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**Regional Identity and Territorial Integrity
in Contemporary Russia**

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**A New Russian Heartland?
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Abstract

This paper seeks to explore regionalism in Russia as an alternative to ethnic or national identity, and from this basis to examine the extent to which regional identities may threaten Russia's territorial integrity. The concept of regional identity is examined, as it relates to territory and legitimacy, and particularly in relation to ethnic and civic identities in the Russian context and in light of the Soviet legacy. Alternative arenas for the appearance of regional identity are discussed, as are actual examples of newly emergent or historically engendered regional identities within Russia today, at spatial scales ranging from the intra-regional to the sub-regional. Throughout the paper seeks to relate these regional identities to the contemporary context and to highlight possible future developments or scenarios which may impact on their content or consolidation, and thereby to anticipate the potential for regional identities to establish as legitimate alternative arenas of political self-determination, in contrast to the Russian state.

By way of introduction

With the advent of Putin's presidency of the Russian Federation, and more specifically his recentralising federal reforms¹, it is no longer 'de rigueur' to talk of the potential break-up or fragmentation of the Russian Federation. Although the 1990s undoubtedly witnessed a shift in power and competencies away from the strong central state towards the sub-national regional units² the ongoing separatist war in Chechnya is now commonly viewed as an exception rather than the start of a rule. There has been an academic refocus which seeks to explain why the situation in Chechnya is exceptional, by demonstrating structural and contextual factors which mitigate against the collapse of the Russian Federation into smaller regional units, a scenario which is now regarded as 'highly unlikely'³. Yet Yeltsin's approach to centre-periphery relations, which sought flexibly and creatively to accommodate autonomist demands from many of Russia's regions (both ethnic and territorial) via bilateral agreements (often personally negotiated with Yeltsin) is viewed broadly as having been both necessary and effective in preventing the collapse of the state⁴. By and large those factors, which had been deemed potentially destabilising and threatening to Russia's territorial integrity throughout the past decade, do still exist and it therefore seems that Putin too must have been remarkably successful in dealing with the regions and overcoming disintegrative tendencies⁵.

¹ The key features of Putin's reforms have been threefold: Firstly, the introduction of seven Federal Districts each under the control of a Presidential Representative selected by Putin. Secondly, the removal of the regional Governors from their seats in the Federation Council. Thirdly, the possibility for the President to remove Governors from office. The recentralization process has manifested most notably in concerted efforts to create a single legal and economic space across the whole Russian territory, by way of legal harmonization of the regional and federal laws, and in centralizing the fiscal system by appropriating a higher proportion of funds to the centre.

² See for example Arbakhan Magomedov, "Regional Ideologies in the Context of International Relations," (Zurich: Center for Security Studies and Conflict Research of the ETH Zurich, 2001).

³ A. Wenger, "Engaging Russia and Its Regions: Challenges and Opportunities for the West," (Zurich: Center for Security Studies and Conflict Research of the ETH Zurich, 2002)., p.36

⁴ See for example J Hughes, "Managing Secession Potential in the Russian Federation," *Regional and federal studies* 11, no. 3 (2001).

⁵ Unless of course the disintegration of the Russian state was always 'highly unlikely' and both Yeltsin and the academic community at large were mistaken in their reading of the situation.

The consensus generally is that Putin's reforms have had a significant, but limited, impact on the regions. Orttung⁶ regards their impact as more of an atmospheric change than as any real sea change in centre-periphery relations. While some centralisation has undoubtedly occurred, the regions, and their governors in particular, retain a high degree of political and economic control. Certain regions still represent proto-state formations under the leadership of authoritarian bosses. The centre has certainly not always been able to ensure the election of its favoured candidates in gubernatorial elections⁷. Putin's capacity to solve the mammoth economic and structural problems faced by the Federation remains very much dependent on the governors' support⁸ mandating negotiation and compromise. Political authority remains fragmented, the roles and powers of the Presidential Representatives are unclearly defined, and differ across the federal districts. The regions retain great potential (if not actual) influence in the Federation Council⁹. Putin has been very reluctant thus far to use his powers of dismissal¹⁰, which in any case are very difficult to apply¹¹. Undoubtedly substantial progress has been made as regards tax transfer to the centre and equally many regional laws have been brought into line with the Federal ones¹², but vital sticking points remain with some of the strongest regions¹³. The regional executives are

⁶ Robert W Orttung, "How Effective Are Putin's Federal Reforms?," *EastWest Institute Russian Regional Report* 6, no. 11 (2001).

⁷ J Perovic, "Regionalization under Putin: Old Models and New Trends," (Centre for Security Studies and Conflict Research, 2002). p.8

⁸ Wenger, "Engaging Russia and Its Regions: Challenges and Opportunities for the West.", p.39

⁹ Undoubtedly the Federation Council is now more obedient, almost to the point of uselessness, which is clearly not conducive to the development of a healthy system of checks and balances (see. Mark Smith, "Putin: An End to Centrifugalism?," in *Russian Regions and Regionalism, Strength through Weakness*, ed. G P Herd and Anne Aldis (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003)., p.32), but it will not necessarily remain so. Federation Council representatives are appointed/selected by the executives and legislatures of the respective regions, and could therein provide much opposition to the centre, in support of the regions. Arguably this reform was more about preventing regional leaders having a stepping stone to national politics from where they could challenge Putin, than it was about central control. It may in fact reinforce the desire of governors (especially the more authoritarian among them) to retain as much power as possible in their specific regions.

¹⁰ Nazdratenko (Primorskii krai) for example has left his position as Governor, but as a result of a compromise which saw him offered a federal Government position as chairman of the State fisheries committee rather than as a result of presidential dismissal. See Perovic, "Regionalization under Putin: Old Models and New Trends.", p.10

¹¹ Not least because the old Federation Council made changes to the law before it was passed which made it that way.

¹² Only around 5-6% of regional laws still contravened federal ones by May 2001, compared to 20% before the process began, see Smith, "Putin: An End to Centrifugalism?," p.28

¹³ Hahn notes that while 5'800 of the 6'000 laws which violated federal norms had been brought into line by April 2002, and that 50 of the 60 regional 'constitutions' were now in conformity, notable

popularly elected giving them strong local mandates, and there has been a growing allegiance between some governors and oligarchs¹⁴ as Putin has distanced himself. The relatively subdued reaction from the regions to Putin's recentralisation does not necessarily imply homogenisation or unification in the national sphere and the Federation certainly cannot be described as a single national political community¹⁵. Indeed perceived acceptance may imply little more than that regional elites currently judge quietness to be the best policy. This judgement may well change in the future, along with regional governors' support for Putin, or whomever else may be at the helm.

