envisaged in laws, thus decided at the level of government (see on programs [Zamyatin, 2014c]).

3) *Conflict*. The conflict point was whether the official status amounted only to the symbolic recognition and, thus, implied voluntary use of state languages or also compulsory language knowledge

and practical use, namely, also of titular languages. When this question arose, the interests of the titular and Russian segment of the republics' nomenclatura diverged, and difference stances emerged as to what the official establishment of languages meant and what problem it was addressed to solve.

The titular interest groups advocated for the adoption of language laws. Titular cultural activists envisioned the official status as the mechanism to ensure the extension of the symbolic and practical use of titular language in the public sphere via their compulsory use. While expressing concerns about the language shift, titular activists did not dare to make stronger statements and relate the titular languages to the group of endangered languages because they were part of a political culture in which it was usual to hypocritically present things as being better than they actually were. Programmatic documents of national organisations typically contain the goal of “language revival” in analogy with a wider goal of “national revival”, but the official documents typically avoided using the term as the policy objective or outcome, probably because it was associated with the situation of languages on the verge of extinction. The official formula in public debate was borrowed from the Soviet law and later Russia's law as a more moderate “maintenance and development of languages”, which implied the process but not necessarily the result [Zamyatin, 2015].

Meanwhile, the titular politicians found themselves in a difficult situation. Notably, with the abolition of ethnic quota and other social quota, the numbers of the deputies of titular nationalities in the ASSRs with the titular majorities increased and with the titular minorities dropped. As the data demonstrate (see Table 1), when, with the dissolution of the USSR, the system of national representation was abolished, and many titular groups began to be underrepresented in parliaments. After losing in the elections, titular politicians looked for new justification of their role previously consisting in ethnic political representation and found it in political nationalism advanced by titular national movements. Titular politicians considered the language status also pragmatically as a political resource to ensure their access to power.

The ethnic Russian politicians saw it as a detriment to their interests. They used the argument about equality and prevention of discrimination against language requirements. They also presented the need to promote Russian as a common language as the public interest and a universalist claim. They represented the promotion of the titular language as a particularist claim and a group interest. There was also a lot of hate speech, but what was possible in mass media discourse, was not acceptable in political discourse. The predominant public discourse of “inter-ethnic accord” limited the possibility of publicly expressing a negative attitude. Instead, many Russian politicians acted in bad faith and preferred not to voice their ideology explicitly but thumbed their noses behind the back of the proponents of compulsoriness of the titular languages.

Thus, ideological tensions and political conflicts in republics developed between the conflicting values expressed in pluralistic and assimilative discourses [Zamyatin, 2018]. The conflicting values about which language should be promoted did not permit easy comparison of alternatives because the situation was highly emotionally charged and perceived as a “zero-sum” game.

4) *Legislative Process*. In the early 1990s, there were still no agencies of republics on nationalities affairs that would develop policy proposals. The Supreme Councils elected in March 1990 created new commissions on nationalities affairs that started to draft language laws. Sometimes, national organizations or research institutes prepared their projects. The drafts of national organizations were typically rejected. In general, social movements and other non-state actors had little influence on the process.

In the Tatar ASSR, the republic's language law started being drafted immediately after the adoption of the USSR Language Law in 1990. Nationalists demanded designating Tatar as the only state language of the republic. An alternative proposal to drafting a new law was to enforce the Tatar ASSR Decree of 1921 on the introduction of Tatar in official administration as a state language along Russian. Yet, the law was not adopted that year.

In 1992, three alternative drafts were discussed in the first reading in the Tatarstan Supreme Council. The draft proposed by democrats suggested instead of compulsory use to promote Tatar by giving bonuses for its knowledge by professionals. The draft developed in the Institute of Language, Literature and History was chosen as a "basic framework" for the future law. In the second reading, the main point of disagreement was whether both languages were to be used in office. The democrats were against language knowledge requirements and insisted on inclusion of the provision on non-discrimination. According to the nationalists, the equal status of the two languages precluded the problem of discrimination. The law had to be passed together with its implementation program but the program was not ready by the time of its adoption.

In Komi, the Supreme Council commission ordered the Institute of Language, Literature and History to prepare a draft language law. The Komi national organisations criticized the first draft law for its weakness, in particular, for the originally planned long-term implementation period that had to last up to ten years. Due to the low proportion of ethnic Komi in the population, the Komi ethnic representation in the Supreme Council was insufficient to pass a language law in the wording envisaged by leaders of the national movement. Yet, as in some other republics, the Komi national movement became strong enough quickly enough to lobby for the government's support for designating state languages, that is, foremost, support for the titular language. Due to the strategy of cooperation with the establishment, chosen by leaders of the national movement, and their lobbying of the draft among the Russian-speaking deputies, it proved to be possible to reach an agreement quite early that also resulted in the early adoption of a quite assertive language law in 1992. This became possible partly thanks the position of the head of the republic. However, the scope of the agreement was narrow and did not include the procedure for implementing the law, which was contested and its approval significantly delayed [[Zamyatin, 2013c: 131](#)].

The Supreme Councils of some other republics refused to pass the laws. In Bashkortostan, the Supreme Council's commission prepared the draft law in 1992 that was discussed at the session in 1993. However, the Bashkir and Tatar deputies could not agree again on whether the Tatar language should become the third state language of the republic, in addition to Bashkir and Russian. The Bashkir deputies were against, pointing at the process of assimilation of Bashkirs into Tatars. That is, the option of taking no action was also a policy decision.

In Mari El, the Supreme Council's commission prepared the first draft of the language law by August 1991. Another draft was prepared in 1992 by a working group of the Supreme Council and published for public discussion. Heated debates arose around the proposed compulsory study of the state languages for all students in all schools of the republic and the requirements that certain categories of officials had to have some knowledge of the state languages [[Zamyatin, 2013c: 132](#)]. The Supreme Council refused to discuss the law draft because of the conservative majority rejected both propositions (see [[Nacionalnye dvizheniya Marij El, 1994](#)]).

In Mordovia, the first draft language law was prepared in 1991, but public support for it was very

low. After the first Congress of the Mordvin (Mokshan and Erzyan) people in March 1992, a quasi-representative body claiming political legitimacy (on the nature of such “people’s congresses” see Osipov 2011 and the section on constitutions below), the draft language law passed the first reading in the Supreme Council but with the decline in activity of the national movement since then the situation came to a standstill. The draft language law was discussed and rejected by the Supreme Council because the deputies opposed the propositions on compulsory study of the titular languages in all schools and language preferences for some administrative professions. Even the deputies of titular origin were reluctant to openly support the draft law [Zamyatin, 2013c: 134–135]. As in Mari El, the presence of two language varieties delayed policy adoption.

In Udmurtia, the first drafts were prepared by the Udmurt national organizations in 1991 and 1992. However, the Supreme Council rejected the drafts that contained clauses on compulsory study of both state languages by all students, and on bonuses for officials for languages knowledge [Zamyatin, 2013c: 135].

5) *Compromise*. Since the aspirations of the sides contradicted each other, a compromise was needed. The political elites had to negotiate over the adoption of language laws. The revival of titular languages could not be the sole or even the main issue of such negotiations because it was not among the concerns of the ethnic Russian politicians. So, the titular pressure groups were forced to be flexible in advancing some demands and refusing from others. The ability to reach a compromise and include some mechanisms to introduce elements of the compulsoriness depended on the political situation in every individual republic.

