



Working Paper No. 2

There are republics and then there are republics:

Who matters?

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**A New Russian Heartland?
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Abstract

Russia's federal system exhibits pronounced asymmetries of a formal and informal nature, both between groups of regions (either ethnically or territorially designated) and within these groups. This paper focuses on the asymmetry which pertains between the 21 ethnic republics at the apex of the institutional federal hierarchy in Russia, and seeks to determine which of these republics are the most important and why. A number of arenas of asymmetry are considered ranging from the economic and political to the personal and ethno-cultural. The changing dynamics of Russian asymmetry are also considered, in particular by a comparison of the Yeltsin and Putin periods, as characterised broadly by decentralising and recentralising trends respectively. The importance of maintaining state stability through regional stability is argued here to have had a crucial impact. This goal played a significant role in determining which arenas of asymmetry held most sway, and in combination with the changes in the domestic and international contexts, has had crucial influence in determining which of the republics matter the most.

By way of introduction

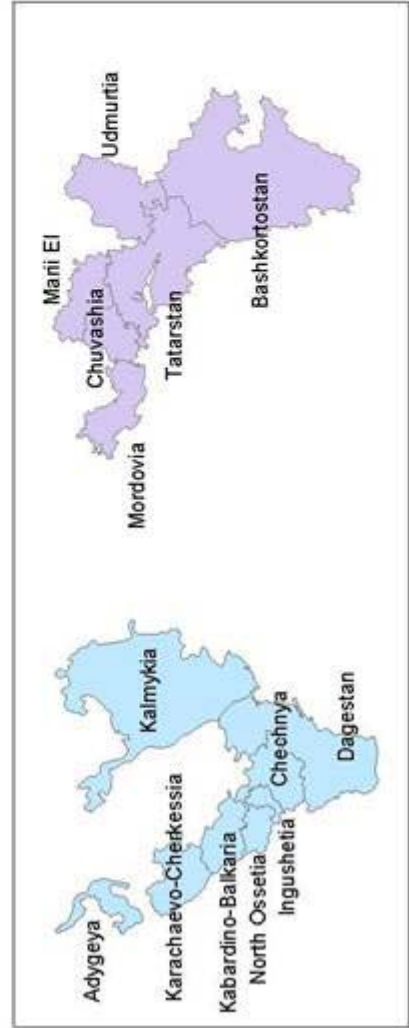
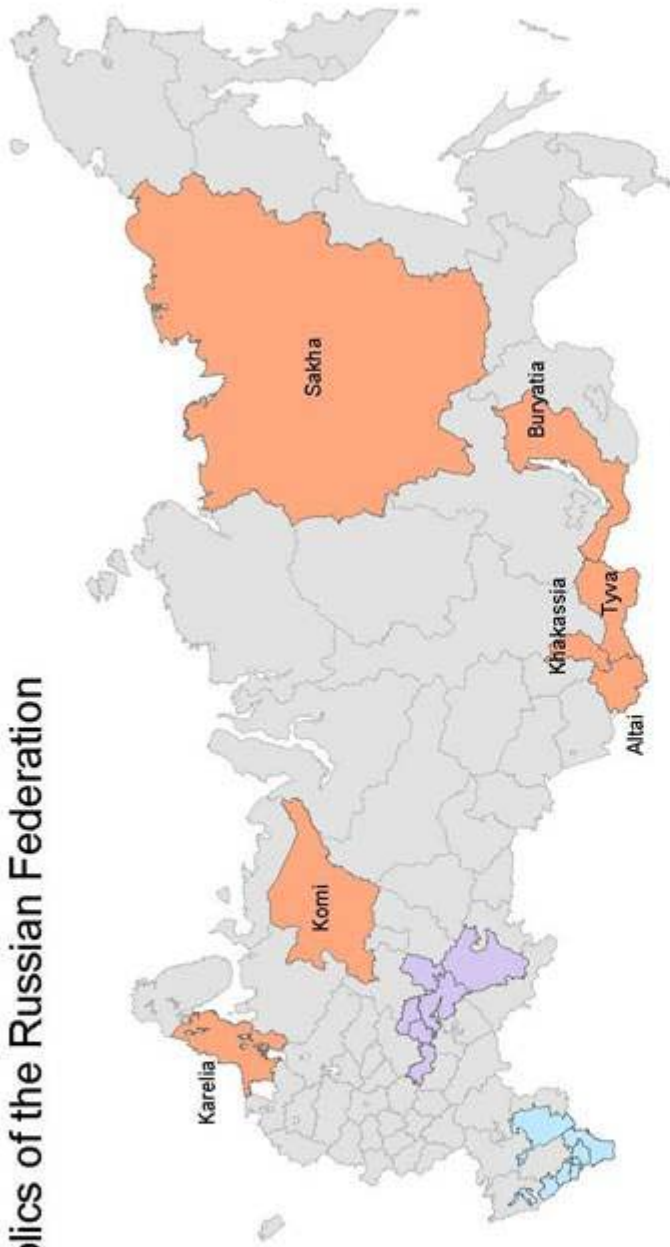
That Russia's federal system is asymmetric is much noted. The hierarchical federalism, within which some units have more rights than others, is an institutional legacy of Russia's Soviet past. Institutionally the Soviet system, which was federal in name if not substance, attributed greater rights to certain territorial units, based, in theory, on ethnic claims to self-determination and autonomy. The highest hierarchical level under the Soviet Union was occupied by those Union-Republics, such as Ukraine, Estonia, and Uzbekistan, which have now gained independence. Within the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) there also existed an institutional hierarchy, with the highest status being attributed to Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSRs), such as the Bashkir ASSR (now Bashkortostan) and Yakutia (now Sakha). These republics claimed their sovereignty as the Soviet Union collapsed, but have not claimed independence (Chechnya excepted) and now constitute the top layer of the Russian federal system.¹ These republics are geographically grouped to a significant degree (see map) and feature in five of Russia's seven federal districts.

They are; Sakha (Yakutia) in the Far Eastern federal district, Tyva, Khakassia, Buryatia and Altai in the Siberian federal district, Bashkortostan, Tatarstan, Marii El, Mordovia, Udmurtia and Chuvashia in the Volga federal district, Komi and Karelia in the North Western federal district and Adygeya, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia (-Alania), Kalmykia, Dagestan, Ingushetia and Chechnya in the Southern (North Caucasian) federal district.

The Soviet legacy of attributing greater rights to certain ethnically designated units was strongly reinforced in the Federal Treaty signed multilaterally in 1992 between three groups of regions according to their hierarchical ethno-territorial status.

¹ 20 such republics, four of which were elevated to such status only in July 1991, made declarations of sovereignty. Ingushetia and Chechnya have subsequently split, making 21 republics in total.

The Republics of the Russian Federation



Although the wide autonomy granted to the republics in contrast to other regions in these treaties² was not replicated in full in the 1993 constitution, the latter nonetheless retained some important features of institutionally established asymmetry behind a façade of equality. The 1993 constitution dropped reference to the republics' 'sovereign status', granted equal rights to all regions and established joint jurisdiction between the regional and federal authorities regarding ownership of land and natural resources but significantly granted the republics rights to determine their own form of state power (resulting in most establishing elected but authoritarian presidents³), adopt their own constitutions and their own laws etc.⁴ These same rights were not established for the territorially based oblasts and krajs which were simply treated as administrative units, rather than as political entities designed 'to give political rights to...specific ethnic minorities'.⁵ The series of bilateral agreements signed between 1994 and 1998 by Yeltsin and republican, followed by oblast, heads, further reinforced and codified a formal asymmetry in the Russian Federation. Some privileged republics won important concessions from the federal authorities in areas such as self-government, tax and export contributions, ownership of natural resources, the appointment (or election) or sub national officials such as the judiciary and procuracy, the stationing of conscripts, republican 'citizenship' and special language and cultural rights.⁶ The republics appeared able to use their special privileges to circumvent federal laws and the not entirely inaccurate perception pertained that the republics were being privileged per se over oblasts, garnering

² In the 1992 Treaty republics were granted the right to adopt their own constitutions, given wide autonomy over republican budgets, foreign trade, ownership and use of natural resources and land. See Hughes, J., (2001), "Managing Secession Potential in the Russian Federation", *Regional and federal studies*, 11, No.3: 36-68, p.47

³ By contrast, non-republican executives were appointed by Yeltsin, until 1996 at least, since when elected executives have been the norm in all regions regardless of ethno-territorial status.

⁴ See Hughes, "Managing secession potential..." p.49

⁵ Remington, T., (1999), *Politics in Russia*, London, Longman, p.59

⁶ Lynn, N. J., (1997), "The Republics of the Russian Federation: National Territorial Change" in *Geography and Transition in the Post-Soviet Republics*, edited by J. Bradshaw Michael, Chichester, UK, Wiley, 59-72, p.61 and Solnick, S., (1995), "Federal Bargaining in Russia: Why have Russia's republics received better treatment than its oblasts and krajs?", *East European Constitutional Review*, 4: 52-58, p.52

much resentment from the non-republican governments, and unilateral short-lived declarations of republican status in certain prominent oblasts.⁷

All things being equal it appeared that ethnicity, and more specifically republican status could be used as an effective bargaining tool to win certain privileges and rights. However, the reality was (and is) of all things unequal. Disparity abounds in many forms in Russia as elsewhere. Russia's many regions exhibit differing historical-cultural traditions, differing ethnic demographics, different religious affiliations, and different forms and intensities of regional identity. Economically, regions have different capacities (in part resulting from the uneven allocation of resources in the Soviet planned economy),⁸ different natural resource bases,⁹ and different levels of development and specialization lead by differing reform processes. Geographically, regions are of different sizes, have different climates and are differing distances from the federal centre and international markets. Politically, regional elites relations differ in their outlooks, affiliations and choices, as well as in their relations with each other, with the federal authorities in general and the President in particular. Amongst all these factors of asymmetry institutionalised constitutional status is but one bargaining tool.