Russia is still in the grip of multiple transitions. Politically, neither the transition to liberal democracy nor a working federation are complete. Economically the transition to a capitalist market economy is beset with difficulties from property rights to corruption at the highest levels. Legally, the judiciary is far from independent and a common legal space has still to emerge (despite the efforts of the past couple of years). Ideologically, liberalism may be fighting a losing battle with authoritarianism. Psychologically, Russia remains in the grip of an identity crisis, a 'collective re-orientation of both elites and the public alike'¹⁶, which highlights the disunity of the state and its population. While some 'normalisation'¹⁷ may have occurred, widespread social and economic problems continue to impact on the lives of ordinary Russians throughout the country which the state remains ineffective to overcome. Such a failure to address the problems of its citizenry, points not only to central weakness (to inefficiency at best, and ineptitude or disregard at worst), but holds the very dangerous potential to seriously undermine the legitimacy and authority of the centre.

exceptions remained, including Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Sakha (Yakutia). See G M Hahn, "The Impact of Putin's Federative Reforms on Democratization in Russia," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 19, no. 2 (2003)., p.117

¹⁴ EastWest Institute Russian Regional Report, 17 (20), 17 June 2002

¹⁵ Richard Sakwa, "Federalism, Sovereignty and Democracy," in *Regional Politics in Russia*, ed. C Ross (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002)., p.2

¹⁶ B Petersson, *National Self-Images and Regional Identities in Russia*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001)., p.19

¹⁷ Andrei Shleifer and D. Treisman, "A Normal Country," (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2003)., Working Paper 10057

Many attempts have been made to list and quantify the factors which may predispose regions towards autonomist or secessionist politics¹⁸ and to identify those areas exhibiting multiple secession inducing features¹⁹. Commonly included are geopolitical factors (i.e. the existence of foreign borders, length of period of association, contemporary and historical status), ethno-political factors (i.e. the share of ethnic Russians in the regional population, concentration of an ethnic group in its 'own' region, impact of migration in and out), and economic factors (i.e. access to and processing facilities for natural resources, specialisation of the regional economy, poverty and unemployment levels). While undoubtedly of value in identifying relevant factors²⁰ such attempts may encounter difficulties due to incorrect or overly generalised assumptions about causality (for example whether a multiethnic population engenders conflict or consensus) and importance ranking (for example whether ethno-political factors matter more than geopolitical ones).

Likewise many factors are noted for their centripetal influences in preventing state collapse in Russia. Such factors include the economic incentives for regions to remain part of the federation, the situation in Chechnya as a deterrent, the dominance of the Russian ethnic-group country-wide (and indeed in almost all regions), and a the lack of Western support for separatism, unlike in the case of Soviet collapse²¹. Stepanov²², in his analysis of causes of ethnic tension and separatism intelligently argues for an integrated approach which combines long term structural, social and cultural factors and short term economic, political and geopolitical ones. Regionalism or regional identity constitutes just one of many factors which may impact on Russia's cohesion and territorial integrity²³. Regional identity can, no more

¹⁸ See for example N Petrov and A Treyvish, "The Threat of Regional Secession from the Russian Federation: More Losers Than Winners," (Moscow: Institute of Geography, Russian Academy of Sciences, 1993).

¹⁹ H E Hale and R Taagepera, "Russia: Consolidation or Collapse?," *Europe-Asia Studies* 54, no. 7 (2002), p.1110

²⁰ See Valery Stepanov, "Ethnic Tensions and Separatism in Russia," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 26, no. 2 (2000). for a similar approach to identifying ethnically troubled regions, which seems to relatively effectively, albeit with some similar limitations.

²¹ See for example Hale and Taagepera, "Russia: Consolidation or Collapse?."

²² Stepanov, "Ethnic Tensions and Separatism in Russia." esp. pp.326-8

²³ Just as identity and identity conceptions were influenced by political changes in the early 1990s, so changes in identity had played a role in influencing those changes. The relationship is a dynamic one.

than any of these factors, be treated in isolation. Its form and content will be influenced by many of the factors above, as it will in turn influence them.

See M Bassin, "K Voprodu O Geografii Natsional'noi Identichnosti," in *Identichnost' I Geografia V Postsovetskoi Rossii*, ed. K E Aksenov (St Petersburg: Helicon Plus, 2003)., p.10

Identity, Legitimacy and Territory

Both Russia's ethno-territorial federal structure and a confused ideological understanding of nation are part of the Soviet inheritance and are of major importance in understanding identity, in whatever form, in Russia. The Soviet reification of primordial ethnic groups as permanent and unchangeable categories of nationality remains very influential among Russia's many ethnic minorities²⁴, as do linkages between such ethnic identities and specific territories²⁵. The Soviet state effectively cemented together ideas of ethnicity, homeland, and political or administrative authority. Ethnicity was thereby ingrained in the psyche of Russia's many titular ethnic groups as a collective identity upon which self-determination demands in some form could be legitimately made. At the same time, ethnic identities were reinforced by Soviet policies such as indigenisation and passport nationality. This legacy restricted Russia's choices in the early 1990s. Russia had no real choice but to adopt an ethno-federal structure along similar lines to the Soviet system. To do otherwise (for example to adopt a wholly territorial system) would almost certainly have resulted in widespread unrest and protest in the ethnic republics and possibly hastened the break-up of the Russian Federation.

Despite the maintenance of the ethno-territorial form of federalism which reinforces Soviet conceptions of nation, the Russian state has sought to resolve its long running search for identity²⁶ in favour of a unifying civic understanding of nation, as seems necessary given the multi-ethnic nature of the Russian population. Yet different understandings of nation prevail in Russian society, as a result of the Soviet legacy, and present a major obstacle to the de-ethnification of politics and nationality which such a civic

²⁴ D. Gorenburg, "Regional Separatism in Russia: Ethnic Mobilisation or Power Grab?," *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 2 (1999), p.269

²⁵ N. J. Lynn and P. Fryer, "National-Territorial Change in the Republics of the Russian North," *Political Geography* 17, no. 5 (1998), p.567, for example in the form of ASSR's under the SU and Republics as part of the Russian Federation.

²⁶ Simonsen notes that Saratov may have been right in his suggestion that perhaps the search for a national idea is a key national trait, but also that this will not help to unify the population. As quoted in Sven Gunnar Simonsen, "Inheriting the Soviet Policy Toolbox: Russia's Dilemma over Ascriptive Nationality," *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 6 (1999), p.1084

conception requires. The resentment by many in Russia's territorial oblasts of the perceived legal, economic and political advantages awarded to ethnic republics may be indicative of these different understandings of nation. Under the Soviet Union, ethnic Russians as the dominant ethnic group could readily accept trans-ethnic Soviet internationalist or multi-ethnic culturalist ideas of the Russian nation. Both such conceptions were largely built around ethnic Russian cultural markers (especially Orthodoxy and the Russian language). Ethnic non-Russians by contrast readily adopted the ethnic conception of nation, also promoted by Soviet policy, and came increasingly to view Soviet internationalism as creepingly assimilationist and aimed at reducing minority rights in favour of the dominance of the ethnic Russian population. More recently the promotion of a civic national identity conception has come to be viewed in a similar light, particularly in view of growing chauvinistic Russian nationalism of the Zhirinovskiy variety.

Collective identities, be they ethnic, civic or whatever, serve to legitimise self-determination claims. Contemporary Russia lacks a common identity able to unite all the citizens of the state and so legitimise its authority. As they jostle for supremacy²⁷ alternate and multiple identities may therefore call into question the political legitimacy of the state, and its territorial boundaries. Legitimacy is of course not alone conferred by identity but rather is also impacted by factors such as the elite or leadership, the socio-economic situation, (in)security and so on. Different identity formations though, can provide organisational arenas for mobilisation against a regime which is weak or failing to deliver and so of questionable authority. Where identity is intrinsically linked to territory, a questioning of the legitimacy of a certain identity as the basis for self-determination, necessarily also questions the legitimacy of territorial borders.

Many identity alternatives exist. Each individual exhibits multiple identities which are flexible and changeable in content and importance through time. For example while my nationality (in a civic sense) is British, I may equally

²⁷ Sankaran Krishna, "Boundaries in Question," in *A Companion to Political Geography*, ed. John Agnew, Mitchell, and Gerard Toal (Oxford: Blackwells, 2003), p.303

choose one of many different societal bases for identification depending upon the specific circumstances of my experience and situation. I may identify myself by gender, occupation, sexuality, cultural preference, ethnicity, ideology, family, region of residence or birth, or globally as a member of the human race, among many others.