The configuration of the mechanisms and elements varied and depended, first of all, on the time at which the law was adopted. As both popular mobilisation and titular political representation were rapidly decreasing, the politicians’ ability to balance their demands with the time line of policy adoption became the most important variable for the ensuring the legislative and institutional basis for state languages.

Many politicians chose not to openly voice their motives, including so as not to undermine the existing certain level of consensus necessary to reconcile and balance the conflicting interests of the elite segments and the interests of ethnic groups they claimed to represent. Another factor was that the titular politicians needed the support of national movements and for that reason expressed their support also for the movements’ linguistic and cultural demands. However, retaining their access to power, the titular politicians did not hurry to fulfil their promises to the national movements, busy rather with participation in the power consolidation.

On the wave of popular ethnic mobilization in 1992, it was still possible to mobilize the deputies along ethnic lines in support for the inclusion of some provisions on compulsoriness of the titular languages into the language laws in Komi and Tatarstan. In other republics no compromise was reached, because a coalition was formed of the conservative Russian and parts of titular Russophone nomenclatura, Russian and national democrats, who were against most elements of compulsory knowledge and use of the titular languages.

6) *Decision*. Those language laws have more norms establishing compulsory use of titular languages that were adopted on the rise of national movements in the period after the adoption of the USSR language law (Law of the USSR, 24 April 1990) in the ASSRs with titular groups in the majority, as are Chuvashia (Law of the Chuvash ASSR, 27 October 1990), Tyva (Law of the Tuvan ASSR, 14 December 1990), or in the plurality, Kalmykia (Law of the Kalmyk ASSR, 30 January 1991). These laws typically include, among others, provisions on language requirements for some professions, compulsory study

of the titular languages by all students, the functioning of titular languages as the means of instruction, and even the sole titular state language, as in the Tuvan ASSR. The laws passed in that period faced no resistance from the centre that was divided in the confrontation between the USSR and the RSFSR authorities, who both needed support of the ASSRs. For the same reason, also the Russian and titular elites had mutual interest to act jointly in the face of central authorities (see [Zamyatin, 2013a: 151–153; 2013b]).

The later a language law was adopted, the more difficult it became for titular politicians to bargain for stronger language demands, also because the RSFSR's language law set out the range of policy alternatives and options regarding the compulsoriness of language use for the language laws in the republics adopted after 1991. Those republics adopted their language laws since in 1992, like Tatarstan (Law of the Republic of Tatarstan, 8 July 1992), Sakha (Law of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), 16 October 1992) and Komi (Law of the Komi Republic, 28 May 1992) followed the pattern of the RSFSR's law in that they contain many declaratory statements but few prescriptive norms. In effect, they are reminiscent more of policy documents than legal acts. The laws did not provide a list of domains for compulsory language use in the same vague manner of the RSFSR's law.

As a result of the compromise, “the maintenance and development of titular languages” became not an absolute goal of language laws but the one balanced by the goal of “the maintenance and development of all languages of the peoples of republic”, including Russian, and the goal of the affirmation of the position of Russian as “the language of inter-nationality communication” and, in effect, the objective of its further spread in all domains. Thus, the laws contained only some objectives and mechanisms that enhanced revival, including language preferences and compulsory use in some republics, while other mechanisms and elements of official status, notably the parallel status of Russian, were built in to pursue other and often contradicting goals. The co-official status of state languages itself was not in question. It was, inter alia, an attempt to address the perception of a “zero-sum” game and portray it is a “win-win” for both sides, although in reality it just concealed the contradiction in goals.

The republics' language legislations are often not transparent on the objective(s) of language policies. Unlike some other contexts in different countries, protection of minority languages was not the main official justification for the official status of the languages. Nevertheless, the analysis of the processes around the adoption of the language laws in Finno-Ugric republics showed that at least there the revival of titular languages became the goal formulated in a compromise as their “maintenance and development” along all other languages of the peoples of republic. Thus, the compromise of inserting contradicting goals in laws also predetermined policy inefficacy and ineffectiveness.

3. Since 1991: State languages as an instrument of political struggle in the Electoral Laws

1) *Context.* Both in Soviet and post-Soviet times, the role of *first figures* used to be crucial for the functioning of the political system. Since the 1930s, the First Secretary of the Obkom was the top official in the SSRs and ASSRs. There was an unwritten practice that in the SSRs the First Secretaries were of titular nationality, as most of them were also by the 1980s. A change in the practice provoked inter-ethnic tensions and first violent rallies in Kazakhstan in 1986. In the ASSRs, the First Secretary and Second Secretary would be an ethnic Russian and a “representative of titular nationality”. By the late Soviet times, the chairman of the Supreme Council of a republic was formally the top official, but in practice the First Secretary of the Obkom still had an upper hand. In the ASSRs, the main representative

public figure in the SSRs and ASSRs, chair of the Supreme Council, would often be a person of titular nationality who would presumably know the titular language. At the same time, an ethnic Russian would typically have been the First Secretary of Obkom (see [Hodnett, 1978]).

In the new times to survive the changes, the *nomenklatura* wanted to convert their access to power. Typically, the first or second secretaries of the Obkoms usually managed to become first the chairmen of the Supreme Councils. In spring 1991, it was decided on the All-Russia referendum to introduce the post of the president and in June 1991, Russia elected Boris Yeltsin its president. In the following months, many republics by analogy also introduced presidency or differently named office of high executive official. After the coup-d'état attempt in August 1991, the CPSU was prohibited, and another shift of power started now from the Supreme Councils to the presidents or heads of the republics and the executive branch, both at the central and regional level. Even though the chief officials could not yet fully dictate the rules of the game, their position had already mattered a lot. Typically, these were the same CPSU functionaries in the past who had simply changed chairs in the Obkom and Supreme Council now to the presidential office (for the data see [Zamyatin, 2013a: 141–142; 2013b]).

2) *Issue*. Titular nationalists insisted on the need to continue the Soviet practice of taking into account nationality in making appointments. For titular politicians it became difficult in the new times to justify publicly ethnic quota and, instead, they adopted the approach used in the Soviet Baltic republics and modified in more neutral terms of language knowledge. Compulsory knowledge of the official language by (a candidate to the post of) the head of a state or territory is typically justified as an element of language status. This requirement can have dual justification within the language status: as a part of its function as the working language of the state authorities and as a language preference [Zamyatin, 2013b: 357–358].

3) *Conflict*. The issue of language requirements became part of the political discourse with the start of a discussion about the introduction of the institution of presidency in the republics in 1991. The political conflict emerged regarding the demand for compulsory knowledge of both state languages by chief officials. The entitlement to have a republic as “their own” in minds of titular nationalists translated into their belief that it should be also ruled by one of “their own”, or at least by someone who knows both languages, which in practice meant someone of the titular nationality. Unsurprisingly, this demand provoked a harsh reaction on the side of ethnic Russian politicians. Local Russian politicians typically did not speak titular languages, and believed the language requirements are intended to exclude them from political competition. A typical argument against the language requirements was that this is a discriminatory provision used by the ethnonational leaders to exclude their opponents from the competition for the first posts.