Likewise, the republics as a group are far from unified, geographically, economically, politically or culturally. Despite their institutional position at the apex of the federal structure, equality between the republics is relative.¹⁰ Differences between one republic and another may be no less than between one republic and an oblast, or indeed between one oblast and another. It was not necessarily the case that ethnic republics en masse received more preferential treatment than others per se, but undoubtedly the case that some republics were

⁷ Most notably a Urals Republic was declared by Sverdlovsk governor Eduard Rossel in 1993. See Broers, L., (1998), "Bilateralism versus multilateralism: the dynamics of Russian regionalism", *Slovo*, 10, No.1-2: 21-48, p.25

⁸ Filippov, M. and O. Shvetsova, (1999), "Asymmetric bilateral bargaining in the new Russian Federation - A path-dependence explanation", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 32, No.1: 61-76, p.62

⁹ Alexseev, M., (1999), "Introduction: Challenges to the Russian Federation" in *Center-Periphery Conflict in Post-Soviet Russia. A Federation Imperiled*, edited by M. Alexseev, New York, St Martin's Press, 1-14, p.6

¹⁰ Broers, "Bilateralism v. multilateralism:..." , p.35

'more equal than others'.¹¹ This was accentuated by a bilateral treaty process, which by the end of 1998 had seen eleven republics sign agreements¹² mandating varying privileges. In particular, as more and more agreements were signed, the range and depth of powers ceded to the regional authorities declined. Thus while Tatarstan signed its agreement as a 'state united with the Russian Federation' and Bashkortostan as a 'sovereign state', Chuvashia signed merely as a 'subject of the Russian Federation, and Komi as a 'region of the Russian Federation'.¹³ Clearly all things were not equal between republics and once a bilateral treaty had been signed 'a subject's status and privileges [were] derived from that treaty, rather than [being] an intrinsic corollary of republican or provincial status'.¹⁴ This paper seeks to determine which of the ethnic republics have gained privileged status since the end of the Soviet Union and why.

¹¹ Solnick, "Federal Bargaining in Russia:..." p.54 and Kahn, J., (2002), *Federalism, democratization, and the rule of law in Russia*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p.6

¹² They were Tatarstan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Bashkortostan (in 1994), North Ossetia, Sakha, Buryatia and Udmurtia (in 1995), Komi and Chuvashia (in 1996), Chechnya (in 1997) and Marii El (in 1998). See Kahn, *Federalism, democratization...*, p.158

¹³ *Ibid.* pp.164-5

¹⁴ Broers, "Bilateralism v. multilateralism:..." , p.42

Table 1: Selected Characteristics of Russia's Republics¹⁵

Republic	Federal District	Territory (sq. km)	Population (000s) (Census 2002)	% Urban (Census 2002)	% Titular (Census 1989)	% Contribution to Total GRP in 2001	Resource Industries as a % of Industrial Production
Sakha (Yakutia)	Far Eastern	3,103,200	948.1	64.2	33.4	1.28	85.0
Karelia	North Western	172,400	716.7	75.0	10.1	0.43	66.8
Komi	Western	415,900	1019	75.3	23.3	1.13	84.4
Buryatia	Siberian	351,300	981	59.6	24.0	0.39	24.9
Gorno-Altai	Siberian	92,600	202.9	26.4	31.0	0.07	27.3
Khakassia	Siberian	61,900	546.1	70.8	11.1	0.25	59.5
Tyva	Siberian	170,500	305.5	51.7	64.3	0.06	46.5
Adygeya	Southern	7,600	447	53.8	22.1	0.09	26.3
Chechnya	Southern	15,000	1100.3	34.5	66.0	No Data	No Data
Dagestan	Southern	50,300	2584.2	42.9	76.7*	0.40	30.4
Ingushetia	Southern	4,300	468.9	42.8	74.5	0.06	66.1
Kabardino-Balkaria	Southern	12,500	900.5	56.6	57.6†	0.27	11.5
Kalmykia	Southern	76,100	292.4	44.3	45.4	0.15	45.1
Karachaevo-Cherkessia	Southern	14,100	439.7	44.1	40.9‡	0.09	36.5
North Ossetia-Alania	Southern	8,000	709.9	65.4	53.0	0.19	26.4
Bashkortostan	Volga	143,600	4102.9	64.1	21.9	2.38	60.9
Chuvashia	Volga	18,300	1313.9	60.6	67.8	0.43	12.1
Marii El	Volga	23,200	728	63.2	43.3	0.20	19.9
Mordovia	Volga	26,200	888.7	59.8	32.5	0.31	13.2
Tatarstan	Volga	68,000	3779.8	73.8	48.5	2.79	56.2
Udmurtia	Volga	42,100	1570.5	69.7	30.9	0.88	38.7

* Includes Avars, dargins, Kumyks, Lezgins, Laks and Tabasarans

† Includes Kabardins (48.2%) and Balkars (9.4%)

‡ Includes Karachai (31.2%) and Cherkes (9.7%)

¹⁵ See Goskomstat Rossii Census 2002 Results, and Goskomstat Rossii, (2002), "Regiony Rossii: sotsial'no-ekonomicheskie pokazateli." Goskomstat Rossii, Moscow, and Orttung, R. W., D. N. Lussier, et al., Eds, (2000), The Republics and Regions of the Russian Federation: A Guide to Politics, Policies, and Leaders, Armonk, NY & London, M E Sharpe

The dynamics of republican asymmetry under Yeltsin: Who mattered?

Economic factors figure heavily in Russia's federal asymmetry. The republics exhibit large differences in terms of economic development, resource endowment, economically active populations and industrial structure.¹⁶ Hanson has identified two key groups of 'winners' from the transition to a market economy, the leading possessors of natural resources (including the republics of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Sakha) and leading financial or gateway regions (among which figure no republics).¹⁷ Perhaps the economic situation in a particular region or republic is far more important in terms of power or autonomy than is any legal hierarchy of units pertaining to ethnic inheritance.¹⁸ Greater wealth is often translated into greater political power¹⁹ and economic resources can be powerful bargaining tools, provided the region retains significant fiscal control. In such instances, richer regions, especially those possessing substantial natural resources, are less reliant on federal subsidies than poor regions, and so are financially more independent. Moreover their importance to the centre in terms of federal revenues²⁰ gives them a powerful bargaining tool in negotiations with the federal government²¹.

¹⁶ Kirkow, P., (1996), "Distributional coalitions, budgetary problems and fiscal federalism in Russia", *Communist Economies & Economic Transformation*, 8, No.3: 277-98, p.291

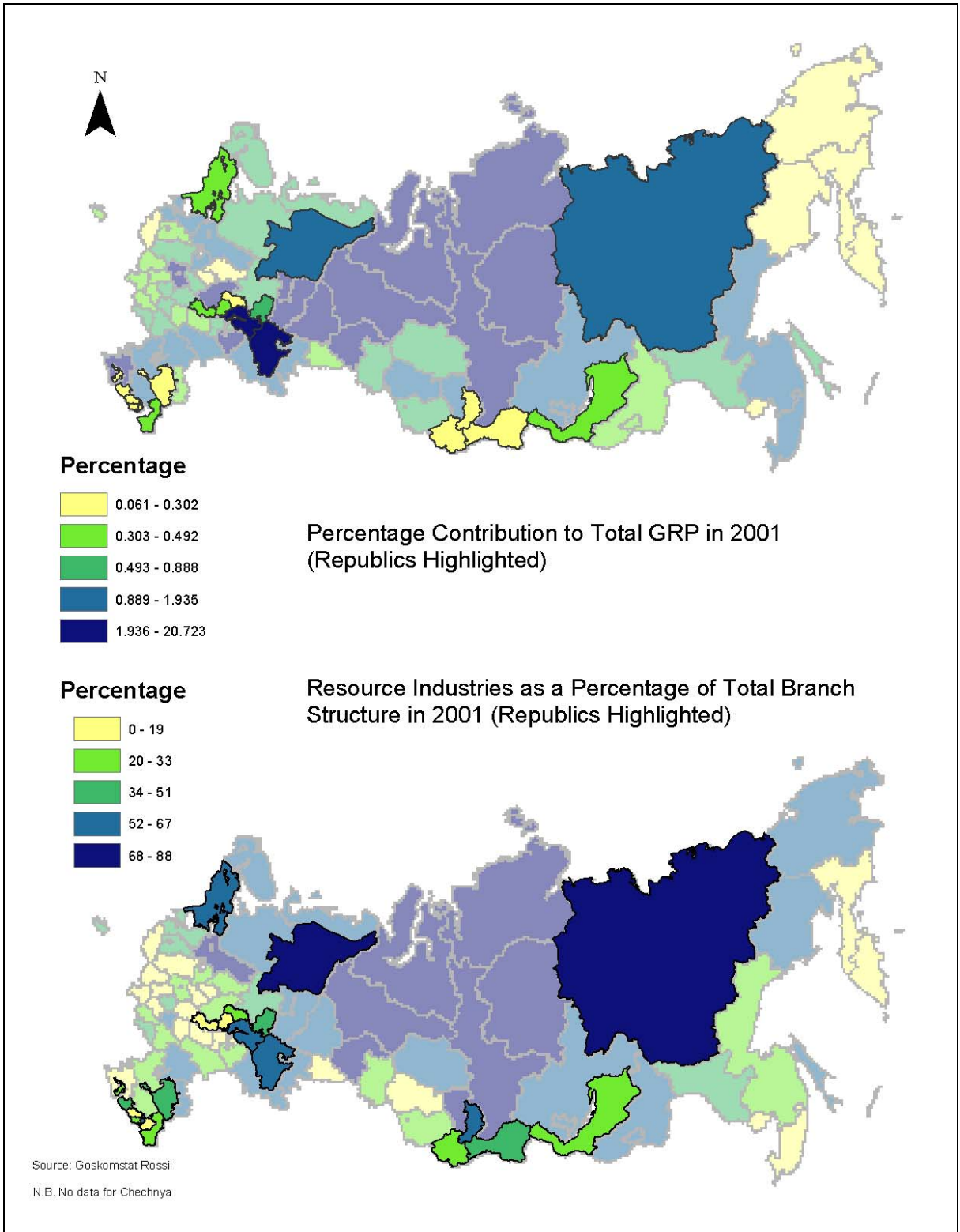
¹⁷ Hanson, P., (1996), "Russia's 89 Federal Subjects", *Post Soviet Perspectives*, 4, No.8 as quoted in Filippov and Shvetsova, "Asymmetric bilateral bargaining..." pp.65-66