Despite providing alternate mobilisation arenas multiple identities need not necessarily be a source of instability, and can coexist in a defined hierarchy (for example ethnic Englishness (fairly) happily coexists with civic Britishness)²⁸. However problems may arise where a steady hierarchy is not clearly defined or promoted by the state or where different collectivities within a state promote different hierarchical orders to the state-led conception.²⁹ Where many different identity conceptions exist, and especially where significant numbers believe self-determination rights are collectively engendered by ethno-cultural features, a weak or diverse national identity may be dangerous for state legitimacy.

'An attachment to territory is as old as human society, and there is little to suggest that the powerful ideological bonds that link identity, politics and territory will be loosened in the future'³⁰. Despite the progress of globalisation the interactions, experiences and communications of most Russian citizens are determined by spatial location. Place is a necessary condition of social existence³¹ and it therefore becomes almost impossible to divorce who we are from where we are³². Communities and social collectivities in Russia (as

²⁸ See A G Manakov, "Kul'turnye Granisty I Identichnost' (Na Primere Severo-Zapada Evropeiskoi Rossii)," in *Identichnost' I Geografiia V Postsovetskoj Rossii*, ed. K E Aksenov (St Petersburg: Helicon Plus, 2003). for a very clear discussion of territorial identity hierarchy in the Russian context.

²⁹ What matters is which form of identity forms the basis for politicisation of a community. In Britain, both ethnic welshness and civic britishness are politicised, but in a clear hierarchy of deference of the ethnic to the civic ideal, resulting from the British liberal democratic political culture.

³⁰ Vladimir Kolosov, "Ethnic and Political Identities and Territorialities in the Post-Soviet Space," *GeoJournal* 48, no. 2 (1999)., p.72

³¹ J N Entrikin, "Democratic Place-Making and Multiculturalism," *Geografiska Annaler* 84B, no. 1 (2002)., p.20

³² John Agnew identifies four main reasons why place is so important to identity, they are that: 1. Political identities, while not necessarily place specific, are established within a 'geographical field' of shared relevance, such as a state, 2. Multiple/Overlapping identities derive from familiarity and experience, from where one lives one's life, 3. Most everyday communication, interaction and reaction is geographically constrained at a relatively local level, and 4. that places are shared, even if only in imagination. See John Agnew, *Making Political Geography* (London: Arnold, 2002)., pp.123-127

elsewhere) are commonly spatially restricted as, consequently, are identity formations.

Territorial identity is closely linked to the most commonly discussed forms of collective identity³³. This is most obviously seen in the modern state system, where state borders act as the boundaries for civically defined nations. State makers seek to align territory with identity in a 'fiction of homogeneity'³⁴ in order to provide legitimacy to their authority over the whole territorial space of the ubiquitous nation-state. Likewise ideas pertaining to ethnic nationhood more often than not link blood with soil, such that as Kaiser indicates, the myth of primordial connectedness with the homeland serves as one of the main basis of [ethnic] nationalistic claims to territory today³⁵. 'Territory creates a collective consciousness by reinventing itself as a 'homeland'³⁶, for a community which may be otherwise bounded by political, ethnic, cultural or simply regional criteria.

Much of identity thus is regionally engendered and territorially related. Indeed the ability to politicise an identity so as to legitimise a self-determination claim is to a significant degree restricted by its linkages with territory. In the contemporary world any collectivity seeking to control its own destiny needs a place to do so. For example, Walker³⁷ has admirably demonstrated that the idea of a queer nation is culturally as legitimate a candidate for collective rights (and by extension self-determination) as is any culturally defined national community which doesn't rely on exclusivist racialist claims. Yet the difficulty in exercising political authority by a nation which is so spatially dispersed prevents it from exercising its self-determination claim.

Despite the dominance (in both academic and public spheres) of the civic/ethnic national dichotomy 'it is of course conceivable that other collective

³³ Manakov, "Kul'turnye Granisty I Identichnost'." p.114

³⁴ Krishna, "Boundaries in Question." p.303

³⁵ Robert J Kaiser, "Nationalism and Identity," in *Geography and Transition in the Post-Soviet Republics*, ed. M J Bradshaw (Chichester: J Wiley & Sons, 1997)., p.11

³⁶ Petersson, *National Self-Images and Regional Identities in Russia*, .p.28

³⁷ Brian Walker, "Social Movements as Nationalisms or, on the Very Idea of a Queer Nation," in *Rethinking Nationalism*, ed. et al. (Calgary, Canada: University of Calgary Press, 1996)..

self-images, apart from national ones, might exert an influence on internal unity, such as those that are related to regional belonging or religious affiliation³⁸. Manakov notes that 'national identity occupies just one 'level' in the territorial identity hierarchy and often cedes priority to regional or even local identity'³⁹. Regional identity or regionalism indicates belonging, association or solidarity with a collectivity which is primarily spatially defined. Regional identity as such can be associated with a myriad of spatial scales, from local communities (village or town) to continents or even the globe⁴⁰.

In Russia, as elsewhere, regional identities may provide an alternative basis around which to claim political self-determination, just as have ethno-cultural identities. Different geographies of identity may provide alternative spaces of organisation, mobilisation and governance, especially when the current territorial configuration (that is the Russian Federation as it stands at present) appears to many of its citizens to be failing in terms of identity, authority and efficacy⁴¹. Indeed empirical studies in Russia show that 'many citizens identify not only with their ethnic group, but also with the state, and the region in which they live'⁴². Individual and collective self-images and identities vary from region to region, and territory is a salient factor in the formation of such self images, helping to solidify ethnic, political, religious or culturally regional versions of identity. Again despite the implication of the ethnic/civic dichotomy regions need not be ethnically imagined in order to take on the trappings of or challenge the state. Rather they can provide an alternative regional community based conception of the demos which need not rely on ethnic markers. Although of course, both civic and ethnic factors may play a role in the formation of regional identities; just as regional or territorial factors are to be found in the content of ethnic or civic identities.

³⁸ Petersson, *National Self-Images and Regional Identities in Russia*, .p.17

³⁹ Manakov, "Kul'turnye Granisty I Identichnost'." p.14

⁴⁰ Anssi Paasi, "Bounded Spaces in the Mobile World: Deconstructing 'Regional Identity'," *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie* 93, no. 2 (2002)., p.137

⁴¹ Identity, Authority and Efficacy are the dimensions upon which the strength of the national territorial state depends for its legitimacy according to Hassner, see Anssi Paasi, "Territory," in *A Companion to Political Geography*, ed. John Agnew, Mitchell, and Gerard Toal (Oxford: Blackwell's, 2003)., p.109

⁴² Kolossov, "Ethnic and Political Identities and Territorialities in the Post-Soviet Space." p.71

Contemporary Regional Identities in Russia

A substantial number of different regional arenas exist in Russia, at different spatial scales, within which regional identities are able to develop. The state arena is simply one basis for regional identity formation and associated political organisation. Alternative arenas may be larger than the state, as anti-national⁴³, supra-national or trans-national, or they may be smaller than the state, as sub-national (intra-regional, singularly-regional, or sub-regional) configurations of community and identity. In fact examples of each of these identities can be located in the Russian context. At the trans-national level, globalisation and cross-border associations (such as BEAR⁴⁴) are challenging the state identity in an abstract manner, by undermining the basis of territorial sovereignty that has been the defining characteristic of modern states⁴⁵. Arguably state based identity is gradually losing its hegemony in an interrelated and interdependent world⁴⁶ and a dynamic, internationalist and progressive regionalism is establishing cross-national regions and sub-national regions as increasingly legitimate areas of community and interaction. While such processes are certainly not impacting all of Russia's regions, a number of 'islands of globalisation'⁴⁷ are identifiable and regionalist ideas related to globalisation are becoming part of the political lexicon in Russia. Equally the idea of a trans-national, supra-national, or even anti-national, overarching regional identity is nothing new to Russia. Overarching ideologies ranging from Orthodoxy and Islam, to Eurasianism and Communism have long held an important place in identity conceptions

⁴³ National as used in this paper always relates to a civic understanding of nation, unless otherwise specified, for example as ethno-national. Likewise region, unless otherwise indicated, is used in the sense of Russia's 89 administrative regional units.

