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THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE SOVEREIGNIZATION OF THE “SMALL” NATIONS IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

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The text develops and elaborates one of the themes outlined in the collective monograph *Fake Russia: Imitation of Greatness and Power* (Zelenko, G., ed., 2025), specifically in the author's chapter “Cracks in the Ethnic ‘Nesting Doll’ and the Problem of ‘Different Russias’: Ethno-National Processes in the Constituents of the Russian Federation.” The study analyzes the contradictions between official Russian historiography and national versions of the historical past of the peoples residing within the contemporary Russian Federation. Alternative approaches to interpreting the “primary sources” of state-building processes among individual ethnic groups are examined. Particular attention is devoted to the modern politics of historical memory in the national republics of the Russian Federation and its instrumentalization as a means of state control.

Keywords: historical memory, national identity, colonial policy, national republics in the Russian Federation.

On the territory of the Russian Federation live peoples who, at different historical periods and under varying circumstances, became part of the Russian state. Accordingly, each of them has its own perception of its historical past and a particular experience of interaction with the imperial center. This factor may prove decisive in processes of national self-determination, including decisions on the establishment of independent states.

The significance of this factor is reinforced by the fact that contemporary policies of “historical memory” and the concept of a “shared past” in the Russian Federation are a direct continuation of the most rigid Soviet approaches in this sphere [1]. Their main tenets reduce to interpreting the territorial expansion of the Muscovite principality, and later of the Russian Empire and the USSR, as “*gathering of historical lands*”, “*voluntary accession*”, “*liberation of peoples from foreign yoke*”, or, in the case of “*no man’s*” and sparsely populated territories of Northern Siberia, as “*peaceful colonization and the inclusion of backward peoples, who remained at the clan-tribal stage of development, into the achievements of civilization*” [2].

According to this approach, most national minorities of the contemporary Russian Federation are effectively deprived of the right to a distinct history that would not be inseparably linked to the Russian one. On this basis, it is concluded that their potential aspirations for independence are artificial and lack historical foundation, similar to hypothetical demands for independence by such Russian regions as Ryazan or Tver.

However, in national regions there exists an alternative vision of historical processes, which often comes into conflict with the official version imposed by the federal center. The problem of contradictions between different historical narratives, particularly in Tatarstan, Tuva, Buryatia, and Chechnya, has repeatedly been the subject of scholarly debate [3]. For peoples who possessed their own statehood prior to annexation by Russia, the interpretation of its loss as a “positive event” is unacceptable and humiliating.

In many national republics, the leaders of anti-Russian uprisings were and remain celebrated as national heroes [4]. Even in cases where the history of resistance to Russian expansion is insufficiently pronounced or recedes into the depths of centuries, sentiments of “historical grievance” toward Moscow are widespread, stemming from centuries-long policies of Russification and disregard for the national traditions of subjugated peoples.

The situation in the regions of the Russian Federation differs significantly depending on a number of factors, particularly on the duration of the “coexistence” of other peoples with Russians. Some contemporary national regions were incorporated as early as the period of the **Grand Duchy of Moscow** (for example, the Finno-Ugric republics of the European part of the Russian Federation), which contributed to deeper assimilation of the local population. In such regions, the “historical memory” of the period outside Moscow’s rule has been largely blurred. At the same time, even among peoples who have long been part of the Russian state, notions of their own state traditions persist. For instance, among the **Erzya** (who in Russian ethnographic nomenclature are included within the “**Mordvins**”), there is evidence of the existence in the early Middle Ages (10th–13th centuries) of their own state formations or tribal unions, which maintained complex relations both with the Rus’ principalities and later with the Golden Horde [5].

More concrete and pronounced notions of their own tradition of statehood have been preserved among peoples whose territories were incorporated into the Russian state during the early Muscovite Tsardom (mid-16th – early 17th centuries). In particular, the Chuvash (self-designation – “*chăvash*”) claim the role of sole heirs of **Volga Bulgaria** (a state that existed in the 10th–13th centuries). The origin of the modern ethnonym is linked either to the name of the early medieval tribe “*suvaz*”/“*suvar*,” or to a social term of the 16th–17th centuries indicating the estate affiliation of persons who paid *yasak* and engaged in agriculture.