¹⁸ von Beyne, K., (2000), "Federalism in Russia" in *Federalism and Political Performance*, edited by U. Wachendorfer-Schmidt, London & New York, Routledge/ECPR Studies in European Political Science, 23-39, p.29

¹⁹ Kempton, D. R., (2001), "Russian Federalism: Continuing Myth or Political Salvation?" *Demokratizatsiya*, 9, No.2: 201-42, p.221

²⁰ As Filippov and Shvetsova note, more than 50% of all taxes remitted to the federal budget came from just ten regions in 1997, including just two republics (Tatarstan and Bashkortostan) (the others being Moscow, Khanty-Mansi, Moscow Oblast, Yamal-Nenets, St. Petersburg, Samara, Sverdlovsk and Perm, see Filippov and Shvetsova, "Asymmetric bilateral bargaining..." p.65

²¹ Ross, C. and R. Sakwa, (1999), *Conference Paper: The Republicanisation of Russia: Federalism and Democratisation in Transition*, Political Studies Association, Nottingham, pp.11-12



Three of Russia's ethnic republics (as well as possibly Chechnya and Komi) have substantial wealth, primarily due to their industrial and natural resource bases. They are Tatarstan (oil and industrial manufacturing), Bashkortostan (oil refining and transit) and Sakha (primarily, diamonds, but also other minerals, especially gold).²² These three have arguably been the most effective in negotiating advantageous bilateral agreements with the federal government, suggesting that economically more important regions have indeed been able to use this leverage to their advantage.²³ These republics undoubtedly secured the best deals when it came to bilateral treaties with Yeltsin. They gained the most in terms of expanded rights, particularly in regards to control of local resources²⁴ and were the greatest beneficiaries of inter-budgetary asymmetry²⁵. They were able to re-negotiate the tax percentages which had to be 'shared upwards',²⁶ such that, Tatarstan for example, was able to retain some 75% of the tax revenues collected on its territory, which was approximately 50% more than that to which other regions were entitled.²⁷ Sakha too agreed special provisions, such that it was allowed to retain locally collected federal taxes,²⁸ and also gained substantial control over its diamond industry²⁹. Tatarstan was also able to negotiate limited control over its natural resources, and greater independence in its foreign economic activity.³⁰ Bashkortostan gained significant control over its own budget, its judiciary and prosecutor.³¹ All three, as well as Chechnya, were permitted to establish their own national banks.³² All three (along with many

²² Hughes, "Managing secession potential..." p.42

²³ Bradshaw, M. J., (1996), "An Atlas of the Economic Performance of Russia's Regions." Russian Regional Research Group, University of Birmingham, Working Paper 2, TACIS, Birmingham, p.3

²⁴ Bahry, D., (2002), "Ethnicity and equality in post-communist economic transition: Evidence from Russia's republics", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 54, No.5: 673-99, p.673

²⁵ Hahn, G. M., (2003), "The past, present, and future of the Russian federal state", *Demokratizatsiya*, 11, No.3: 343-62, p.349

²⁶ Hanson, P., A. Bolevskiy, et al., (2000), "Federal Government Responses to Regional Economic Change" in *Regional Economic Change in Russia*, edited by P. Hanson and J. Bradshaw Michael, Gloucester, UK, Edward Elgar, 97-132, p.105

²⁷ Hahn, "The past, present, and future..." p.347

²⁸ Lynn, N. J. and P. Fryer, (1998), "National-territorial change in the republics of the Russian North", *Political Geography*, 17, No.5: 567-88, p.580

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.581

³⁰ Solnick, "Federal Bargaining in Russia:..." p.55

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.55

³² Kahn, *Federalism, democratization...*, p.186

others) passed constitutions establishing the primacy of republican law over federal law, in contravention to the 1993 federal constitution.

Under Yeltsin it seems to have been the case that the 'key' ethnic republics were defined in terms of economic power, and more specifically natural resource endowments. Indeed Nicholson has argued that *only* those republics with substantial natural resources (that is Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Sakha) have really been able to benefit from their privileged position, while the other republics largely languish at the bottom of the federal heap, republican status or not.³³ Asymmetries of power and degrees of autonomy were seen as dependent on asymmetries of economics; the few rich republics therefore benefited the most in direct reflection of their economic importance. Richer republics 'on the whole received treaties earlier, and with greater privileges, than poorer ones,³⁴ while economically poorer republics arguably had to 'ensure good relations with the Kremlin to ensure the continued flow of funds'³⁵. Republics such as Karachaevo-Cherkessia, Dagestan, Altai, Tyva and Ingushetia, which received the highest levels of federal subsidy at the peak of the 'parade of treaties', therefore, did not receive treaties themselves.³⁶ Lavrov has shown that nine of the ten republics that did not receive bilateral treaties were substantially subsidised by the federal government.³⁷

Nonetheless it is misleading to attribute too much importance to economic wealth. Economic bargaining chips were not the only dynamics at work just as institutional asymmetry was not.³⁸ If economics had been the only important factor a number of very rich non-republican regions, such as Yamal-Nenets and Khanty-Mansi, would have been expected to sign bilateral agreements first and to have been awarded the greatest benefits, regardless of their oblast status.

³³ Nicholson, M., (1999), *Towards a Russia of the regions*, Oxford, Oxford University Press for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, p.25

³⁴ Kahn, *Federalism, democratization...*p.161

³⁵ Ross and Sakwa, *Conference Paper: The Republicanisation of Russia*, p.16

³⁶ Kahn, *Federalism, democratization...*p.161

³⁷ Quoted in *Ibid.* The exception being Karelia

³⁸ Kahn warns against an excessive focus on economic bargaining chips. See *Ibid.*

Republics such as Karelia and Khakassia which have significant natural resource wealth should have been able to negotiate more successfully and likewise poor republics such as Marii El, Buryatia and North Ossetia would not have been able to successfully negotiate bilateral treaties at all. Yet Buryatia's 1995 treaty, for example, was more than just symbolic, providing special privileges to the economically depressed region in the form of financial aid and credit to stimulate growth.³⁹ Moreover Yeltsin effectively turned a blind eye to the proliferation of extra-constitutional republican laws across Russia rather than only in the economically rich republics. Tyva established its own power over questions of war and peace, as well as over requirements for military service (along with Bashkortostan and Sakha) while Buryatia, Kalmykia, Ingushetia, amongst others, claimed the right to declare emergency situations on their territories. Dagestan, Tyva, and Ingushetia, amongst others, established the right to conduct their own foreign policy and sign international agreements.⁴⁰ The relative importance of Russia's republics then cannot be determined by economic strength per se and rather Kahn argues that only the extreme cases can be explained by the gap between rich and poor republics, and that other dynamics were also at work in the federal hierarchy.

Economic strength, self-determination and sovereignty were inherently linked and reinforced by a state constitution which seemed to legitimise special treatment for ethno-national entities. The strategic importance of economic wealth was therefore closely linked to questions of cohesion and territorial integrity. During the 1990's it appeared that certain ethnic republics could threaten the integrity of the Russian state. The richest republics were not only more able to threaten secession, given the independence their wealth bought them, but their secession would bring the more serious consequences for the Russian state. Though only a few regions (and even less republics) could even begin to afford to stand alone as independent economic entities, Russia could not afford, literally, to lose these regions, yet it looked in danger of doing so. The

³⁹ Alexseev, M., (1999), "Asymmetric Russia: Promises and Dangers" in *Center-Periphery Conflict in Post-Soviet Russia. A Federation Imperiled*, edited by M. Alexseev, New York, St Martin's Press, 247-80, p.270

⁴⁰ Kapustina, L. M., (2001), "Evolyutsia otnosheniy tsentra i regionov Rossii", *Region*, 3: 35-43, p.36

most important republics were those that were economically powerful, but not necessarily because of their wealth per se, but because of what they could threaten thereby. An ability to threaten Russia's integrity stemmed not simply from having the economic strength to go it alone, but from being able to defend such action in the name of an ethno-national group. Such groups were inevitably strongest in the republics, where the economic strength to separate from Russia could be conjoined with the nationally-mobilised will to do so. Coming hot on the heels of the collapse of the Soviet state, and in the context of Yugoslavia, anxieties about the potential break-up of the Russian Federation as a result of ethnic republican separatism were widespread and in part well founded.