⁴⁴ The Barents Euro Arctic Region was established in 1993 and covers regions in Norway, Sweden Finland and Russia (Arkhangelsk, Murmansk, Karelia and Nenets)

⁴⁵ J Batt, "Region, State and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe: Introduction," *Regional and federal studies* 12, no. 2 (2002), p.5

⁴⁶ Kolossov, "Ethnic and Political Identities and Territorialities in the Post-Soviet Space." p.72

⁴⁷ In particular, Makarychev points to regions such as St. Petersburg, Novgorod, Samara, Nizhny Novgorod and Tatarstan, as having strong international standing and a strong focus on international markets over the domestic. See A S Makarychev, "Islands of Globalization: Regional Russia and the Outside World," (Zurich: ETH Zurich Centre for Security Studies and Conflict Research, 2000).

(indeed a substantial number of Russian citizens continue to associate most closely with the Soviet identity⁴⁸).

Within Russia potential broad intra-regional identities include historic communities of association among Siberian inhabitants, among those in the Far East, the Ural-Volga region and in the North Caucasus. A search for regional identities relating to a single region of Russia easily turns up the Chechen example, though this may be better classed in ethnic terms and related to the concept of a 'homeland'. In any case alternatives abound of varying strengths and contents, from Tatarstan to St. Petersburg. At a sub-regional level different communities in bi-titular republics seek greater autonomy, as do minority groups in both republics and territorial oblasts. Dagestan for example, which is home to some 34 distinct ethno-linguistic groups has been subject to various territorial demands from Kumyks, Nogai, Lezgin and Cossacks, to mention just a few⁴⁹. Calls for cross-border unification of the North and South Ossetians combine the inter-national, with the regional in a complex situation. Equally some trans-border and intra-regional community of identity may exist between Tyvinians, Buryatians and Mongolians, and certainly does exist between a substantial proportion of the three Eastern Slavic populations⁵⁰.

At each of these levels from the global to the sub-regional a huge variety of factors ranging from the ethnic, cultural, historical, to the economic, material and pragmatic serve to influence identity conceptions and motivate those who seek to promote a certain identity conception above other variants. In the Russian context regional elites play a very important role in shaping regional identities, since they are able to determine the topics and direction of political

⁴⁸ Kolossov, "Ethnic and Political Identities and Territorialities in the Post-Soviet Space." p.75, notes some significant variation between different regions from the 1998 poll, such that 25% of Stavropol residents associated keenly with the Soviet identity, compared to just 10% in the Urals. Such identity conceptions have been seen to translate into Communist Party support in the South (in 1999 Duma elections in Stavropol the Communist Party received almost 30%, and a reform vote in the Urals (where the Communists received less than 15% generally).

⁴⁹ See L L Khaperskaya, "Ethno-Political Change in the North Caucasus" (paper presented at the Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies (Rand Corporation) and Center for Ethnopolitical and Regional Research, Santa Monica, CA, 1998)., p. 46

⁵⁰ Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians

debate⁵¹, whatever their motivations may be for such actions. Elites act as generators and speakers of identity, but also as borrowers, disseminators and interpreters of identity⁵². As Simonsen notes, the question of whether 'elites in the Republics expressing nationalist views [are] attempting to reflect a public mood, or are...trying to shape that mood, probably cannot be answered decisively'⁵³. Regional identities, as with other identities, are without a doubt socially constructed and reconstructed by elites. They are however not often constructed out of nothing, but rather build upon pre-existing identity markers, such as cultural, ethnic or linguistic features. It is the reliance on such markers which resonates with those to whom an identity is intended to appeal, and it is also for this reason that often contradictory or conflicting features play a part in any one identity conception. Identities are commonly the product of contingent structures and contexts and impacted by external and internal forces. They reflect and develop both elite and mass beliefs, incorporating any or all of ethnic, religious, historical and cultural factors, from economic, materialistic or ideological motivations.

The Soviet legacy and the broadly accepted dichotomous understanding of nation as civic versus ethnic, as well as the ethno-centric separatist war in Chechnya, have reinforced the conception of ethnicity as the crucial cleavage in the Russian context, which is able even to directly threaten the state's territorial integrity. Indeed although the relative homogeneity of the Russian population is an oft noted structural constraint against the collapse of the Russian Federation along ethnic lines the ethnic cleavage is clearly important at the regional, particularly republican, level, such that regionalism and ethno-nationalism are often conflated⁵⁴. As regions do not always have easily identifiable boundaries⁵⁵ regional identity is often associated or intertwined with some other identity framing factors. In Russia ethnic groups tend to be

⁵¹ Magomedov, "Regional Ideologies in the Context of International Relations.", p.12

⁵² Ibid., p.12

⁵³ Simonsen, "Inheriting the Soviet Policy Toolbox: Russia's Dilemma over Ascriptive Nationality." p.1084

⁵⁴ J Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse, "Comparing Regional and Ethnic Conflicts in Post-Soviet Transition States," *Regional and federal studies* 11, no. 3 (2001)., p.8

⁵⁵ See Edward Royle, "Introduction: Regions and Identities," in *Issues of Regional Identity, in Honour of John Marshall*, ed. Edward Royle (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

regionally distributed to some degree and so is frequently the best candidate for such a role.

Although it is often given as an example of a region which exhibits a strong ethnic identity in opposition to the multiethnic civic Russian identity, Tatarstan has yet to resolve its own identity conundrum. Ethnic Tatar elites had demanded greater autonomy for their republic well in advance of the 'parade of sovereignties', having claimed Union Republic status within the Soviet Union as early as 1977, as well as throughout the perestroika period⁵⁶. Immediately following the collapse of the SU such claims were to a significant degree fuelled by ethnic demands for political self-determination. However, as Giuliano has demonstrated, a strong ethnic identity and sense of belonging need not entail the primacy of nationalist politics or ideals⁵⁷. Shaimiev, in his efforts to outmanoeuvre the new nationalist elite, successfully reframed ethnic nationalist goals as public goods, and was able to build trans-ethnic support for republican sovereignty⁵⁸ based on explicitly regional criteria about economic self-sufficiency⁵⁹. He essentially created an aggrieved community united by loyalty to a particular territory⁶⁰, focusing on interests common to all those who made up an inclusively defined 'national community of Tatarstan'⁶¹.