4) *Legislative Process*. The decision of the RSFSR’s Supreme Council in spring 1991 to elect Russia’s president by universal suffrage provoked an outrage in the Tatar SSR, where it was seen as a sign of disregard for its sovereignty. The radical wing of the national movement demanded to adopt a new constitution that would provide for the introduction of a presidency, whereby the future president would have to know both state languages. Another demand was to hold the republic’s presidential elections before the Russian ones. The democrats agreed with the presidency but strongly opposed the language requirements. The establishment insisted on the inclusion of the requirement to know both state languages. At the session, the requirement was clarified as the necessity to know “colloquial Tatar, that is, about a thousand words”. As the bargaining chip, the establishment agreed to a demand

of the democrats to make the Supreme Council a permanent legislative body. The Supreme Council passed the respective amendments to the acting Tatar SSR constitution because the ruling elite needed to demonstrate public support for its course to Moscow as expressed in the percentage of those who elected the republican president. The republic held its presidential election simultaneously with the presidential election in Russia in June 1991 [Kondrashov, 2000: 151–170].

In the Bashkir SSR, the nomenklatura was initially against the presidency and only the few democrats were for it. The Supreme Council approved a law on presidency in October 1991 but postponed the elections because the deputies could not agree, *inter alia*, on the requirements, including language requirements. The law was amended in November 1993 by the inclusion of the 10-year residence requirement and the requirement to know the Bashkir and Russian languages. The elections took place only in 1993 and the chair of the Supreme Council was elected.

Mordovia was an exceptional case where a democratic candidate, an ethnic Russian, was elected to become the president in November 1991 supported by urban Russian technical intelligentsia. Yet, he served only for a couple of years until 1993, when a bloc of rural nomenklatura, Mordovian communist and nationalists overthrew him, liquidating the presidency altogether [Zubkov, Maresjev, 1994].

In the Mari SSR, activists of the titular national organization Mari Ušem gathered at a rally on the day of voting on the issue in parliament in front of the parliament building presenting the demand for the president to know both state languages. The Supreme Council agreed with the proposal of Mari Ušem on the knowledge of both state languages not least because of its chairman's support for this and adopted the decree on the presidential elections in December 1991.

As in Russia, the introduction of the presidency in republics was decided in referenda and not everywhere the public voted in favor. For example, the populations voted against presidency in Karelia, Komi or Udmurtia. In Udmurtia, the first people's congress arranged by the titular national organization in 1991 agreed with the presidency initiative but demanded the knowledge of both state languages. People's deputies principally agreed on the presidency but could not agree on the requirement of the president's knowledge of both state languages. The ethnic Udmurt deputies formed a 52-strong deputy group in support for the requirement. The 41-strong democratic faction was against. The core of the debate was not about the language knowledge itself but about the nationality of the future president. The Udmurt national organization voiced explicitly the demand for the president to be an ethnic Udmurt when presenting the demand of the fluent knowledge of the titular language. One of proposed compromises was the inclusion of the requirement for the president's knowledge of Udmurt and Russian with the exception of the first presidential elections. The Presidential Law in Udmurtia was passed only after the Russian constitutional crisis of 1993. However, this presidential law was never in force, because the constitution approved in 1994 overruled it and, exceptionally for a republic, had not established presidency. The presidency was introduced in Udmurtia only in 2000.

In the Komi Republic, an ethnic Russian became the chairman of the Supreme Council. The Third Congress of the Komi People in December 1993 took a stand against the establishment of the presidency to be introduced at a referendum, because it was unlikely that an ethnic Komi would be elected to the post. As an alternative, the Congress advocated the introduction of the language requirements from the chair of the Supreme Council, then the first figure. At the referendum the public voted against the presidency. However, the new constitution introduced the post of the head of republic (see next section).

5) *Compromise*. As a rule, those republics that introduced the presidency as early as 1991 or 1992

also fixed the requirement that the president should be fluent in both languages. In the first electoral cycle for example in the Tatar or Mari SSRs, the president of republic was usually chosen in tandem with the vice-president: a representative of the titular nationality became president, and the post of vice-president was given to the ethnic Russian. Of crucial importance was the position of the first figure on this issue and the style of leadership that embodies the conflictual or consensual type of predominant political culture in a republic (see [Lijphart, 1977]). In the consensual politics, the titular politicians typically did not place all stakes on a single candidate for presidency (with some exceptions of confrontational politics, as in Mari El in 2000), but had to align themselves with several candidates. As a result, they have typically not been in opposition, and the first figure ensured that the interests of their titular segment are also concerned in the elite settlement.

In summer and autumn 1991, it was possible to mobilize the deputies along ethnic lines in support of language requirements in the republics, like Tatar and Mari SSRs with their comparable shares of ethnic groups in the population and noticeable mass ethnic mobilization that was reflected also in public attitudes. In the Tatar and Bashkir SSRs, not only the absolute majority of the titular group but also significant majorities of ethnic Russians “unconditionally” and “rather” agreed with language requirements. At the same time, most Russians disagreed that “the president should be of titular nationality” [Guboglo, 1994].

Similarly for the titular groups, even in 2002 84, 3 % of ethnic Udmurts and 77 % of ethnic Mari “unconditionally” and “rather” supported the demand for the president to have the knowledge of the titular language and, respectively 67,2 % and 61,6 % supported the demand for the president to be of the titular nationality [Fenomen Udmurtii 6, 2008: 27–28]. However, in Bashkir SSRs, Udmurtia and many other republics with the titular minorities in the population, it was a coalition of the conservative Russian nomenclatura, Russian nationalists and democrats, who jointly prevented the inclusion of language requirements.

6) *Decision*. In the first round of the presidential elections in 1991–1992, Adygea, Kabardino-Balkaria, Mari El, Mordovia, Tatarstan, Tuva and Sakha (Yakutia) elected their top officials. In Kalmykia and Chuvashia, the elections were held but the presidents were not elected. Mostly other republics introduced their presidencies in 1993–1995 based on the new constitutions. In all the republics except three (Buryatia, Mordovia and Komi), the top officials elected by mid-1990s became representatives of the titular nationality, while the vice-presidents were ethnic Russians [Zamyatin, 2013b].

After the electoral laws of the first cycle, the language requirements should have been enshrined in the republics’ constitutions. Seven republics of Russia, Adygea, Bashkortostan, Chuvashia, Mari El, North Ossetia-Alania, Tatarstan and Sakha (Yakutia), included the language requirements for first figures in their constitution (see next section).

4. Since 1992: State languages as an ethnic institution in the Constitutions

1) *Context*. After the coup-d’etat of August 1991 it became clear the USSR would eventually collapse. So, the heavy point of politics shifted to the relations between Russia and its republics and passing a new constitution. Several draft constitutions were developed, all of which replicated the provision of Russia’s language law on Russian as the state language and the possibility for republics to have their state languages. Under the situation of uncertainty and the ongoing crisis, it proved impossible for a certain period to pass a new Russian constitution [Morgan-Jones, 2010]. In early 1992, Tatarstan

refused to sign the Federation Treaty, that should have become part of a new constitution, and continued negotiations with the Kremlin over a special treaty-based status.

The constitutional crisis of October 1993 in Russia marked the beginning of the consolidation of elites around the president. The Russian Constitution was approved by a popular vote already within two months after the crisis in December 1993 and established a strong presidency marking the victory of the president Boris Yeltsin over Russia's Supreme Council.