Although in theory all republics could use ethnic claims to cultural and economic autonomy to distinguish them from other regions, in practice only some were able to successfully do so. Even those republics with the highest percentages of titular inhabitants, such as Tyva, Chuvashia and Marii El, were not necessarily the most powerful in this regard. Indeed Solnick has shown that the first treaties (and the most significant) were not signed with the 'most ethnic'.⁴¹ Nationalist issues were organically less dominant in some republics and less well mobilised by elites in others. Both factors made a difference. The ethnic card was less convincing a tool in republics such as Komi, Karelia, Khakassia and Kalmykia than in say Tyva, Tatarstan and the North Caucasian republics. The strength or otherwise of ethno-national identity (however mobilised) within a given republic impacted its ability to threaten state cohesion and so to play the ethnic card in negotiations with the federal authorities. Therefore despite being relatively wealthy (compared to the southern republics at least) republics such as Komi and Karelia were able to extract few concessions because they simply did not pose a viable threat which needed placating. Komi nonetheless used ethnic rent-seeking in an attempt to mask 'the economics-orientated localism of its largely Russian population',⁴² indicating the perceived power of ethnically-based bargaining in negotiations with the centre.

⁴¹ Broers, "Bilateralism v. multilateralism:..." p.38

⁴² Ibid., pp.40-1

In certain republics the ethnic card was considerably more than just a functional 'veneer'⁴³ and it was this that gave credibility and strength to the threat presented. Ethnic identities ran deep in some communities and certainly deeper than allegiance to the Russian state for many. In this regard the ethnic republics did (and indeed still do) have additional requirements and possible circumstances which genuinely increased their importance in regard to state stability and cohesion. Greater cultural rights were demanded for their own sake, and not just insofar as they aided the achievement of economic goals. Ethno-national sovereignty claims went further than simply economics and addressed questions of citizenship, sovereignty, republican territorial integrity, the primacy of republican laws and linguistic, education and cultural rights for republican populations.⁴⁴ Indeed Gorenburg has demonstrated that in certain republics, most notably in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan (as well as Chuvashia), economic sovereignty claims were used to mask steady progress in the cultural sphere which benefited the titular population, rather than the other way around.⁴⁵ 'Bashkirisation' and 'Tatarisation' remain ongoing processes exhibiting strong cultural dimensions,⁴⁶ and provoking highly contentious debates regarding, for example, the latinisation of the Tatar alphabet and the rights of Muslim women to wear headscarves in their passport photos. Such cultural claims are not only defended by those republics with the most economic wealth. Sharlet has noted that in the face of Putin's assault on republican constitutions even Buryatia held out for nearly two years despite its huge dependence on federal subsidies and its relatively compliant ethnic elite,⁴⁷ while Tyva only complied when threatened with the cutting off of its federal subsidies⁴⁸.

⁴³ Hughes, "Managing secession potential..." p.42

⁴⁴ Stoner-Weiss, K., (1999), "Central weakness and provincial autonomy: Observations on the devolution process in Russia", *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 15, No.1: 87-106, p.91

⁴⁵ Gorenburg, D., (1999), "Regional separatism in Russia: Ethnic mobilisation or power grab?" *Europe-Asia Studies*, 51, No.2: 245-74, p.259

⁴⁶ Hughes, "Managing secession potential..." p.43

⁴⁷ Sharlet, R., (2003), "Resisting Putin's federal reforms on the legal front", *Demokratizatsiya*, 11, No.3: 335-43, p.341

⁴⁸ EastWest Institute, (2001), "Russian Regional Report 16 May." Volume 6, No. 18,

To dismiss cultural claims as purely functional risks encouraging resentment and disenchantment from those who hold their ethnic and cultural heritages dear. Moreover ethnic factors may well see an increase in prominence in the coming years. The ongoing processes of cultural 'rebirth' in many republics are serving to reinforce ethnic identities at a time when the Russian-wide identity is particularly weak and significantly seems to be built around a Russian ethno-centric conception. Most republics are encouraging and expanding titular language education, as well as rewriting histories around the titular nation. Republican parliamentary seats are frequently disproportionately occupied by members of the titular nation,⁴⁹ and language requirements on presidential office have favoured titular candidates⁵⁰. In addition in many republics from Komi to Tatarstan, positive discrimination in the state apparatus,⁵¹ as well as less frequently in educational and industrial jobs serves to privilege members of the titular nation.⁵² All in all, these measures are reinforcing ethnic titular identities, and encouraging re-identification with the titular group. If ethnic identities become stronger, and if ethnic elites maintain control of both political,⁵³ and increasingly economic spheres of life in the republics,⁵⁴ the potential for these ethnic groups to mobilise in a way which may threaten the cohesion of the Russian state cannot be ignored, and to do so may prove a risky strategy⁵⁵. Ethnicity may well

⁴⁹ Bahry indicates that the titular shares of public officialdom increased across the board in Tatarstan, Sakha and North Ossetia, for instance the latter had a 53% titular population in 1989, but titular members occupied 70% of the seats in 1990, rising to 86% in 1995. See Bahry, "Ethnicity and equality..." p.677. In Siberia also, Tyvians occupied 88% of parliamentary seats in 1997, compared to 70% of the population, and in Buryatia 50% of parliamentary seats despite Russians constituting 70% of the republican population. See Balzer, M. M., (1999), "Dilemmas of Federalism in Siberia" in *Center-Periphery Conflict in Post-Soviet Russia. A Federation Imperiled*, edited by M. Alexseev, New York, St Martin's Press, 131-66, p.139 and p.144

⁵⁰ At least until Putin's efforts to bring such constitutions into line with federal norms disallowing such discrimination, republics such as Bashkortostan, Chuvashia and Tatarstan all required presidential candidates to be bilingual in Russian and the titular language, see Gorenburg, "Regional Separatism", p.260

⁵¹ Lynn and Fryer, "National-territorial change..." , pp.581-2

⁵² Gorenburg, "Regional Separatism", p.260

⁵³ Gorenburg suggests that Tatar domination of the elite leadership may reach a ratio as high as 80:20, while between one half and two thirds of the top offices in Bashkortostan are occupied by Bashkirs despite their constituting less than one quarter of the republic population. See *Ibid.*, pp.263-4

⁵⁴ Bahry notes that although indigenization is occurring in economic as well as political leadership, generally greater diversity exists in economic spheres, and if anything old cultural divisions of labour which give an advantage to Russian and russified individuals pertain. This situation does seem to be changing , albeit more slowly than in the political arena. See Bahry, D., (2002), "Ethnicity and equality in post-communist economic transition: Evidence from Russia's republics", *Ibid.*, 54, No.5: 673-99

⁵⁵ A warning Mr Putin may do well to heed

be increasing in importance when it comes to who matters in the Russian Federation.

Ethno-national strength was a more powerful bargaining tool than economic strength alone, since it gave credence to a threat aimed at the state's integrity. Effectively, 'by playing on anxieties about state integrity and the potential 'bandwagon effect' of protests and opposition, regional executives could blackmail federal executives into providing fiscal appeasements'.⁵⁶ Essentially, those republics which appeared most threatening economically *and* ethnically in terms of Russia's cohesion were bought off by the federal government using bilateral treaties and inter-budgetary transfers. Anxiety about state integrity laid the ground for the ethnic card to be played, and rewarded, by republican elites in pursuit of greater autonomy for their regions and power for themselves. Bilateral deals were successfully therefore used to encourage these powerful republics back into the fold and maintain the cohesion of the state. These republics were favoured effectively in exchange for their commitment to the territorial integrity of the Russian state.⁵⁷

Opposition, manifested in sovereignty declarations, anti-Yeltsin voting, public opposition to Yeltsin and so on, became a political bargaining tool which was rewarded.⁵⁸ As Kirkow argues 'equalisation measures were used as a political tool by the centre to appease opposition leaderships in the provinces' such that for instance, those who had opposed the 1993 constitution (mainly republics) were 'rewarded' with higher budgetary transfers.⁵⁹ What has come to be known as 'fiscal appeasement'⁶⁰ used subsidies, transfers, tax breaks and other 'off-budget' aid programmes to selectively defuse crises and reduce the appeal of

⁵⁶ Kahn, Federalism, democratization...p.163

⁵⁷ Kirkow, "Distributional coalitions,..." p.282

⁵⁸ Treisman, D., (1998), "Deciphering Russia's Federal Finance: Fiscal Appeasement in 1995 and 1996", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 50, No.5: 893-906, p.893

⁵⁹ Kirkow, "Distributional coalitions,..." p.293

⁶⁰ Following Treisman, D., (1996), "The Politics of Intergovernmental Transfers in Post-Soviet Russia", *British Journal of Political Science*, 26, No.3: 299-335, and Treisman, D., (2000), *After the deluge: regional crises and political consolidation in Russia.*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, pp.47-80

separatism in the most assertive and credible troublemaking republics⁶¹.

Economic privileges were used to placate the most politically important republics as determined by their economic and ethno-cultural strength and their ability to threaten state cohesion and territorial integrity. In this context Tatarstan, with its strong sense of republican identity, reinforced by significant economic wealth, became the obvious contender for the top spot amongst the republics under Yeltsin. Tatarstan was a championer of republican rights across the board but nonetheless demanded (and received) a special relationship as 'primus inter pares' when it came to republican-federal agreements.⁶²

Conversely as the 1996 presidential election approached fiscal appeasement was used less as a tool to protect state cohesion and more to keep Yeltsin in the presidency. What mattered was simple political patronage and support, offered by the regions in exchange for economic rewards.⁶³ Treisman notes a clear increase in net per capita transfers in 1996 for those regions (all non-republics) which signed treaties between January and June of 1996.⁶⁴

As the 1996 election campaign indicates, personal factors could also be crucial to determining who was the most important, or at least most privileged. Where previously the personal ability and strategy of a republican leader could be crucial in mobilising popular support for ethno-cultural or economic autonomy, and in representing that to the central authorities, by 1996 the ability of an individual governor (republican or oblast) to guarantee electoral support for the president was crucial. The relative importance of the republics was in no small part a function of the effectiveness of individual leaders in conducting personal

⁶¹ Treisman, "Deciphering Russia's Federal Finance:..." , p.893

⁶² Kahn, Federalism, democratization...p.154

⁶³ Solnick has argued that the treaties signed in the run-up to the 1996 election in particular reflected the political importance of respective regional leaders and were used as bargaining chips by the centre in exchange for political favours, such as delivering electoral support for Yeltsin. This certainly applies to most non-republican treaties which were signed during the re-election campaign but would appear to be less relevant in regard to those republics who had already signed treaties before the start of 1996 and whose favouring in this way presumably reflected some other reason of importance as elaborated above. See Solnick, "Federal Bargaining in Russia:..." as cited in Filippov and Shvetsova, "Asymmetric bilateral bargaining..." pp.62-3, footnote 2.