This is not to say that a strong ethnic Tatar identity does not exist, it certainly does, and is evident in 'Tatarisation' policies. Indeed Gorenburg has argued that rather than ethnic nationalism acting simply as a smokescreen for economic gains, in fact an economic and civic focus has served as a mask for ethno-cultural policies favouring the Tatar ethnic group⁶². Contradictory elements abound within the Tatar identity. The integral EuroIslamist

⁵⁶ Magomedov, "Regional Ideologies in the Context of International Relations.", p.16

⁵⁷ E Giuliano, "Who Determines the Self in the Politics of Self-Determination? Identity and Preference Formation in Tatarstan's Nationalist Mobilization," *Comparative Politics* 32, no. 3 (2000), p.296

⁵⁸ Ibid. p.308

⁵⁹ Jean-Robert Raviot, "Types of Nationalism, Society and Politics in Tatarstan," *Russian Politics and Law* 32, no. 2 (1994), p.71

⁶⁰ Giuliano, "Who Determines the Self in the Politics of Self-Determination? Identity and Preference Formation in Tatarstan's Nationalist Mobilization.", p.312

⁶¹ Raviot, "Types of Nationalism, Society and Politics in Tatarstan.", p.66

⁶² Gorenburg, "Regional Separatism in Russia: Ethnic Mobilisation or Power Grab?.", pp.262-3, by contrast Treisman has argued that Russia's 'parade of sovereignties' owed less to the desire for ethno-cultural revival, than to local elites desires for power and money, hidden behind a legitimating ethno-cultural smokescreen.

component for example, advocates a modernist approach to economic reform (in recognition of a regional diversity, clearly not engendered by ethnicity but by material and practical realities) and seeks to benefit from globalisation, but in the name of ethnic Tatar cultural freedom. By contrast, ethnic Tatarstani identity also draws heavily on non-ethnic notions relating to its leadership within its territorial, ethnic, historical, and even cultural environment⁶³. Kazan is seen as a special historical centre not just for ethnic Tatars or for peoples living in Tatarstan itself but those in the whole Volga-Ural region, which includes peoples of Tatar, Bashkir, Russian, Chuvash, Mordovian, and Udmurt ethnicity⁶⁴.

What appears to be emerging in Tatarstan, and indeed what is most appropriate given the ethnic mix in the Republic, is a regional identity remarkably similar in content if not scale to that which the centre is half-heartedly attempting to cultivate on a Russia-wide basis. It is a broadly civic identity which seeks to avoid alienating the many ethnic peoples of the republic, while at the same time being built around markers which relate most closely to Tatar ethnicity, culture, language and history. The same could be said of the Russian state-led conception simply substituting 'Russian' for 'Tatar'. In both it is the regional aspect which holds together the civic and the ethnic. Somehow, perhaps because it is able to use Moscow as the 'other', the Tatar version seems better able to incite a loyalty which could unite all its citizens at a regional level, than is the Russian version at the national level.

At present however, the unconsolidated nature of the emergent regional Tatar identity is evident in uncertainty over the territorial scale of the community to which it relates. Ethnic Tatars may see the region as being the homeland not only of those who live there now, but also those ethnic Tatars who are dispersed throughout the rest of the Russian Federation and even beyond. Again this reflects the attitude of many ethnic Russians to their ethnic and linguistic kin in the near abroad. Moreover the appeal to Tatar history to legitimate its modern day identity promotes ideas which advocate a much

⁶³ Magomedov, "Regional Ideologies in the Context of International Relations.", p.15

⁶⁴ Ibid. pp.15-16

larger state than present Tatar republican territory⁶⁵, developing from the idea of Kazan at the heart of a 'Volga-Ural civilisation, to the concept of a Volga-Ural state⁶⁶. The large Tatar minority in neighbouring Bashkortostan raises important questions and maintains the ethnification of politics in the Volga-Ural region as Bashkirs feel under pressure from both Russian and Tatar ethnic identities. While on the other hand, the unification of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan into the makings of a 'Volga-Ural' state very close to an external border could form a direct threat to Russia's integrity.

The Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) also provides an interesting arena for the development of a regional identity, as home to a minority titular ethnic group, a majority ethnic Russian population, and significant communities of Even, Evenk and other so called 'small peoples of the north'. Similarly to Tatarstan, Sakha has witnessed a 'national rebirth' of some degree and substantial 'sakhaisation' of political and increasingly economic life. This has led to some rise in animosity on the part of Sakha's non-titular minorities who are fearful of cultural assimilation at the hands of the Sakha, in place of the previous ethnic Russian 'threat'. Such fears will likely be encouraged should the 2002 census results indicate a rise in the proportion of ethnic Sakha in the republic, as a result of both out migration by ethnic Russians and re-identification to the titular ethnicity⁶⁷. At the same time, while the above may suggest the domination of the Sakha ethnic identity on Sakha territory, a broad civic loyalty to the republic itself based more on territory than ethnicity has also been noted⁶⁸, as articulated in the inclusive 'My Yakutyane' notion.

As home to at least 34 ethno-linguistic groups⁶⁹, Dagestan has been considered an intrinsically unstable region of Russia, where tension between ethnic communities may engender conflict or a full blown civil war⁷⁰. Two very

⁶⁵ As do appeals to Russian history in relation to the other eastern Slavic nations in particular, and more broadly to the whole of the former Soviet Union.

⁶⁶ Magomedov, "Regional Ideologies in the Context of International Relations.", p.16

⁶⁷ See Lynn and Fryer, "National-Territorial Change in the Republics of the Russian North.", p.578

⁶⁸ Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer, "Dilemmas of Federalism in Siberia," in *Center-Periphery Conflict in Post-Soviet Russia. A Federation Imperiled*, ed. Mikhail Alexseev (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), p.148

⁶⁹ Stepanov, "Ethnic Tensions and Separatism in Russia.", p.313

⁷⁰ Ibid.

different questions are often conflated in the Dagestani context, the first relates to inter-ethnic relations and stability, and the second to centre-region relations and stability⁷¹. As regards the former, the early 1990s saw multiple calls by different groups for increased autonomy, and changes to territorial administration. Yet Dagestan remains united administratively and conflict has not broken out. In fact Ware and Kisriev⁷² have argued that ethnic diversity does not necessarily entail instability and that very intricacy of Dagestan's ethnic structure has inhibited radicalism⁷³ and encouraged the de-ethnification of politics. Significantly intra-Dagestani ethnic identities are superseded by a broader attachment to Dagestan as a whole, if not also to the Russian Federation. Indeed survey data has revealed that a wholly ethnic identification is surprisingly weak in Dagestan and that three-quarters of those surveyed identified themselves primarily as Dagestani, compared to less than 15% who identified primarily by ethnicity. Effectively ethnic, religious and economic diversity is counterbalanced by a centripetal identification with Dagestan⁷⁴ as home to the collectivity of ethnic groups which are united by economic, political and socio-cultural norms into a coherent regional cultural entity⁷⁵. The overarching regional identity reflects a traditional political culture shared by the many peoples of Dagestan based on the precedence of political structures over those of kinship (in contrast to the predominantly clan based culture in Chechnya). Both formal and informal arrangements exist to manage the ethnic division of power and to resolve inter-ethnic competition or tensions⁷⁶. This is reflected in the carefully balanced electoral system which ensures a remarkably proportional representation of ethnic groups, so discouraging ethnic chauvinism in favour of broad cross-ethnic support. Ware and Kisriev have noted an increasing tendency in Dagestan, and perhaps in

⁷¹ Of course the two impact one another, but they are inherently separate, inter-ethnic civil war could break out without threatening separatism from the centre, or separatism could occur without inter-ethnic strife.

⁷² Most recently in R B Ware et al., "Stability in the Caucasus - the Perspective from Dagestan," *Problems of Post-Communism* 50, no. 2 (2003).

⁷³ R B Ware and E Kisriev, "Ethnic Parity and Democratic Pluralism in Dagestan: A Consociational Approach," *Europe-Asia Studies* 53, no. 1 (2001), p.106

⁷⁴ Ware et al., "Stability in the Caucasus - the Perspective from Dagestan.", p.13

⁷⁵ Ware and Kisriev, "Ethnic Parity and Democratic Pluralism in Dagestan: A Consociational Approach.", p.109

⁷⁶ C Zuercher, "Multiculturalism and the Ethno-Political Order in Post-Soviet Russia," *Russian Politics and Law* 38, no. 5 (2000), pp.20-21

other North Caucasian republics, to present themselves monolithically in their dealings with the federal centre, effectively subordinating ethnic, ideological, and political differences to the regional, in opposition to the national⁷⁷.