After the victory over the Union authorities and now the dissolution of Russia's Supreme Council, regional support was not anymore crucial for sustaining Yeltsin's hold on power. In effect, the adoption of the constitution with the Federation Treaty as its part resulted in annulment of previous political agreements between Yeltsin and regional elites regarding the sharing of powers. Negotiations continued and soon resulted in the treaties on power-sharing signed between the Kremlin and individual republics since 1994, allowing some asymmetry between the federal units of the same type, for example, between republics. Yet, in constitutional terms, the republics now differed from the other federative units only by their right to have their own constitutions and state languages.

In the republics, the constitutions also had to give legitimation for the existing political regime that resembled a balance of powers in society. In these ethnically-defined polities, the political system needed legitimation in an ethnic dimension as well. The constitutions of the republics were supposed to be not just a social contract of individuals but also a communitarian contract of ethno-linguistic communities.

2) *Issue*. In the process of state building, the republics' elites competed over the redistribution of powers within the polity, and intra-elite conflicts emerged. The democratic consolidation of political regimes was envisaged as the main way to overcome these conflicts, when there are institutional solutions for conflict resolution. In these circumstances, ethno-national identity was part of the grounds that divided the regional elites. Politicians bargained in order to ensure a better position for themselves and for the group they claimed to represent.

The titular politicians proposed to include in the elite pact a number of "ethnic institutions", that is, the ones that "oversee a state's interaction with ethnic groups living on its territory" [Gorenburg, 2003: 3]. In terms of identity formation, the question was whether the republic was an entitlement of its "titular nation", or a multinational people was the bearer of republican sovereignty. In terms of state building, the question was whether the issue of ethnic political representation had to be institutionally addressed, for example, through a bicameral parliament elected both on the individual and collective principle. The mechanism was suggested by analogy to the Council of Nationalities, the second chamber of Russia's Supreme Council that existed until in 1990–1993. The designation of state languages had both identity dimension and a state-building dimension, and also became a part of the negotiation package.

3) *Conflict*. The interests of republican elites diverged in the case of the constitutions. In political bargaining around the constitutions, the titular politicians sometimes attempted to instrumentally use ethnic mobilization for advancement of their own interests in the struggle for power. As pointed out in the previously section, the central conflict in language issues was again regarding compulsory knowledge of both state languages by presidents or heads of republics. Especially sharp it became since the end of 1993 when the power shift from parliaments to presidents resulted in chief officials becoming the main and often the only first-rank political actors in regional political landscapes. Even if undemocratically, this shift removed the problem of minority political under-representation of the

period between 1990 and 1993, but raised the problem of support on the side of the first figure for taking into account and balancing the ethnic dimension of politics (see [Zamyatin, 2013b]).

4) *Legislative Process*. As in Moscow, the constitutional process in republics was also elites-centered. With the deepening of the economic crisis and the start of liberal economic reforms at the beginning of 1992, the public at large became more and more indifferent to politics. The political process also normalized from that of mass politics to elite politics. Counter-elites were either co-opted or marginalized in all sectors. Accordingly, under the emerging state corporatist system, authorities chose one peak organization to represent the interests in every a strand in the third sector and, thus, to serve as a channel for political participation. In the sphere of nationalities policy, the republics' authorities co-operated with one mainstream titular national organization and marginalized radical organizations or even forced them to stop their activities. In order to mobilize public support, the main national organizations in cooperation with titular political elites in the establishment arranged the "people's congresses", where inter alia presented their demands and visions for the future constitutions (for the example of this dynamics in Mari El see [Zamyatin, 2016: 229]). Yet, the demands had to be negotiated with other political forces in the Supreme Councils or, in some case, in the constitutional assemblies, that were to pass the constitutions.

In the Tatar SSR, with the prospect of a probable collapse of the USSR, titular nationalists changed their goal in autumn 1991 from an upgrade of the political status of the republic to independence. An inter-ethnic conflict with some violent incidents emerged. The republic's Supreme Council was deeply divided along ethnic lines. A new parliamentary faction consisting of 73 ethnic Tatar deputies was created to continue the struggle for independence. Another faction was formed on the basis of a social movement and included 50 mostly ethnic Russian but also some ethnic Tatar deputies who acted as a moderate democratic wing in an attempt to avoid polarization along ethnic lines and to prevent the conservative Russian part of nomenklatura to take over initiative of protecting the rights of ethnic Russians, organizing themselves on the manner of Interfronts. The Congress (Kurultai) of the Tatar People held in February 1992 as a quasi-representative body and claiming to be a legislative alternative to the Supreme Council. On the demand of democrats, the Supreme Council passed a resolution denying the Congress's decisions any legal force [Kondrashov, 2000: 153, 179].

In March 1992, now officially renamed, the Republic of Tatarstan held a referendum on its sovereignty and on the basis of its results started to draft a new constitution. In addition to the official draft, two more drafts were prepared by democrats. Based on opinions of the parliament's standing committees it was decided to take as the basis the draft developed by the constitutional commission. At the parliamentary session, the issue of citizenship was the most controversial. The national organizations again demanded the designation of Tatar as the sole state language but without success. In part of language, the earlier achieved compromise persisted [Respublika Tatarstan, 2000].

The constitution of Tatarstan was adopted before the Russian constitution. In general, the early adoption of the constitution in a republic of Russia on the wave of centrifugal processes made it easier to advocate for the insertion of the provisions on nationality and languages and to formulate them as collective rights or preferences in favor of the titular people. The other republics followed the torn route but many of them were far less successful on it, inter alia because their constitutions were usually adopted between 1993 and 1995, that is, after the Russian constitution. Now, the main argument against

proposed insertion of ethnic institutions into the political system and even mere References to nationality was their supposed contradiction with the Russian constitution.

In Bashkortostan, immediately after passing the sovereignty declaration, the Supreme Council created a constitutional commission that started drafting the constitution. After two publication of the official draft and several alternative drafts, the deputies could not reach an agreement in 1992 but managed to pass the constitution immediately after the Russian constitution in December 1993 [[Parlamentarizm v Bashkortostane, 2005: 190–192](#)].

However, the Constitutional Court of Russia already during the next electoral campaign in 1998 had a ruling concerning the compliance of the provisions on language requirement in the Constitution of Bashkortostan, the law on the President of Bashkortostan and the law on the President's elections (at that time, there was no language law in Bashkortostan). The Court declared to be in contradiction with the Russian constitution and struck down the provisions on the residence and language requirements as discriminatory because the republic did not have a law on state languages that would justify the language requirement. Accordingly, the residence and language requirements ceased to be applied. However, the decision also assumed that the latter could be constitutional, if state languages of the republic were established by law [[Parlamentarizm v Bashkortostane, 2005: 200–209](#)]. The ruling was of a restricted procedural character, as the language requirements themselves were not challenged by the Court but the impossibility of their implementation was emphasized because of a lack of a legislative mechanism. In 2001, Russia's Supreme Court issued a decision concerning the similar case of Adygea ruled to be unconstitutional the language requirement to president (Determination, 13 November 2001).