⁶⁴ Kahn, Federalism, democratization...p.162, and Treisman, After the deluge: regional crises and political consolidation in Russia., p.74

relations with the president, and of their ability to manipulate whatever ethnic, economic or political bargaining tools were at their disposal.

Personal, political, economic and ethno-cultural-identity factors therefore were closely entwined under Yeltsin in a multi-vector designation of republican importance. But essentially those republics that seemed to pose the greatest threat to the Russian state mattered most, in terms far more extensive than simply their economic contribution to the central purse. There seems little reason to diverge from Kahn's conclusion written in regard to bilateral treaties but relevant to the wider scene.

'The treaty process favoured republics whose executives had visible control over their republics but who were astute enough to articulate demands that left room for negotiation and compromise. Republics that possessed substantial natural or industrial resources were more likely to have their appeals heard by the centre than those that were dependent on federal aid. Republics destabilised by internal leadership struggles or whose leaders misjudged the prevailing political winds in making their demands were less successful. The problem with a strategy of appeasement is ascertaining who should (or can) be appeased. Republics that successfully balanced menace with moderation in their signals to the federal centre fared best'.⁶⁵

In Russia under Yeltsin by and large, republican success in this regard can be attributed most keenly to Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Sakha, whom not only had the economic and historical-cultural tools to bargain with but whose leaders played the game most effectively proving unafraid to use the ethnic card. Ethno-cultural, economic and political conditions favoured these republics in their relations with the centre.

⁶⁵ Kahn, Federalism, democratization...p.164

Republics under Putin: Who matters now?

The balance of personal, economic, ethno-cultural and political factors, as they relate to the ability (or will) to threaten Russia's cohesion, no longer necessarily rests with the same republics as in the past decade. Certainly Putin's vision of how best to maintain stability differs from Yeltsin's appeasement strategy. Putin has moved against the legal asymmetry of all the republics, most notably against those perceived in the 1990's to be the most powerful, the so-called 'key' ethnic republics. Putin has retracted many accrued advantages by insisting on legal harmonisation, retaking control of the fiscal purse strings, and cancelling or failing to renew all but a few bilateral treaties (which have been mostly renegotiated), while revoking many tax concessions in the process (for instance in both Tatarstan and Bashkortostan). He has rallied against legal and economic asymmetry and this has hit the republics fairly hard.

Those republics which under Yeltsin had won the most concessions and negotiated the most lucrative power sharing agreements have found themselves fighting hard to retain the unofficial asymmetry and their privileged autonomy and the centre has driven substantial revisions to republican laws.⁶⁶ For instance, although Bashkortostan's initial constitutional revisions in November 2000 actually served to reinforce the republic's special status and sovereignty claim and incorporated the text of its bilateral power-sharing agreement,⁶⁷ a second revision in December 2002 made numerous concessions to the federal government, dropping all mention of 'sovereignty',⁶⁸ claims to republican citizenship, the exclusive right to distribute the republic's natural resources⁶⁹. Tatarstan adopted a new constitution in April 2002 which removed reference to the republic's international status, and the superiority of republican laws over federal ones but which failed to make the adjustments necessary to bring it fully

⁶⁶ Hahn, "The past, present, and future..." p.351

⁶⁷ Kahn, Federalism, democratization...pp.271-277

⁶⁸ Sovereignty was replaced by 'statehood' which Bashkiri authorities described as a synonym.

⁶⁹ EastWest Institute, (2003), "Russian Regional Report 16 January." Volume 8, No. 1,

into line with the federal constitution.⁷⁰ It retained the concept of limited sovereignty, provisions for republican citizenship, bilingualism of the president and fifty or so further violations and negotiations with the centre continue.⁷¹ Sakha has also strongly resisted revisions of its constitution and power-sharing concessions, passing a revised constitution in February 2001 which in fact asserted its exclusive ownership of its diamond, other mineral and hydrocarbon resources more strongly than before, adding newly conflicting clauses,⁷² and defending its bilingual language requirement for parliamentary representatives.⁷³

Some thorny issues remain as bones of contention between Moscow and these republican elites and neither seems willing to give them up.⁷⁴ Tatarstan for example is simply unwilling to give up its treaty-based relations with Moscow, and is slowly working on amendments instead.⁷⁵ Crucially the Russian Constitutional Court ruled in July 2003 that only it was able to determine whether or not a regional constitution violated federal norms and that ordinary courts did not have such jurisdiction.⁷⁶ This means that republican elites will be able to adopt constitutional laws in violation of the federal constitution in the knowledge that it will be some considerable time before the one court in the country with the power to overturn them will get to that particular case. In response to this decision Bashkortostan has announced that it wishes to challenge the earlier court ruling, made by a lower court, that certain clauses were in violation and in particular wishes to revise reference to its 'sovereignty'.⁷⁷ The battle lines may yet be redrawn.

⁷⁰Sharafutdinova, G. and A. Magomedov, (2004), "Volga Federal Okrug" in *The Dynamics of Russian Politics: Putin's Reform of Federal-Regional Relations*, Volume 1, edited by P. Reddaway and R. W. Orttung, Lanham, UK, Rowman and Littlefield, 153-86, p.160

⁷¹ EastWest Institute, (2003), "Russian Regional Report 8 April." Volume 8, No. 5,

⁷² Sharlet, "Resisting Putin's federal reforms on the legal front", pp.341-2

⁷³Wishnick, E., (2004), "Far East Federal Okrug" in *The Dynamics of Russian Politics: Putin's Reform of Federal-Regional Relations*, Volume 1, edited by P. Reddaway and R. W. Orttung, Lanham, UK, Rowman and Littlefield, 243-75, pp.253-4

⁷⁴ Nelson, L. D. and I. Y. Kuzes, (2003), "Political and Economic Coordination in Russia's Federal District Reform: A Study of Four Regions", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 55, No.4: 507-21, p.517

⁷⁵ RFE/RL, (2004), "Tatar-Bashkir Weekly 24 February."

⁷⁶ EastWest Institute, (2003), "Russian Regional Report 23 July." Volume 8, No. 13,

⁷⁷ Ibid.,

As the above suggests, the bargaining power of these three republics as a result of their economic wealth, and their ethnic mobilising potential, as well as the historical precedent for their privileged treatment still undoubtedly retains some strength of influence. Putin has sought to bring these republics into the fold while avoiding too much direct confrontation, primarily by building patronage relationships with the elite leaderships. The leaders of these republics are among the very few whom meet regularly with the president and it seems that their ability to upset the status quo warrants them special treatment.⁷⁸ For these republics at least informal intra-elite agreements remain key to relations between them and the Kremlin,⁷⁹ tending to bypass the Presidential envoys in contrast to most other regions. Putin's acknowledgement that bilateral treaties are likely to remain in place with certain regions⁸⁰ (provided they meet federal norms) suggests a tacit acknowledgement of some degree of partial asymmetrical treatment for these wealthy republics,⁸¹ but he has also made it clear that the ethnic card will not be rewarded.

Of particular significance to the ethnic republics is the message sent by the law on regional government which was passed in July 2003 and which emerged from the Kozak reforms.⁸² This law circumscribes the use of bilateral treaties which may now be signed only with regions possessing 'economic, geographic or other peculiarities'.⁸³ It is not necessarily the case that ethno-cultural factors no longer form part of the matrix of justification for special treatment but the new law pointedly makes no specific mention of ethnic peculiarity.⁸⁴ Moscow is at the very least *sending the message* that ethnicity will no longer win special favours. Whether or not reality is on message may of course be another matter entirely, but Moscow has certainly not shied away from provoking an angry reaction, at

⁷⁸ EastWest Institute, (2002), "Russian Regional Report 17 June." Volume 7, No. 20, , pp.3-4

⁷⁹ Sharafutdinova and Magomedov, "Volga Federal Okrug", p.159

⁸⁰ Hahn, "The past, present, and future..." p.349

⁸¹ As Hughes notes, Putin's federal reforms and harmonisation processes have effectively modified but not eradicated the asymmetry of Russian federalism. See Hughes, "Managing secession potential..." p.61

⁸² Cashback, D., (2003), "Risky Strategies? Putin's Federal Reforms and the Accommodation of Difference in Russia", *Journal of Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, No.3: 1-24, pp.12-13

⁸³ Article 267 as cited in *Ibid.*, p.13

⁸⁴ The previous 1999 law on this matter had specified political, social, geographic, ethnic and other peculiarities. See *Ibid.*, p.13

least in the 'key' ethnic republics. Issues which are controversial from an ethno-cultural perspective have been tackled head on. For example Moscow has challenged the legality of bilingualism requirements for republican presidential candidates across the board, as well as attacking Tatarstan's adoption of the Latin script, and attempting to ban Muslim women from wearing head scarves in their passport photos. The general consensus seems to be that those previously threatening republics such as Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Sakha, are no longer credibly so, and as such ethno-cultural separatism, outside of Chechnya, accurately or not, is regarded as less of a danger.