By contrast it can be argued that any allegiance to the Russian Federation (demonstrable by a high degree of trust in the Federal leadership), owes more to practical realities than to cultural features. Security concerns relating to the war in neighbouring Chechnya, and the violent Chechen incursion into Dagestani territory in 1999, as well as several years of theft, raid, hostage-taking and death as a result of Chechen activities have had a substantial impact in severing the historic links between Dagestan and Chechnya and encouraging reliance on the central Russian authorities. For many Dagestani citizens the most immediate hard threat to Dagestani security lies with Chechnya, not with the Russian Federation. Equally economic and material incentives tie the poverty-stricken Dagestan to the Federation and as such support for the federal centre in Dagestan as elsewhere may depend to a significant extent on its ability to meet expectations of economic benefit and development as well as military security.

The unique Dagestani electoral system which ensures representation of all nationalities in proportion to their numbers⁷⁸, and which serves as a vital stabilising tool in de-ethnicising Dagestani politics, is under threat from Putin's federal reforms, since they would appear to contradict the federal constitution. By forcing a change which would bring the Dagestani system into line, Putin's efforts to alter the centre-region balance of power threaten to undermine Dagestan's history of accommodation and may force ethnicity to become a political issue⁷⁹. Such a failure to take account of local circumstances has the potential to either encourage ethnic conflict within Dagestan, or to encourage inter-ethnic Dagestani solidarity against a centre which is forcing the adoption

⁷⁷ Ware and Kisriev, "Ethnic Parity and Democratic Pluralism in Dagestan: A Consociational Approach.", p.117

⁷⁸ Ibid. p.112

⁷⁹ R B Ware and E Kisriev, "Russian Recentralisation Arrives in the Republic of Dagestan: Implications for Institutional Integrity and Political Stability," *East European Constitutional Review* 10, no. 1 (2001). p.69 and p.71

of an inappropriate political system⁸⁰. In this way an effort to recentralise centre-region relation could serve undermine allegiance to it and to reinforce a regional identity able to offer a more legitimate authority in that region.

Of course a strong presidency can 'promote stability by imposing institutional mechanisms to accommodate and manage ethnic and regional challenges'⁸¹ but across Russia there is also a danger (even if this does not seem apparent at present) that Putin's recentralising efforts, could engender a regional backlash, particularly in the ethnic republics. Efforts to limit ethno-centrism in certain republics may well increase tensions both within the republics and vis à vis the centre and new correlations of power may bring new forces to power who are not satisfied with the limited voice their region has in a centralising federation⁸². Moreover an increase in negative ethnic sentiment and inferiority complex among ethnic Russians⁸³ will not have gone unnoticed either by liberals or ethnic minorities, particularly given the strong showing of both Zhirinovskiy's LDPR (11.5%) and other nationalist parties (i.e. Rodina) in the 2003 Duma elections. Attempts to introduce a Russia-wide internal passport which does not list 'nationality' has initiated opposition from both Russian and non-Russian ethno-nationalists, due to a 'self-victimising' fear of 'erasing' ethnic Russian identity in the former case, and fear of disguised assimilationist policies from the latter⁸⁴.

Russian ethno-centrism and not civic multi-ethnicity may well be perceived as the ideological basis for Putin's efforts, and indeed Sperling warns of Putin's

⁸⁰ Conversely if the centre backs down in the face of Dagestan's unique circumstances, this may undermine the push towards a single legal space and encourage the assertion by other regions that their particular circumstances require special differential treatment and legal provisions. Tatarstan in particular would make a strong case regarding the 10% variation in electoral district populations rule.

⁸¹ Hughes, "Managing Secession Potential in the Russian Federation.", p.64

⁸² Hahn, "The Impact of Putin's Federative Reforms on Democratization in Russia.", p.149

⁸³ E Pain, "The Russian Question," *Russian Politics and Law* 38, no. 2 (2000), p.63. In this 2000 article mass nationalism was deemed weak, but easily manipulable given a lack of popular concern with the potential dangers for society of widely held xenophobia, 2003 election results would suggest that mass nationalism is becoming increasingly prominent.

⁸⁴ Cristiano Codagnone and Vassily Filippov, "Equity, Exit and National Identity in a Multinational Federation: The 'Multicultural Constitutional Patriotism' Project in Russia," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 26, no. 2 (2000), esp. pp.281-3

ethnically chauvinistic 'militaristic patriotism'⁸⁵. In which case, regional populations of mixed ethnicity may increasingly regard either ethnically exclusive identities, or regional multi-ethnic identities, as more legitimate bases for political authority than the central national version. In such a context it is not hard to see how a regional leader who has been granted the right to a third or even fourth term in office⁸⁶ and who has been effectively excluded from accessing the national political scene (by removal from the Federation Council), may seek to maximise power and authority by appeal to anti-centre regionalist rhetoric in pursuit of autonomy or even separatism.

Regional identities are evident in both Tatarstan and Dagestan, and are based on more than just ethnicity, indeed the latter case is explicitly trans-ethnic and the former case implicitly multi-ethnic. In each case regional identities appear to have primacy over the civic Russian-wide variant, but at the moment coexist with a 'rossiyane' or mixed identity⁸⁷. In the absence of a unifying civic national identity at the state level this will not necessarily always be the case.

The development of regional identities is also exhibited in non republican regions, which do not necessarily have a titular or marked ethnic identity to build a regional one around. In Stavropol krai for example Kolossov et al. have noted the formation of a unified trans-ethnic regional identity based around traditional regional groups (including ethnic Russians) in opposition to the influx of (mainly Dagestani) 'migrants'⁸⁸. This regional identity is not particularly liberal or civic, but rather unites those with a 'deeply rooted

⁸⁵ Valerie Sperling, "The Last Refuge of a Scoundrel: Patriotism, Militarism and the Russian National Idea," *Nations and nationalism* 9, no. 2 (2003).

⁸⁶ Gelman notes that shortly after the introduction of the federal reform program, the Duma passed laws allowing 69 of 87 regional governors a 3rd or 4th term. See Vladimir Gelman, "The Rise and Fall of Federal Reform in Russia," (PONARS, 2001).

⁸⁷ Vera Tolz, "Forging the Nation: National Identity and Nation Building in Post-Communist Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 50, no. 6 (1998), p.1016

⁸⁸ V A Kolossov, T A Galkina, and A D Krindach, "Territorial Identity and Interethnic Relations, Based on the Example of the Eastern Regions of Stavropol Krai," *Russian Politics and Law* 40, no. 3 (2002), pp.19-22

regional self-consciousness⁸⁹ against those who are conceived as possessing a different regional identity, who 'do not belong' and seem to threaten the regional status quo, particularly in economic terms. Oldberg has described a nascent regional identity forming in Kaliningrad⁹⁰, where the region's physical separation from Russia engenders both economic and ideological incentives towards European and global spheres, providing a clear case for the acknowledgement of local diversity and differential needs.

Some of the loudest proponents of regional autonomy outside the republics have come from the Far East and in particular from Primorskiy krai which, under Nazdratenko's leadership, campaigned for republican and later 'special' status, in respect of its frontier position, historical traditions, and economic requirements. Troyakova⁹¹ has written of a new regional identity developing in this region as influenced by its isolation from the centre in terms of distance, time and living conditions, its distinct historical traditions, and its geopolitical and economic positioning between Russia and Asia Pacific. Calls for republican status likewise in Chukotka, or even the Jewish Autonomous Region, did not reflect ethnic demands or nationalism but regionalism⁹². Just as Moscow's disregard of ethnic distinctiveness may raise the spectre of an ethno-republican backlash, so her failure to take the development of regional identity in the non-ethnic regions seriously, may encourage 'self-victimising' chauvinistic undertones against a centre which is perceived as both ignoring its citizens in the Far East and privileging ethnic identities over regional ones⁹³.