In Udmurtia, both the national organization and the democratic organization presented their draft constitutions. The communists also developed their draft and were against the institution of presidency. The nationalists demanded the inclusion of language requirements and a second chamber that would represent "peoples of the republic". However, it was a draft prepared in the constitutional commission that was taken as the basis for the constitution, which was claimed to have taken into account the other drafts. For example, the official draft envisaged the office of president and a two-chamber parliament. However, these provisions were dropped at a later stage, and the final draft envisaged no ethnic institutions [[Fenomen Udmurtii 2–1, 2002: 130–148](#); [Konstitutsija, 1995](#)].

In Komi, again the national organization developed its draft declarations proposing among other things, a two-chamber parliament and the requirement of the knowledge of both state languages from the president. An ethnic Russian leader to some extent supported national revival but only up to the point when he rejected unfavorable for him language requirements [[Zamyatin, 2013b: 359](#)]. The draft of the constitutional commission became the basis for the constitution, which introduced the post of the head of the republic without language requirements [[Ilin, 1995](#)].

In the Mari El Republic, the constitutional commission drafted the constitution that had to be adopted by the Constitutional Assembly. The Russian nationalist organization Rus' was against the procedure and insisted on a direct popular vote. One of the complicated issues was the presence of two varieties of the Mari language. Among the amendments to the draft, the State Assembly proposed the recognition of a single Mari language and Russian as the state languages. Among the proposals to the draft constitution, there was an open letter of scholars, writers, cultural activists with the demand to designate Hill Mari with the status of another state language, but the latter was rejected by the State Assembly [[Zamyatin, 2013b: 354](#)].

5) *Compromise*. The votes for the constitutions were to be cast in the republican Supreme Councils with the majority rule, and the claims to establish ethnic institutions in the republics with the titular minorities would not have been supported by majority. Yet, even if the titular politicians in the Finno-Ugric republics were not in control of power, as in the Volga-Turkic republics, the elite settlement appeared to be possible in most cases despite the tensions. If the titular politicians were not strong enough to form a single political force, only rarely did the ethnic grievances coincide with the conflicts around the separation of powers. Otherwise, these tensions have had an inter-ethnic dimension (as in Mari El, see [Zamyatin, 2016]).

The people were again largely sidelined from the constitutional process, but public opinion determined the scope of the compromise (see [Zamyatin, 2013b]). According to the data of the 1994 public opinion surveys, by the time the co-official status of languages reflected the prevailing public attitudes. The option of two state languages was supported in the Volga-Turkic republics not only by the titular groups but also by the majority of Russians. Furthermore, the two-language solution was supported primarily by the titular groups but also by a sufficiently large numbers of the Russian-speakers to have an overall majority support also in the Finno-Ugric republics (see Table 2).

Table 2. Attitudes of titular groups and local Russians to the official status of titular languages in 1994 (% , the data from [Zamyatin, 2018: 311–312])

Republic	Komi	Mari El	Mordovia	Udmurtia	Karelia	Tatarstan*
Agree that the titular language should be the sole state language in republic						
Titulars	n/a	31,7	6,7	n/a	n/a	21,2
Russians	n/a	2,2	n/a	n/a	n/a	2,9
Agree that the Russian language should be the sole state language in republic						
Titulars	n/a	6,8	n/a	n/a	n/a	4,9
Russians	n/a	50,7	n/a	n/a	n/a	23,4
Agree that the titular and Russian languages should be the two state languages in republic						
Titulars	n/a	56,6	n/a	64,6	n/a	64,3
Russians	n/a	41,5	n/a	46,6	n/a	58,3

* In Tatarstan, an additional option was that there should be no state languages, with which 7,6 % Tatars and 13,4 % Russians agreed.

Given this contrast in public attitudes between the titular groups and the Russians, it becomes clear that the demographic composition of the population played a crucial role for the designation for including ethnic institutions. The inclusion of the co-official status of the titular languages and some other ethnic institutions were achieved through interplay of forces within the system of power relations, whose composition was unique for every republic. In Karelia, despite the presence of a relatively well organized titular interest group, it had only restricted influence in political landscapes due to the very low percentage of the titular group in the population. In the end, the republic also used its right and designated its state language but Russian only.

In Mari El, the percentage of titular and Russian groups in the population is comparable, aligning political forces for a serious conflict that is explainable in instrumentalist terms. In Komi, Mordovia and Udmurtia, the share of the titular groups in total populations is lower than one third, which leads to the need

for the elites to cooperate with other elite segments. The developments in the Komi Republic took the most interesting turn. The titular politicians in Komi were co-opted into the ruling elites, being more successful in promoting their interests than titular politicians in the other republics. The consensual political culture had also influenced public opinion. In 1994, 63 % Komi and a “significant part” of Russians believed that the head of the republic should know the titular language. It is reported that ethnic Russians supported this because it was “a sign of respect for the titular nationality” [Ilin, 1995].

6) *Decision*. While in established democracies, existing institutions process new policies, in democratizing states typically the policy is to develop new institutions. The constitutions legitimized the upgrade in their political status to that of the constituent republics of Russia with their own constitutions and state languages as symbols of their national statehood. Otherwise, copying Russia’s constitutional design at the federal level, the republics established strong presidencies. The consolidation of elites under highly personalized regimes continued in some republics up to the late 1990s.

The overwhelming majority of the deputies passed the Tatarstan Constitution on 30 November 1992, but 53 deputies-democrats refused to vote. Despite the earlier attempts of the Tatar movement to persuade the ruling elite to establish Tatarstan as the state of the ethnic Tatar nation, it was established by the republican constitution in the wording of the sovereignty declaration as a civic state based on the will of the Republics’ multinational people (article 1). The Constitution designated the “equal-in-rights Tatar and Russian state languages”, which had to “function on an equal footing” (article 8). Furthermore, in addition to non-discrimination provisions, it fixed the requirements of knowledge of both state languages for the President (article 91), guaranteed education in the state languages (article 56) and established that legal acts are to be published in both languages (article 80).

The Republic of Bashkortostan passed its constitution on 24 December 1993 without establishing state languages. Only the 2000 constitutional amendment established Bashkir and Russian as two state languages of the republic and introduced the requirement of their knowledge to the presidency candidate [Parlamentarizm v Bashkortostane, 2005: 190–192]. The Republic of Karelia had not designated its state languages when the Soviet-time constitution was revised on 24 December 1993 and designated only Russian in its new 2001 constitution.

The 1994 constitution of the Komi Republic designated Komi and Russian as the republic’s state languages. The 1994 constitution of the Udmurt Republic designated Russian and Udmurt as its state languages. The 1995 constitution of Mari El designated two varieties of Mari (Hill, Meadow) and Russian as its state languages. The 1995 constitution of Mordovia designated Russian and two Mordvin languages (Moksha and Erzya) as its state languages.

Thus, the constitutions of all the republics, with the exception of Karelia, reproduced the designation of the co-official state languages made by the sovereignty declaration. Some republics, like Mari El, introduced the requirement to know both state languages justified in the new political systems exactly by the multinational character of statehood. In addition, some republics, like Komi or Mari El, established that the head of republics gives his oath in both state languages. Unlike Tatarstan, the constitutions of other republics did not speak about languages in education or by publication of legal acts.