Putin's approach seems to suggest that he does not see the need to appease those republics that were powerful under Yeltsin to the same degree, though he is aware that high-profile leaderships need to be kept on side. Indeed Putin is in a stronger position than was Yeltsin vis-à-vis republican leaders. Putin's popular approval ratings mean he does not need to rely so heavily on the regional leaders to secure electoral support as did Yeltsin. Consequently he does not need to offer economic incentives in exchange for that support. Loyalty rather than opposition is now the name of the game and regional leaders are literally queuing up to offer Putin their allegiance. Where republican elites remain oppositional, or are consolidated and popular such that the federal authorities may have significant difficulty bringing their preferred candidate to power,⁸⁵ compromise may be the best solution for all involved and loyalty can be assured by means other than economic appeasement. Even in Bashkortostan and Tatarstan therefore, in contrast to Yeltsin, Putin has been able to establish relationships with elites on his own terms. Both Rakhimov and Shaimiev have been allowed third terms in office,⁸⁶ effectively it would appear, in exchange for loyalty and the maintenance of stability in their republics.⁸⁷ Concessions on third

⁸⁵ As for example in Sakha in 2003 as explained in Wishnick, "Far East Federal Okrug",

⁸⁶ Elected December 2003 and March 2001 respectively. The former was supported by the Kremlin only at the last minute after Putin had made sure to demonstrate to Rakhimov that he could be replaced by a Putin follower.

⁸⁷ It is expected that centrally gathered kompromat also has a role to play in assuring loyalty

terms in exchange for elite loyalty have also been made in Kabardino-Balkaria (Kokov), Kalmykia (Ilyumzhinov) and Dagestan (Magomedov) amongst others.⁸⁸

By swapping the right to a third term of relatively unimpeded rule (provided, for example, republican laws appear to be in line however they operate in practise) for elite loyalty, Putin is effectively prioritising the requirements of stability (and control) over those of democracy. He seems particularly willing to do this in the republics where the uncertainty which accompanies democracy could mean the revival of anti-Russian titular ethno-nationalism. Instead allowing stable authoritarian elites (most notably in Kalmykia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia and Bashkortostan)⁸⁹ to retain power serves Putin's goal of stability well. The existence of well-established authoritarian leaderships, loyal to Putin, in potentially volatile ethnic republics, goes some substantial way to containing the potential political impact of any ethno-centric backlash to Putin's recentralising efforts and his assault on republican sovereignty. Authoritarianism seems to be the lesser evil to nationalism, from the perspective of stability at least. In Kalmykia, for example, President Ilyumzhinov, now in his third term, operates probably the most authoritarian regime in the Russian Federation with very little interference from Moscow.⁹⁰

Putin's success in commanding loyalty from republican elites, particularly in the more volatile republics of the Volga and North Caucasus, is evidenced in a comparison of the December 2003 Duma elections and the March 2004 Presidential elections. While turnout levels and support for the federal leadership (as gauged by support of United Russia and Putin respectively) seem broadly compatible in republics such as Karelia and Komi between the two elections, striking divergences appear in most of the North Caucasian republics as well as in Bashkortostan and Sakha in particular which would seem to suggest that

⁸⁸ EastWest Institute, (2003), "Russian Regional Report 3 February." Volume 8, No. 2,

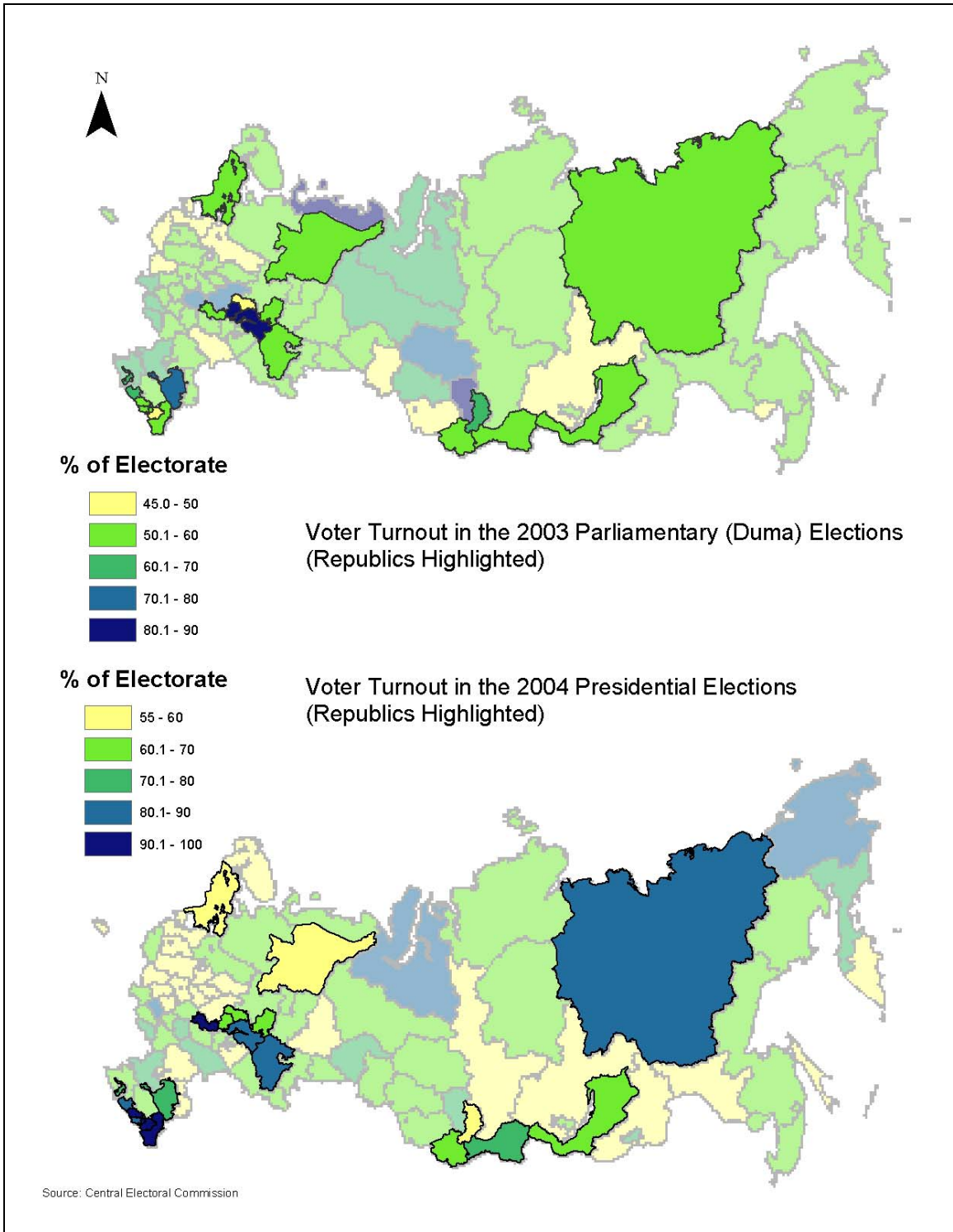
⁸⁹ Hahn, G. M., (2003), "The impact of Putin's federative reforms on democratization in Russia", *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 19, No.2: 114-53, p.116

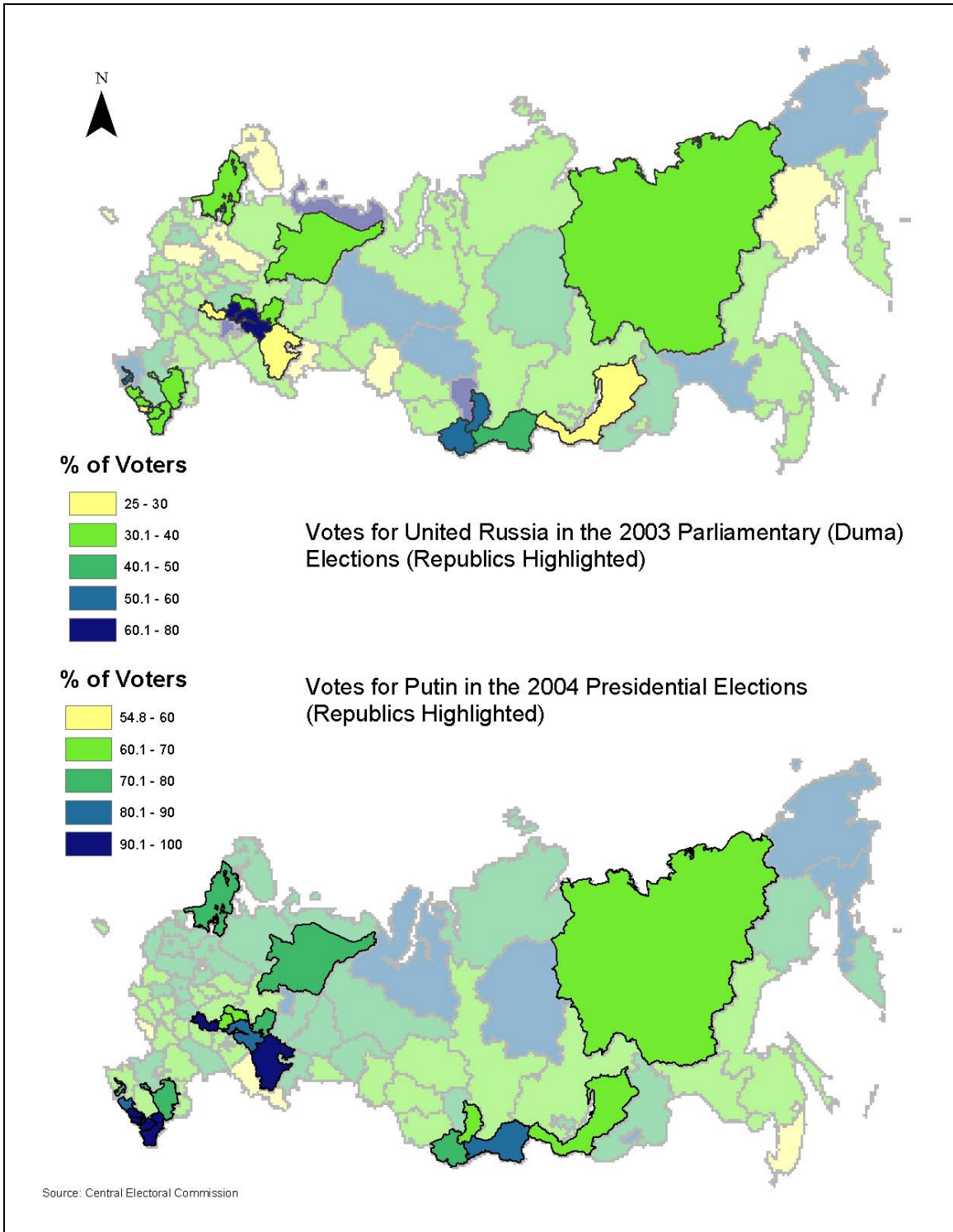
⁹⁰Zubarevich, N., (2004), "Southern Federal Okrug" in *The Dynamics of Russian Politics: Putin's Reform of Federal-Regional Relations*, Volume 1, edited by P. Reddaway and R. W. Orttung, Lanham, UK, Rowman and Littlefield, 111-51, p.125