⁸⁹ V A Kolosov, T A Galkina, and A D Krindach, "Territorial Identity and Interethnic Relations, Based on the Example of the Eastern Regions of Stavropol Krai," *Russian Politics and Law* 40, no. 3 (2002), p. 24

⁹⁰ I Oldberg, "The Emergence of a Regional Identity in the Kaliningrad Oblast," *Cooperation and Conflict* 35, no. 3 (2000), p.283

⁹¹ T Troyakova, "A Primorsky Republic: Myth or Reality?," *Communist economies & economic transformation* 10, no. 3 (1998), p.402

⁹² V. I. Kozlov, "Nationalism, National Separatism, and the Russian Question," *Russian politics and law* 33, no. 1 (1995), p.40

⁹³ Troyakova, "A Primorsky Republic: Myth or Reality?," p.402

In asserting 'the primacy of the economic and other interests of their own area (region, territory, republic) over those of other areas'⁹⁴ the citizenry in many of Russia's non-republican oblasts are expressing a region-centric identity to some degree. This is most clearly evidenced in the tension and resentment engendered between 'donor' and 'recipient' regions. Such an unwillingness to help those who are less well off, even though they are citizens of the same country, points clearly to a lack of communal national unity and widespread potential for the development of strongly regionally orientated identities, as well as giving an indication of the extent of economic deprivation.

Bo Peterssen's study of regional elites in four oblasts in Russia revealed that most clearly lacked a civic national identity and viewed themselves and others in the context of a predominantly cultural Russian identity (which incorporated the legacy and tradition of multi-ethnicity, but from a Russo-centric perspective) and in terms of regionally specific identities and communities of belonging at the regional level. Significantly Peterssen notes a withdrawal from the federal centre, and regional identities which are defined 'against' the state, such that Moscow is 'accused by the provinces [of] being a parasite that live[s] at their expense'⁹⁵. The prevailing mood among regional elites is described as clearly 'implying intra-state tension and frustration'⁹⁶. This is emotively demonstrated by one Khabarovsk deputy who is quoted as saying 'the centre does not take any real interest in us, it spits at us and does not care how we live and survive here'⁹⁷. Petersson describes Moscow as the predominant 'Other' against which strong regional identities are being built⁹⁸. While such regional identities are currently predominantly negative in content 'such 'Othering' of the centre might be the stuff that strong regional identities are made of [which] bodes ill for the future internal cohesion of the Russian Federation'⁹⁹.

⁹⁴ Kozlov, "Nationalism, National Separatism, and the Russian Question.", p.40

⁹⁵ Petersson, *National Self-Images and Regional Identities in Russia*, . p.178

⁹⁶ Ibid. p.179

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid. p.187

Novikov¹⁰⁰ argues that it is not possible to portray Russia as a system of regional subcultures differing across the national space and that notions such as 'Siberia' and 'the South' are simply parts of the nationwide Russian identity, rather than alternative regional cultures able to form bases for regional identities¹⁰¹. However, both historical factors and more recent administrative and economic structures would seem to offer at least the possibility for the development of broader regional identities within the Russian territory. As discussed earlier, the Tatarstani regional identity draws much from a civilisational idea of a broader 'Volga-Urals' region which forms a homogenous association¹⁰² with an organic heritage which differs culturally, historically and religiously from Russia¹⁰³. Likewise the Primorskiy krai republican initiative made much use of the historical precedent of the Far-Eastern Republic (which existed between 1920 and 1922) which was based on non-ethnic cultural and economic distinctiveness. While the Russian Far East is undoubtedly still a long way from being a macro-region, culturally, economically or politically¹⁰⁴ incentives exist in all three spheres for such development, particularly in regard to its needs to re-orientate towards the Asian-Pacific markets and in lieu of problems particular to the region, such as migration from China. In the North Caucasus the naming of the federal district as 'Southern' invoked significant resistance by members of differing ethnicities calling for the use of 'North Caucasian' in the name, in recognition of their regions' historical and cultural distinctiveness as a broader region, and apart from the rest of Russia.

Arguably there also exists a broad Siberian regional identity and sense of 'Otherness' from the rest of Russia¹⁰⁵. Within the indigenous academic community at least, the idea of an independent Siberia is based not only on

¹⁰⁰ A. V. Novikov, "Between Space and Race: Rediscovering Russian Cultural Geography," in *Geography and Transition in the Post-Soviet Republics*, ed. M J Bradshaw (Chichester: J Wiley & Sons, 1997).

¹⁰¹ As Petersson points out regional self-images may be national in this sense, even if the content is not shared nationwide, see Petersson, *National Self-Images and Regional Identities in Russia*, . p.18

¹⁰² Magomedov, "Regional Ideologies in the Context of International Relations.", p.16

¹⁰³ Ibid. p.21

¹⁰⁴ Troyakova, "A Primorsky Republic: Myth or Reality?.", p.401

¹⁰⁵ J Hughes, "Regionalism in Russia - the Rise and Fall of Siberian Agreement," *Europe-Asia Studies* 46, no. 7 (1994)., p.1147

economic motivations but on the strength of a culturally distinct Siberian regional identity. There exists 'an intelligentsia-led political tradition of regionalism dating back to the 'oblastniki' of the late 19th century'¹⁰⁶, in recognition of Siberia's separation geographically and culturally (in customs and habits) from the 'European Heartland'. This is reflected in popular folkloric conceptions related to Siberia as a self-reliant frontier society¹⁰⁷ able to endure immense hardship (especially that suffered by the forced and voluntary settlers of the Soviet era). A sense of 'Otherness' is manifested in the long-established linking of Russian centralism with the colonial exploitation of Siberia, and is reflected in Siberian regionalism having been often economically motivated¹⁰⁸. While the Siberian Agreement suffered from intra-regional competition and disagreements over regional interests, it was also effective to some degree in presenting a unified front against the centre, acting as a cohesive bloc, and inspiring some genuine fear of Siberian separatism¹⁰⁹, which could well revive itself if the centre fails to deliver solutions to Siberia's socio-economic problems while at the same time benefiting from her resources. There is still some potential in the idea expressed by a Kemerevo representative that 'Siberia can survive without Russia, whereas Russia cannot survive without Siberia'¹¹⁰ and Siberia may not always wish to remain Russia's 'shoulder to lean on'¹¹¹.

Smirnyagin¹¹² has argued that the relative cultural aspatiality in Russia means that administrative regions take the place of vernacular regional communities. He argues that because Russia lacks organic cultural identity alternatives which could transcend and so tie together administrative regions within the state, the administrative and political division of territory is instead the 'major framework for the manifestation of social and cultural differences at the meso

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ M Castells and E Kiselyova, "Russian Federalism and Siberian Regionalism, 1990-2000," *City* 4, no. 2 (2000), p.193

¹⁰⁹ Hughes, "Regionalism in Russia - the Rise and Fall of Siberian Agreement.", p.1135

¹¹⁰ Vera Tolz, "Regionalism in Russia: The Case of Siberia," *RFE/RL Research Report* 2, no. 9 (1993), p.5

¹¹¹ Hughes, "Regionalism in Russia - the Rise and Fall of Siberian Agreement.", p.1147

¹¹² Quoted in Novikov, "Between Space and Race: Rediscovering Russian Cultural Geography.", p.46, and see also Manakov, "Kul'turnye Granisty I Identichnost'." , p.115

level'¹¹³, resulting in the 'each one for themselves' regional attitude alluded to previously. The very administrative structure of the Russian Federation may thus help to consolidate regional identities at the singularly-regional level. Just as 'it has been commonly argued that federalisation under Communist auspices served to consolidate rather than mitigate national feeling by attaching it to state structures'¹¹⁴ so regional administrative structures may consolidate interests and identities in each of the 89 units. Paasi describes this process as the 'institutionalisation'¹¹⁵ of regions, and refers to a variety of different arenas within which it occurs. Beyond regional shape, in the form of administrative boundaries, a region's symbolic shape (its name, flag etc.), and institutional shape (from executive and legislative bodies to regionally based companies, and particularly a regionally dominated media), combined with social practise and consciousness, institutionalise a region and a regional identity.