In addition to the names of the republics, the preamble of the constitution of those republics, that declared their state sovereignty, had the reference to the titular nation as historical grounds for the creation of the republic. Yet, the constitutions of all Russia’s republics established them as civic states with the multinational people of the republic as the source of their sovereignty (see also [Gorenburg,

2003: 207–209]). Accordingly, where it was established, republican citizenship was assigned to all inhabitants irrespective of nationality. A few republics, like Tatarstan or Karelia, established bicameral parliaments but there were there were no nationalities chambers, and no other mechanisms of ethnic representation in parliaments were established. Therefore, across the republics the status of co-official state languages was virtually the only institutionalized reference to nationality built in the constitutional systems that was more than just a symbol. At the same time, the constitutions recognized some individual human rights to language and identity, including non-discrimination on the basis of nationality or language that excluded from many public domains the compulsory use stemming from the official status of languages [Zamyatin, 2013b].

Russian scholars, for example Mikhail Guboglo, typically interpret the introduction of state languages not only in the former SSRs but also in the former ASSRs as an attempt to use them instrumentally in power struggle [Guboglo, 1998]. From a comparative perspective, I demonstrated that the instrumentalist explanation was not very useful in understanding the designation of the state languages in the Finno-Ugric republics. Only in Mari El, with its comparable distribution of ethnic groups and their proportionate representation in the republican parliament at some point, were the titular languages employed in an attempt to use them as a resource in strife for power on the basis of the constitutional provision on the language knowledge requirement. However, such an attempt provoked a conflict, and language requirements were never actually enforced even in Mari El [Zamyatin, 2016].

After the Bashkortostan case of 1998 and the Adygea case of 2001, the legal norms that establish language requirements for chief officials had not been in use altogether. The annulment of language requirements was justified by the policy to foster anti-discrimination clauses in legislation [Osipov, Sapozhnikov, 2004: 189–190]. But historically this step of excluding ethnic categories from legal and political space proved to be a manifestation of the regime change also in the dimension of center-periphery relations and the nationalities policy shift that eventually resulted in the depletion of the republics' constitutions and the demise of federalism.

Therefore, References to language or nationality bore the function of symbolic affirmation but were of a very limited instrumental use in the political process. Arguably, the introduction of language requirements was in itself not sufficient to influence the nationality of the head of the republic, and were rather an indication of the resources of titular elites to legitimize their claims and their ability of to negotiate a better institutional deal in the elite settlement. Whereby also without legal regulations, the practice of taking into account nationality of the head of republic was sustained at the level of informal practices. For example, the Volga Turkic republics had leaders of titular nationality throughout the period. The leaders of titular nationality were elected only for certain periods in Mari El (until 1996), Udmurtia (from 1991 to 1995), Mordovia (from 1993 to 2012), Komi (from 2000 to 2008) and Karelia (until 1998).

In practice, the inclusion of language requirements did not mean an automatic advantage for the candidates of titular nationality, because an ethnic Russian or a candidate of another nationality with the knowledge of the titular language were also sometimes elected as, for example, in Buryatia. Further, the election of a leader of the titular nationality did not automatically mean it was better off in including ethnic institutions into the constitutional framework, because he would always keep in mind the next elections and calculate that the elite settlement is better than the confrontation around language requirements. The elected leader of an ethnic Russian origin, on the contrary, would often as a concession in return for their refusal to include language requirements be more ready for a settlement [Zamyatin, 2013b].

Instead of being interpreted as instrumental, the official designation of state languages should be rather understood from the institutionalist perspective as an ethnic institution. The constitutions fixed the political balance and were substantially an agreement of the republican elites on the main institutions of the political system. Authorities rejected most demands of the titular pressure groups for the establishment of ethnic institutions but not the designation of state languages. Ethnic demands were rejected precisely because they could be potentially used as political instruments. The demand for state languages was accepted in order to ensure a compromise among different segments of elites.

5. Since 1993: State languages as a tool of “language revival” in the Language Laws II

1) *Context.* After the adoption of the Russian Constitution the new government structure was built at the federal level and the level of regions. In 1994–1995, State Councils or State Assemblies, the new type of parliaments, were elected in the republics according to their new constitutions. These now were mostly free elections with participation of many parties and electoral blocs that changed the layout of deputy corps. They included “directors’ corps”, that is, the leadership of industrial enterprises and business and fewer agrarians. In those republics that established a bicameral parliament, the second chamber was typically filled with the heads of municipalities. This tendency became even more expressed in the next electoral cycle of 1999–2000. However, the elections did not principally change the balance of power. The people with old Soviet nomenklatura past still remained prevalent among the new political elites in regions with the conservatives remaining a dominating force.

People elect parliaments. The ethnic composition of the population had an impact on the makeup of parliaments, although in no case was ethnic voting universal. Yet, popular ethnic mobilisation of the early 1990s also without any institutionalized representation mechanisms resulted in a certain level of ethnic political representation both in the first relatively democratic elections in spring 1990 and the elections according to the new constitutions in 1994. Those titular pressure groups that were better represented in parliaments typically insisted on the inclusion of stronger clauses in the institutionalization of the official status in language laws (see [Zamyatin, 2014b]).

As the languages laws not only prescribe compulsory language use by authorities and their officials, but also influenced language use in communication with citizens and public services, popular language attitudes influenced the formation of the policy in the case of language law than in the cases of symbolic and formal recognition by declaration or constitution. Public debate in the mass media was the channel to reveal public opinion. Sociological research studies were arranged from time to time in the republics, however, mostly *after* the adoption of the language laws. The results of such surveys on popular opinion were used both by authorities and interest groups to justify their positions.

Over the following years, the popular influence on elites through elections was ever decreasing. But also in the early 1990s the activities of the elites and their consolidation mattered more than popular mobilisation in addressing language issues [Zamyatin, 2013b: 23–25]. For example, despite a low popular support for the compulsory teaching of titular languages in Komi, Mari El and later in Mordovia, the according provisions were included in the laws. In other words, language laws reflected the elite settlement rather than interests of the public.

With the decline of ethnic mobilisation by the mid-1990s, there was less and less ethnic voting on the principle of identity for the candidate of “their nationality” and, accordingly, less titular candidates in these republics, that is, also pressure groups had less political clout in parliaments. Yet, the drafting of language

laws now moved from legislatures to governments, where the titular pressure groups were still well co-opted (see [[Zamyatin, 2014c](#)]). By the mid-1990s, ministries or state committees on nationalities affairs were set up in every republic and started to draft laws in those republics that still did not have them.

2) *Issue*. The issue of compulsoriness of language knowledge and use remained central but the matter of cost was also raised. At the time of the adoption of the constitutions it was not on the agenda because constitutional language provisions did not imply direct expenditures. Now the issue of costs came as another argument in the discourse of the Russian nationalist deputies against language laws. The titular politicians had to develop both sociolinguistic and instrumental arguments to support their claims. One of the arguments for the official status for languages and the need of regulation was that there should be a language law, because there are language laws in other republics (see, for example, [[Fenomen Udmurtii 2–1, 2002: 297](#)]).

3) *Conflict*. The titular politicians still intended the compulsory use of titular languages as the way to ensure their spread in the public domains and, thus, their revival. Yet, the Russian politicians challenged the policy of preferential state support for the titular languages, arguing for an equal treatment of Russian as another republic's co-official language or arguing against any special support for any language based on the equality of languages and non-discrimination. Since the year 2000, the language revival itself had been questioned from the position of language rationalisation.