republican leaderships were able to return Putin's favours by way of electoral support. Probably the most striking example is from Bashkortostan, where support for United Russia in the 2003 Duma elections was just 26.4%, and turnout 59.8% but just three months later, following Rakhimov's re-election with Moscow approval, Putin received some 91.8% of the vote on a turnout of 89%. Likewise in Ingushetia for example, turnout and support for United Russia in 2003 registered as 58.8% and 37.9% compared to respectively 96.2% and 98.2% in March 2004. Turnout in Chechnya apparently rose from 45.6% in 2003 to 94% in 2004, with support for United Russia at 32.8% and for Putin at 92.3%. Similar patterns are visible in all the North Caucasian republics as well as well as many of those in the Volga federal District (Tatarstan being a slight exception in that support for United Russia and Putin, and turnout were high on both occasions). Arguably the voting and turnout patterns in 2003 better represent the choices of the electorate while the 2004 results better reflect the political choices of the republican leaderships, and namely their loyalty to Putin.

Despite their usefulness in delivering votes, in the longer term, authoritarian enclaves in an ostensibly democratic state may well not be the most effective way of ensuring stability and cohesion. Coincidentally or not, outside of the few economically rich republics, the very poorest regions of Russia often coincide with ethnic republics, and authoritarian leaderships tend not to be a recipe for the best governance. The socio-economic hardship, restricted media freedom, and electoral manipulation which so often characterise life in Russia's republics would seem reasonable targets for ethno-nationalist and other opposition, as indeed they were during the latter years of the Soviet Union. Half-hearted freedom and democracy has not proved a successful recipe for stability in Russia's recent past, particularly in the context of ethnic peculiarity. However, from a democratic perspective the republics certainly do not rate well. Petrov's⁹¹ expert evaluation and analysis of levels of democratic development in Russia's regions between

⁹¹ Petrov, N., (2003), *Regional Models of Democratic Development*. pp.2-8, Forthcoming





1991 and 2001 ranked only three republics among the top twenty Russian regions,⁹² while the ten lowest rated 'outsider' regions were all national autonomies and included six republics.⁹³ An alternative assessment made using electoral data similarly included eleven republics in the bottom twenty and eight in the bottom ten.⁹⁴ The impact of such regime types on Russia's cohesion as a whole remains to be seen.

Those republics that possess significant natural resources undoubtedly remain important to the health of the Russian economy, but without the ability to threaten to disrupt the political order there is a limit to demands which can be made based on economic strength alone. Reforms of inter-budgetary relations have given the federal government much greater control over the federal finances, effectively weakening the economically strong republics.⁹⁵ Tatarstan for instance, is now considerably more dependent on the centre, and must remit far more of its taxes.⁹⁶ Likewise Sakha has had to give up more than half of its tax revenues to Moscow, effectively curtailing much of its autonomy.⁹⁷ Nonetheless some partial asymmetry remains in the economic sphere, perhaps as compensation for some loss of autonomy.⁹⁸ Russia's 2002 budget included provision for a special program for 'Social and Economic Development of the Republic of Tatarstan until 2006' which accounted for 70% of such special program funding and should return over 61 billion roubles to the republic over that period.⁹⁹ Whether or not

⁹² These were Karelia (at number 3), Udmurtia (at 14) and Chuvashia (at 20)

⁹³ These were North Ossetia (at 79), Tyva (80), Bashkortostan (83), Kabardino-Balkaria (85), Ingushetia (87) and Kalmykia (88), Chechnya excluded. Others in the bottom ten were, Ust-Orda Buryatia, Evenk, Agin Buryat and Chukotka.

⁹⁴ Petrov, *Regional Models of Democratic Development*, pp.8-18

⁹⁵ EastWest Institute, (2001), "Russian Regional Report 19 June." Volume 6, No. 23,

⁹⁶ EastWest Institute, (2004), "Russian Regional Report 27 March." Volume 9, No. 4, Previously Tatarstan had been able to retain all the fees from its oil production and about 75% of taxes collected on its territory, now all the fees, VAT and a much larger share of its tax revenue must go to Moscow. See Sharafutdinova and Magomedov, "Volga Federal Okrug", p.161. Cashaback reports that although in 2000 only 15% of Tatarstan's taxes were remitted to the centre, by 2001 this had risen to 32%, and by 2002 to 49.3%. See Cashaback, "Risky Strategies?..." p.18

⁹⁷ Wishnick, "Far East Federal Okrug", p.260

⁹⁸ Hahn, "The past, present, and future..." p.355

⁹⁹ Nelson and Kuzes, "Political and Economic Coordination in Russia's Federal District Reform: A Study of Four Regions", p.9

this program is fulfilled and funds forthcoming is another matter but the very existence of this provision is indicative of the republic's continuing importance to some extent.

The above suggests that while neither the ethnic factor nor the wealth factor is completely overlooked by Putin (or his reforms)¹⁰⁰, the importance of these factors has changed since the Yeltsin era. Most specifically the Tatar or Bashkir ethnic threats have diminished, and these republics no longer look willing (though they may still be able) to threaten Russian stability and cohesion. During the 1990's, strength, be it economic, political or ethno-cultural and especially all three, meant importance because it was from such strength that the greatest threat seemed to emanate. In the present context strength in these spheres does not necessarily equate with importance because that strength cannot necessarily be accompanied by a credible or articulated threat to state cohesion. The central authorities in Russia seem not to view Russia's stability, in the short term at least, as endangered by the controllable, loyal, authoritarian elites of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. From the perspective of stability different republics may now have a greater potential to threaten the country's cohesion.

In particular the economically weak, poverty-stricken, ethnically diverse, often Islamic, predominantly borderland republics most obviously in the North Caucasus, are potentially volatile, incohesive and destabilising for Russia's internal security and her foreign relations. Instability in these republics could result from a combination of features, just as the strength of Bashkortostan and Tatarstan reflected a complex matrix of ethnic, economic and political influences. Importantly those republics with external borders, which also have majority ethnic populations, also tend to be the poorest regions in Russia, for example Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kalmykia, North Ossetia and Tyva.¹⁰¹ In various instances the titular ethnic groups or the political leaderships are themselves fragmented, as in Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessia or

¹⁰⁰ See David Cashaback's argument that it is in Cashaback, "Risky Strategies?..."

¹⁰¹ Ross and Sakwa, Conference Paper: The Republicanisation of Russia

Dagestan.¹⁰² Poverty is more prevalent in the republics than in Russia's regions¹⁰³ and the standard of living, especially in the North Caucasus, tends to be notably lower than elsewhere.¹⁰⁴ More than sixty percent of the population in each of Kalmykia, Ingushetia, Dagestan and Karachaevo-Cherkessia lives below the subsistence level, as well as more than half in a further five regions in the Southern federal district.¹⁰⁵ Such republics often have predominantly agricultural based economies which also retain a cultural division of labour to the detriment most often of the titular ethnic group, so encouraging intra-ethnic tension and hostility. Unemployment levels are high¹⁰⁶ and corruption widespread. In short the social and economic crises in these republics have been especially severe, not least due to the substantial influx of migrants and refugees which increases pressure on resources, complicates the ethnic balance and further encourages tensions.¹⁰⁷ Moreover the North Caucasian republics in particular must also deal with the additional problems caused by the Chechen conflict, including weapons proliferation, terrorism and refugees. Add to this issues associated with border regions such as illegal migration, drug trafficking, crime etc. and the likelihood of instability, as well as the potential volatility of the region, in terms of Russian cohesion seems clear. In the context of an international climate focused dominantly on the dangers of radical Islamic terrorism, volatility in a region where five of the most backward republics are titularly Islamic,¹⁰⁸ could have influence which ranged far beyond Russia's borders and impacted her international position, giving these regions an importance not presently matched by Tatarstan and Bashkortostan.

¹⁰² Makarychev, A. S., (2002), "Democratic Institution-Building in Russia's Regions: Global Challenges, Domestic Responses", Slovo, 14: 77-96, p.93

¹⁰³ Bahry, "Ethnicity and equality..." p.674

¹⁰⁴ Zubarevich, "Southern Federal Okrug", , p.114

¹⁰⁵ Ibid." , p.114

¹⁰⁶ Those regions with the highest levels of unemployment amongst the economically active population in 1997 included Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kalmykia, Dagestan, Buryatia, Tyva and Karachaevo-Cherkessia, see Bradshaw, M. J., D. Sutherland, et al., (2000), "Regional Dynamics of Economic Restructuring Across Russia" in Regional Economic Change in Russia, edited by P. Hanson and M. J. Bradshaw, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 43-75, p.49

¹⁰⁷ A paper regarding the regional effects of demographic changes will be the next in this series.