In this way although the administrative boundaries of the Federal Districts are intended to create economically viable regional groupings¹¹⁶ they may too, as Hale and Taagepera have suggested, 'promote the development of distinct macro-regional identities serving as eventual basis of independent state formations'¹¹⁷ able to work together and challenge the centre¹¹⁸. Far more than the inter-regional economic associations were able to do, the administrative formations of the Federal Districts (not least because they are supported by the centre) may act to unify fragmented regional forces. As inter-regional connections are developed and inter-regional networks of interaction are constructed regional linkages and so identities can more easily develop, particularly where the Federal District boundaries are in some alignment with

¹¹³ Novikov, "Between Space and Race: Rediscovering Russian Cultural Geography.", p.47

¹¹⁴ Batt, "Region, State and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe: Introduction.", p.8

¹¹⁵ Paasi, "Bounded Spaces in the Mobile World: Deconstructing 'Regional Identity'." , p.140

¹¹⁶ Castells and Kiselyova, "Russian Federalism and Siberian Regionalism, 1990-2000." , p.187

¹¹⁷ Hale and Taagepera, "Russia: Consolidation or Collapse?." , p.1115

¹¹⁸ To some, more limited degree the 11 economic regions , as well as the 8 regional associations had begun to develop this sort of role, although very weakly, not least due to the conflicting alternatives.

broad trans-regional cultural identities, such as in most of the North Caucasus, in Siberia and in the Far East¹¹⁹.

¹¹⁹ Equally however, such horizontal integration could serve as a bulwark against disintegration of the federation, see G P Herd, "Russia in Crisis: The Disintegration of the Federation?," *Conflict Studies Research Centre* E99 (1998).

By way of conclusion

This paper has sought to explore the notion of identity and how it relates to territory and legitimacy in the Russian context. It has sought to establish the potential strength of alternative regionally-based identities in the light of the weak Russia-wide civic identity and in reaction to the increasingly evident Russian ethno-centric identity. As Kolossov points out, 'when the regional identity proves stronger than the national identity, the danger of the state's disintegration increases'¹²⁰. In a transitional environment fluctuating and unconsolidated identities are open to organic development and constructive manipulation which can engender rapid alterations of focus and direction¹²¹ which may have major implications for the centre's authority and Russia's cohesion and so its territorial integrity.

The legitimacy of the Russian state in its present form is far from well established. In the context of economic weakness, socio-economic crisis, terrorist threat, drug trafficking, small arms proliferation, internal migration, corruption, and so on, it is not difficult to see how central authority may be undermined. Regional identities may provide arenas for the political mobilization of legitimate alternatives as did ethnically and economically motivated identities in the early 1990s. As witnessed just a decade and a half ago with the collapse of the Soviet Union, a lack of central authority, and the centre's inability to provide for the needs of the population, can indeed undermine the legitimacy of the state formation to the extent that it ceases to exist. Although perhaps not likely 'things do happen that have no precedent'¹²² and are not widely anticipated, as clearly evidenced in Russian history.

¹²⁰Kolossov, Galkina, and Krindach, "Territorial Identity and Interethnic Relations,...", p.8

¹²¹ This is particularly evident in relation to Dagestani attitudes towards Chechnya and Chechens in general, whom they now see as the main threat to their security, so encouraging allegiance with the centre, compared to previous to the 1994-96 war when Dagestani's tended to identify more closely with their Chechen 'brethren' in opposition to Moscow.

¹²² Hale and Taagepera, "Russia: Consolidation or Collapse?.", p.1112

Regionalist ambitions are defined by the political environment¹²³, just as they help to define it. Central and federal elites change, as do their policies, goals and motivations. Thus in the early 1990s the limits of the possible allowed for greater autonomy than they may appear to do now. But just as the political environment has altered since that time, so it will do so again. Factors exist to promote and reverse regionalist (and separatist) tendencies but the Chechen case remains testament to the fact that economic reliance on the centre will not necessarily discourage pursuit of an alternative path where a strong alternative identity exists and which can be manipulated by elites to appear as more legitimate bases upon which to determine a community's fate.

This is not to suggest that any of the regional identities or communities discussed in the course of this paper at the present time, provide actual or even likely arenas for separatism from Russia, but to elaborate where potential may exist in the context of many other factors which may promote such tendencies, and which range from the economic to the demographic. It is of course possible that regional (and even ethnic) identities may 'peacefully coexist with an all-embracing all-national one'¹²⁴. But at present no such (necessarily civic and multi-ethnic) one identity has been established as 'banal'¹²⁵. Rather a plurality of regional identity formations are in the process of 'institutionalising', consolidating and strengthening in the present environment of instability and insecurity. These could, under opportune circumstances, challenge the state-led identity variant for legitimacy and authority.

The very adoption of regional identities suggests that 'for some regions, the new Russia is an imperfect political entity'¹²⁶. Whether it is due to central Russian ethno-nationalism, central authoritarianism, central corruption, or simply a failure by the centre to address economic ills in the regions, regional identities may present a more appropriate and legitimate basis for political

¹²³ Herd, "Russia in Crisis: The Disintegration of the Federation?.", p.18

¹²⁴ Tolz, "Forging the Nation: National Identity and Nation Building in Post-Communist Russia.", p.1013

¹²⁵ See Andrew Wilson, "Elements of a Theory of Ukrainian Ethno-National Identities," *Nations and nationalism* 8, no. 1 (2002). for a discussion of similar phenomena in Ukraine

¹²⁶ Magomedov, "Regional Ideologies in the Context of International Relations.", p.23

authority in the eyes of either the regional elites or the regional publics. The present community of fate in Russia is not intrinsically integrated with the imagined community¹²⁷ and thus the legitimacy of those who rule that community of fate is open to question. Regional regimes may be perceived to be more democratic and legitimate than a corrupt and authoritarian centre. Regional elites may be able to mobilize regional identities against the centre in pursuit of economic goals, where regions are either economically weak (and so let down by the centre) or economically strong (and so held back by it). Regional trans-ethnic identities may be more appropriate in multi-ethnic regional communities, not to mention from a liberal-democratic perspective¹²⁸. In any or all of these circumstances it is far from unfeasible that certain regions or groups of regions would come to see an attachment to the Federation as a burden¹²⁹ and a detriment on their economic or social development in a globalising world and may seek their own alternative regional path.

¹²⁷ P J Taylor, "Relocating the Demos," in *Transnational Democracy. Political Spaces and Border Crossings*, ed. J Anderson (London: Routledge, 2002)., p.237

¹²⁸ From a western liberal democratic perspective multi-ethnic or trans-regional identities without exclusive ethnic bases should be more legitimate and representative than either Russian or other ethno-centrism which cannot but alienate some members of any community.

¹²⁹ Hale and Taagepera, "Russia: Consolidation or Collapse?," p.1114

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