4) *Legislative Process*. All in all, these were the aspirations of the titular politicians that were behind the demands for state languages. With the decline of ethnic mobilization resulting in dramatic decreased in numbers of titular deputies, the deputy corps turned to be less friendly to initiatives connected to nationality. The difficulty of the process was not only that the deputies were critical to the drafts that now came “from outside the house” but also that the preparation of drafts in government became a bureaucratized and complicated process. The process included consultations both with the federal agency in charge (since 1989 it was the State Committee of the Russian Federation on Nationalities Affairs upgraded in 1996 into a federal ministry) and the republics' authorities. While consultations with the federal ministry tended to go smoothly, the republics' bureaucracies typically run by the ethnically Russian technocrats would judge the drafts and based on their monolingual ideologies and the efficiency assumption and the issue of costs. One of the brakes was that the republics' other ministries and agencies would often slow down the process sending negative reviews on draft laws. Then, the draft had to pass a government session to be brought into parliament as a government initiative. But after that, ironically authoritarian tendencies that manifested themselves by the increased role of the head of republics and the executive over legislatures helped to get the government-initiated laws through legislatures.

Karelia or Udmurtia are indicative examples of republics with the difficult process of searching for a compromise in discussions of numerous draft laws that is also well documented (see [[Karely, 2005: 95–128](#); [Fenomen Udmurtii 2–1, 2002: 231–273](#)]). In Karelia, the Ministry of Justice prepared draft laws in 1994, followed by several drafts of the State Committee on Nationalities Policy. In Udmurtia, by 1994, eleven hearings on the parliamentary standing commission in charge were held without much progress. In 1994, the work intensified after the creation of the Committee (later Ministry) on Nationalities Policy [[Fenomen Udmurtii 2–1, 2002: 274–314](#)].

5) *Compromise*. The cases of Karelia, Mordovia and Udmurtia show that in the republics were the legitimacy of representation continued to be based solely on the Soviet national quota systems without being backboned by a strong national movement, “national cadres” largely failed during the period of

rapid social transformation. In both republics, the establishment managed to co-opt the collaborationist leaders and to mobilise them against the more radical segments of the movements. For example, there was an early split in the leadership of the national movement in Mordovia. Yet, a compromise, even if largely symbolic, was needed to consolidate the regime.

In Karelia, the regime consolidation took place largely without the need for co-optation of nationalist leaders. In Mordovia, an opportunity for the regime consolidation was opened by the change in republican leadership in 1998. In Udmurtia, the regime consolidation took place already at the time the overall change in Russia's political regime in 2000–2001. The language law was adjusted to a changed political situation and did not prioritise support for the titular language. In order to reach a compromise, the titular politicians were forced to refuse from many initial demands, such as language preferences and other compulsory language teaching. The provisions became softer and softer in the later drafts, and later in time.

As a mechanism to reach compromise, the law included many blanket rules to be specified in bylaws that were never enforced. Another device used to reconcile the contradictions was to use the vague legal language, when the final texts contained more qualifications such as “if possible” or “if necessary”. This ambiguity in formulation of the legal norms installed problems for enforcement and implementation. In fact, the officials implementing the laws take these not as obligations, but almost as recommendations. Throughout the 1990s, authorities brought forward economic difficulties as an excuse for non-implementation of language provisions. Therefore, the overall dynamics from session to session and from draft to draft was that of nullifying the legal content.

6) *Decision*. A deputy's nationality does not automatically determine his or her stance on ethnic or linguistic matters [Zamyatin, 2013a: 148–151]. Still, ethnic mobilization mattered, and it proved possible to mobilize along ethnic lines the deputies elected in the 1993 election cycle in Mari El in support for the inclusion of some provisions on compulsoriness of the titular languages. A comparable share of ethnic Maris and Russians in the population and a proportional political representation helped the leadership of the national movement to lobby for the adoption of an assertive language law even after the decline in activities of the national movement (Law of the Republic of Mari El, 26 October 1995). A couple-of-years delay in the law adoption was rather due to internal disagreement about whether one or two Mari languages should be the state languages.

In Bashkortostan, the initial obstacles persisted also in the late 1990s. The Russian deputies still were against the requirement of the language knowledge by public servants. The Tatar deputies continued to demand the status of a state language also for the Tatar language. However, Russia's Constitutional Court's 1998 decision incentivized the elites to reach a compromise and to finally designate the state languages by passing a language law. This time the Bashkir and Russian deputies reached an agreement to form a winning coalition and to establish only Bashkir and Russian as two state languages with their equal-in-rights functioning. The language law of Bashkortostan (Law of the Republic of Bashkortostan, 15 February 1999) introduced the requirement of the knowledge of Bashkir and Russian as two state languages for the presidency candidates. However, soon this requirement was softened to the knowledge only at “the level of communication” in order to “have possibility to use it in work” without the necessity to pass the language exam.

In Karelia, Mordovia and Udmurtia titular politicians appeared for various reasons to have

relatively few resources, which led to the late adoption of language laws. In Mordovia, the elite pact included the adoption a language law (Law of the Republic of Mordovia, 24 April 1998). In Udmurtia, a decade after the first draft the core issues still remained the compulsory study of the titular language and the costs, for example, by the introduction of the titular language as the working language in office. The law advocated had nothing else to do but to refuse from their initial demands. The law had neither introduced the compulsory study and nor had envisaged any additional costs to the budget, because the costs were to be covered from the current budgets of public agencies (Law of the Udmurt Republic, 27 November 2001). In Karelia, the titular language was not designated a state language, so only a law on state support of the Karelian, Veps and Finnish languages was passed (Law of the Republic of Karelia, 19 March 2004).

Both in Karelia and autonomous districts, the absence of the status of state language did not exclude the launch of language revival through the adoption of a law on titular native languages and implementation programs. In these regions, lawmakers could not boost the revival of titular languages through the mechanisms that imposed compulsory use of the state languages. Yet, Karelia’s law contains some elements of official status and the compulsory teaching of Karelian was introduced in the areas of dense settlement at the municipal level. While the autonomous districts could not designate their state languages, some of them had similar laws, albeit their languages could have only some official functions.

On the whole, the data of this comparative study reinforce the argument about the central role of titular politicians as the driving force of status planning. There were certain practical complications that caused delays in advancing the legislative basis: for example, the competition of two or more titular language varieties (Mordovia, Mari El and Karelia) or the conflictual situation around the presence of the third large language community (Bashkortostan). Yet, more important in the long run was the difference between the consensual and confrontational politics. For example, many language provisions in Komi were still in force also in the 2010s while in Mari El they have been to a great extent abolished (see Table 3).

Table 3. Language requirements and language teaching according to language laws (from [Zamyatin, 2013c])

	Komi	Mari El	Mordovia	Udmurtia	Karelia	Tatarstan
Language law	1992	1995	1998	2001	2004	1992
Language pReferences	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Language of instruction	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Compulsory state language	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Entering exams	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Language Law II amended	2002, 2009	2001, 2008–2011	2010	2010	–	2004 (new law 2013)

Language preferences	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Language of instruction	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Compulsory state language	Yes/No	No	Yes/No	No	No	Yes
Entering exams	No	No	No	No	No	Yes

Further, the data establishes a direct link between ethnic representativeness and the adoption of language laws: the varying levels of political representation of titular politicians and their ability to bargain for better conditions in the elite pact resulted in different configurations of the official status of the titular languages expressed in the level of institutionalisation of its elements. The data on ethnic representation (presented in Table 1 above) correlate with the data on the establishment of institutions across the republics (see Table 3). In fact, I demonstrated in a recent study that these configurations also had a diverging impact on language practices (see [Zamyatin, 2018]).