¹⁰⁸ Lavrov, A. and A. Makushkin, (2001), The Fiscal Structure of the Russian Federation, Financial Flows Between the Center and the Regions, New York & London, EastWest Institute/M E Sharpe, p.xxiv

As Zubarevich points out, 'Putin's policies of taking more from the regions to the federal level, generally favours poorer regions, while the rich lose some of what they'd otherwise keep'.¹⁰⁹ Effectively a policy in Russia which redistributes resources broadly from the rich to the poor will aid those regions which are titularly non-Russian, and often Islamic, since these happen also to be the poorest. By recentralising fiscal finances therefore, the federal government is able to redirect funds towards the neediest in economic but also stability terms, without it explicitly appearing as if ethnicity or Islam is being privileged, and so to some degree containing the resentment of the non-republican regions which was so evident in the 1990's. The impression is of more equitable treatment for all, addressing inequality from an economic perspective, regardless of additional motivations concerning stability and integrity. The concerns of economic welfare and the preservation of national unity and political order neatly coincide.

It would also appear to some extent that the leeway awarded in the 1990's to those republics which asserted themselves most strongly as threatening to the centre, is now being given to those which do not necessarily assert this threat, but represent it nonetheless. A special program of federal financing will see the Southern federal district receive an additional 1.8 billion roubles over five years,¹¹⁰ while then presidential envoy Kazantsev¹¹¹ generally made concessions in order to reach compromises with the republican leaderships in that district, effectively rewarding the maintenance of stability,¹¹² even if this was won by authoritarian means.

Most notable in terms of asymmetric treatment has been Putin's glaring departure from legal symmetry when it comes to Chechnya's constitution, which allows for both sovereignty and citizenship in sharp contrast to the lack of such compromises in the Tatar and Bashkir cases.¹¹³ A draft Chechen bilateral treaty prepared in 2003 represents 'exactly what the federal government purports it no

¹⁰⁹ Zubarevich, "Southern Federal Okrug", p.137

¹¹⁰ Ibid." p.134

¹¹¹ Viktor Kazantsev was unexpectedly replaced by Vladimir Yakovlev on March 9th 2004

¹¹² Zubarevich, "Southern Federal Okrug", p.121

¹¹³ EastWest Institute, (2003), "Russian Regional Report 7 May." Volume 8, No. 7,

longer wants'¹¹⁴ asserting both the primacy of Chechen over federal laws and Chechnya's sole right to exploit its natural resources.¹¹⁵ The reality of the ethnic and religious threat is of course all too evident in this case. Divergences in the treatment of Tatarstan and Dagestan are also instructive. Dagestan has been allowed to maintain its electoral system which allocates seats on an ethnic basis, in one of many clear violations of federal norms, while Tatarstan has been forced to redraw its electoral districts to bring them into line with the federal law which disallows any size variation beyond 10% in order to prevent ethnic privileging. Adygeya's refusal to amend similarly conflicting electoral laws bought only a half-hearted response from the then envoy, Kazantsev¹¹⁶. A Karachaevo-Cherkessian law which violated federal norms, but aimed to counter Wahhabi fundamentalism was signed into federal law by Putin rather than being overturned.¹¹⁷ Ingushetia has been allowed to maintain tenets of Muslim law, which allowed polygamy and traditional clan justice, again in clear violation of federal norms.¹¹⁸ These republics have been able to ignore much of the harmonisation drive with little interference from Moscow, essentially in the name of stability.

Moreover Dagestan in particular has been recipient of centrally-initiated efforts at economic development, for example in investment in the oil reserves of the Dagestani shelf, in local ports and in the defence industry.¹¹⁹ Hahn argues that 'in the North Caucasian republics of Dagestan and Ingushetia the federal authorities have decided it is more expedient politically to allow the republics considerable autonomy because of their volatile Muslim populations and proximity to Chechnya'.¹²⁰ A similar trend is discernable to some degree in the Siberian republics, most notably in Tyva, where President Sherig-ool Oorzhak has been allowed a third term and to re-write the constitution in a way which extends his

¹¹⁴ Cashaback, "Risky Strategies?..." p.22

¹¹⁵ Petrov, N., (2003), "Chechnya's Status: Bilateral Treaties Return", Moscow Times and Cashaback, "Risky Strategies?..." p.22

¹¹⁶ Zubarevich, "Southern Federal Okrug", , p.125

¹¹⁷ Officially entitled 'On Countering Political and Religious Extremism' according to Ibid." p.126

¹¹⁸ Hahn, "The past, present, and future..." p.146, whether these allowances will remain now that Aushev is no longer in power and has been replaced with Putin loyalist Zyazikov remains to be seen.

¹¹⁹ EastWest Institute, (2001), "Russian Regional Report 23 May." Volume 6, No. 19,

¹²⁰ Hahn, "The past, present, and future..." p.146

personal power, again apparently in the interests of stability.¹²¹ Symmetry is a priority, but seemingly only where rocking the Islamic or ethnic boat will not be too risky, and thus is enforced in the Volga Islamic republics, but is less so in the North Caucasian, and even Siberian republics. Where the interests of legal standardisation contradict those of stability, the former are, more often than not, sacrificed to protect the latter.

¹²¹ See Shandarov, M., (2004), "Siberian Federal Okrug" in *The Dynamics of Russian Politics: Putin's Reform of Federal-Regional Relations*, Volume 1, edited by P. Reddaway and R. W. Orttung, Lanham, UK, Rowman and Littlefield, 211-42, esp. p.219

By way of conclusion

Putin has it seems learnt from some of Yeltsin's mistakes. Too much talk of the centre having been out-manoeuvred by the republics in the 1990's appears not to have gone unnoticed. By coming down hard on those republics that were the most powerful under Yeltsin, that is Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and (to a lesser degree) Sakha, Putin can make it clear that being an ethnic republic, being rich, being politically strong, having a consolidated and established leadership, even being Islamic,¹²² is not enough to warrant a higher status. Rather he has sought to convey that status is a reward for loyalty and that he personally calls the shots rather than the republican chiefs.

Socio-economic, political and ethno-cultural asymmetries in the Yeltsin era gave importance to the wealthy, ethnic republics which had consolidated elites, and were capable of destabilising the state. Under Putin those wealthy republics, are now unable to use their economic strength to gain privileges because such strength is no longer accompanied by a credible ethnic threat, and the elites have been largely co-opted by Putin. By contrast economically poor, ethnically and confessionally divided republics with more volatile elites, are now the greater threat to Russia's stability and consequently it is these republics who matter and these who are finding themselves the recipients of advantageous asymmetric treatment at the hands of the centre. Putin has not completely 'sought to undo Yeltsin's legacy'¹²³ but has revised it. Under both Yeltsin and Putin, cohesion, stability and territorial integrity have been key goals and the strategies to achieve them have been ad hoc and pragmatically based to a significant extent. Putin and Yeltsin's priorities differ very little, but Putin's targets make his tactics much less evident and more nuanced. Because his targets are not the wealthiest or most vocal he is able to direct resources and favours where it does matter,

¹²² There is seemingly less threat in attacking Tatar-Bashkir Islam since it combines Muslim canons with liberal ideas, and seeks to disassociate from the radical Islamicism which is gaining a stronger foothold in the north Caucasus and in Chechnya.

¹²³ Kahn, Federalism, democratization...p.268

potentially a great deal, but under the cover of equalisation and disparity alleviation.

The concern of course, must be that Putin has misjudged the situation and has prematurely discounted the threat posed by those republics which Yeltsin considered most important. Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, and Sakha may, in addition to the republics in the North Caucasus and Siberia, pose a significant danger not just from an economic perspective but from the ethnic, religious or cultural viewpoint.¹²⁴ Indeed as Hahn has pointed out, much of Shaimiev's and Rhakimov's popularity and legitimacy in their republics is linked to their ability to preserve republican 'sovereignty' and autonomy.¹²⁵ The need to maintain the support of their own public may overcome loyalty to the centre if the pressure is strong enough (and the prize lucrative enough), particularly given the democratising impact of Putin's reforms at the local level.¹²⁶ Tensions may well re-ignite and these republics may once again threaten Russia's territorial integrity. Undermining ethno-cultural particularities may serve to worsen that threat and radicalise the republican populations. Indeed there is some evidence of Wahhabi Islam making inroads into the Volga Muslim republics accompanied by rising militancy, especially amongst the Bashkiri youth, as well as evidence that Islamic groups in Chechnya and Tatarstan may be closer allies than previously thought.¹²⁷ Such trends may be particularly dangerous in the light of growing Islamophobia on the part of the Russian population and the seemingly Russo-centric attitude of the federal government. Thus at the same time as Putin provides certain republics in the Southern federal district with leeway supposedly because of their economic weakness, so ethnic or religious peculiarities may come back to haunt in him in the Volga region.

¹²⁴ See for example the first working paper in this series which argued that regional identity may be able to threaten Russia's territorial integrity in an unstable environment. See Griffith Prendergrast, J., (2004), "Regional Identity and Territorial Integrity in Contemporary Russia." *A New Russian Heartland?*, University of Leicester, Leicester

¹²⁵ Hahn, "The past, present, and future..." p.14

¹²⁶ Hahn, "The impact of Putin's federative reforms..."

¹²⁷ Hahn, "The past, present, and future..." pp.16-17

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