Conclusion

The designation of state languages became the policy in republics. Language status planning as the policy solution came as a recommendation “from above”. In a cascade effect from the SSRs, titular pressure groups were able to lobby for inclusion of their demands, also for the revival of languages, into political agendas of the ASSRs. Policy adoption was not possible as one act under the situation of uncertainty with changing political actors and environment. Instead, these were general political developments that allowed moving forward at turning points when the time was ripe and the decisions on state-building and nation-building principles had to be reached and fixed in the constitutive documents. These documents marked the stages of national-state building in general and, inter alia, the steps of the adoption of language policy through fixing the compromise reached on some issues. The default approach was of delaying the decision on issues, from symbolic to practical, were compromise was still not reached.

Therefore, language policy adoption consisted of not one but at least three steps: symbolic designation in the sovereignty declarations, formal designation in the constitution and legal designation in electoral laws and languages laws. This configuration of steps corresponded to various functions of the official status of language that allowed its usage for different purposes: as an attribute of national statehood, as an element of institutionalized ethnicity, as an instrument of political struggle and as a tool of language spread in the public sphere. Let me summarize the mechanisms that allowed compromises to be reached at every step regarding each function:

1. The political status of different types of national-state and national-territorial formations in the hierarchy of the Soviet state structure largely pre-determined their status also in the post-Soviet period, and, thus, the status of their languages. The sovereignty declarations of the ASSRs were the acts of defiance in a different way than those of the SSRs. The Tatar and some other ASSRs hoped to upgrade their political status to that of a SSR and undertook this act as a reaction to the RSFSR declaration, because the latter in effect claimed sovereignty over its ASSRs. By passing their declarations, the ASSRs challenge this claim of the RSFSR declaration. At the same time, the authorities of the Tatar

and some other ASSRs cooperated with the Union authorities with deference and despite proclaiming in some cases the supremacy of their own laws largely acted in accordance with the Union laws. Thus, the political status of the republic as a form of national statehood became both the precondition and justification for the designation of state languages. The analogy in the status of the SSRs and ASSRs and the principle of equality of Soviet peoples opened the possibility for this designation also in the latter category of republics.

The republican elites had a joint interest in passing the sovereignty declarations because it increased their power vis-à-vis the centre. The benefit of reaching an agreement created incentives to make concessions, even if the benefits of sovereignty in how it should have served public interest was presented differently in discourse of elite segments. For the Russian politicians this was, first of all, economic sovereignty and greater self-governance in the interest of the “peoples of republic”. For the titular politicians sovereignty was the exercise of the right to national self-determination of the “titular nation” and affirmation of its national statehood. In this context, the titular politicians presented state languages as yet one more attribute of the upgraded national statehood. The Russian politicians considered this element as a potential threat to their position.

Despite the conflicting interests, the compromise became possible, because the politicians at that moment had to agree only on general principles for future national-state building. The declarations were short and listed ideas for new constitutions without further detailed specification at the time what the ideas implied. Thus, the scope of the language issue remained narrow: whether to declare state languages and how many, while it remained open to interpretations what this would mean in practice. Given the overlapping interest to justify the emerging polity, the sides agreed on the inclusion of state languages.

Unlike the SSRs, most of which established their sole state languages, also those ASSRs with mass national movement established a parallel official status of Russian and titular state languages. While some radical national organizations demanded the designation of the single titular state languages, the establishment agreed on the parallel status as an extension of another compromise when the source of sovereignty was declared to be the multinational peoples of republics, and not their titular nations, although typically the preamble mentioned them symbolically as the historical roots of statehood. Therefore, official bilingualism became a characteristic of the multinational people.

The step had to be presented as a popular demand. The lack of the demand for the official status of Karelian on the side of the national movement prevented the inclusion of the issue in the political agenda, when it was possible during the approval of the sovereignty declaration, and no more was an issue of the immediate agenda than the symbolic recognition. By form, symbolic designation actually did not amount to policy adoption because the sovereignty declarations were policy documents that expressed intention rather than action. By content, however, the policy option of the designation of the co-official state languages of republics remained the same as it had already been in the declarations.

2. The new constitutions of republics formalized the upgrade in their political status to that of constituent republics of Russia with their own constitutions and state languages as symbols of their national statehood. The constitutional designation amounted to language policy adoption, although it resolved again only the most general issues: first, the co-official status itself and, second, in some republics, language requirements of presidential candidates. Regarding the first issue, there was some debate, but the constitutions repeated the sovereignty declarations establishing the parallel status

of Russian and titular language(s). Notably, the official status of the languages was the only ethnic institution built in the constitutional systems. The compromise on its establishment took place also because, after all, it was a formal recognition without an explicit specification whether this act also made the titular languages compulsory for use and, thus, without immediate effect on real politics.

3. The second issue on language requirements already had a precedent in electoral laws but also had an immediate effect. The titular politicians strived to include into the constitutions the requirement of the knowledge of both state languages as the only explicit element of the compulsoriness. It was, thus, to the detriment of the interests of the Russian politicians, as few of them had any knowledge of titular languages. Given the central position of the office of the head of republic to the republics' political system, the issue at stake was decisive. It was whether the titular politicians would have exclusive access to the office, and can be interpreted from the institutionalist perspective as an attempt of using language requirements as an instrument in political struggle. As these were particularist demands, that is, the ones which satisfaction benefitted one group, it naturally proved to be difficult to find support in parliaments. The pressure groups had to bargain in order to reconcile their goals in negotiations with each other. However, it was not a rude force but the consensual politics of looking for a compromise also in the republics with the titular majorities in the population. If established, language requirements reflected popular attitudes of the majority.

4. For the same reason, reaching a compromise proved possible also when adopting language laws in the republics with the titular minorities. Here the compulsoriness of titular language went beyond language requirements and had to serve the goal of language revival. The shift among the titular populations from the titular languages to Russian was identified as the language problem in the former ASSRs. However, the mechanism of compulsory use came in a cascade effect from the former SSRs mainly addressed another problem: the substitution of the titular languages by Russian in power corridors. Accordingly, the spread of titular language in the public sphere of post-Soviet countries had to be achieved through the introduction of language requirements under the conditions when there was a sole titular language. The device of compulsoriness proved to be effective for the titular politicians in most former SSRs to instrumentally ensure their position of ruling elites. At the same time, the device proved less effective to achieve the goal of the spread of titular language among the Russian-speaking populations, and authorities faced complications in most former SSRs.

Russia's republics set language revival as one of the goals of their language legislations. The titular politicians also envisaged language status as a tool of spreading titular languages in the public sphere by the introduction of their compulsory knowledge and use. Yet, the co-official titular and Russian languages were established as a compromise in all Russia's republics. Official bilingualism became an obstacle for the spread of titular languages, because in practice it annulled the compulsory use of the titular languages alongside Russian. The pursuit of language revival under the conditions, when Russian already dominated in all public domains, resulted in the policy's ineffectiveness and its inability to change language practices. Therefore, the policy approach with selective compulsoriness had not been adequate to solve the problem of language shift and language loss by the titular groups. These processes continued to intensify throughout the post-Soviet period.

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