In Chuvashia, ideas of renaming the republic to emphasize its historical connection with Volga Bulgaria have gained some popularity. In the 1990s – early 2000s, proposals were voiced to officially call the Chuvash “Bulgars” [6], as well as to rename the republic “*Republic of Chuvashia – Volga Bulgaria*” [7], by analogy with the names Sakha (Yakutia) and North Ossetia (Alania). A corresponding petition, signed by Chuvash writers and public figures, was considered by the State Council of Chuvashia in 2012–2013, but was deemed “inexpedient” [8].

The perception by the Chuvash themselves of **Volga Bulgaria** (chuv. *Atălçi Pălhar*) as unequivocally “their” state is “inconvenient” both for the Russian Federation and for neighboring Tatarstan. In the first case, it underscores the existence among the Chuvash of their own state tradition, which is considerably older than the **Muscovite principality** or **Tsardom of Moscow**. In the second, it creates potential competition with the historical narratives of Tatar historians, who also regard not only the **Kazan Khanate** but **Volga Bulgaria** as part of the “Tatar” historical tradition. Moreover, for Russian historiography, reference to the Bulgar heritage serves as a reminder of a period when the (proto-)Chuvash and (proto-)Russians maintained equal interstate relations, which contradicts the imperial concept of the “voluntary accession” of non-Russian peoples. An echo of such notions has even been preserved in the official interpretation of the symbolism of the flag of the Chuvash Republic, which mentions the peace treaty of 985 between Prince Vladimir the Great of Kyiv and the ruler of Volga Bulgaria [9].

Russian, Tatar, and Chuvash historiographies interpret differently the events connected with Ivan the Terrible’s conquest of the **Kazan Khanate**. The official Russian and loyalist Chuvash versions emphasize that the Chuvash were allies of Muscovy in the struggle against the “Tatar oppressors” and “voluntarily” recognized tsarist authority. In Tatar historiography, this episode is viewed as a military intervention by the Muscovite state and as a betrayal by part of the khan’s Chinggisiid subjects. Chuvash nationalist interpretations, meanwhile, highlight the claim that Ivan the Terrible allegedly promised the Chuvash princes a “Golden Bull of Liberty,” but failed to fulfill his obligations. In the Chuvash “national pantheon” [10], a special place is occupied by Princes Tugai and

Mamich-Perdei, who led anti-Muscovite uprisings in the second half of the 16th century.

Despite a certain degree of abstraction and the mythologization of particular events and historical figures, the debate over the early statehood of the Chuvash is of considerable importance, as it challenges the official Russian version according to which the first political and state formation of the Chuvash was only the Chuvash Autonomous Region, created in 1920. In this context, the emphasis on historical continuity from Volga Bulgaria creates an alternative narrative that contradicts the Soviet and post-Soviet historiographical concept of the “voluntary incorporation” of the Chuvash into the Muscovite state.

The historical contradictions between Tatars and Russians are even more complex and profound, as they are based on fundamentally different interpretations of the Mongol conquest and the incorporation of the Rus' principalities into the **Golden Horde (Ulus of Jochi)** — a state that existed in the 13th–15th centuries [11]. Debates on this topic have continued for centuries and still provoke sharp disputes in academic and public circles. One of the latest examples was the discussion of the speech by Damir Mukhametdinov, rector of the Moscow Islamic University and first deputy head of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation, at the scholarly conference “Paths and Countries: Civilizations of the East in Historical Dynamics,” held on November 14, 2024. His theses elicited a strong reaction from Russian nationalist circles, once again demonstrating the impossibility of producing a unified historical concept that would equally satisfy both Russian and Tatar sides [12].

Mukhametdinov's main points amounted to a critique of official Russian historiography, which, in his view, is a construct that imposes a Russocentric perspective on non-Russian peoples. He emphasized that the Eastern Slavs appeared “*on the historical stage*” rather late, and that prior to Russia's imperial conquests their influence in the region was limited. Special attention was devoted to the period of the so-called “*Golden Horde yoke*,” which, he argued, in reality provided political order, stability, and opportunities for the development of the principalities that later became the core of the Muscovite state. He also criticized the standardized history curriculum in Russian schools, which, in his opinion, demeans other peoples by forcing them to view their own history through the prism of the Russian one. “*Why should a modern Tatar, Buryat, or Chechen perceive the history of their ancestors with skepticism compared to the history of the Russians, which they are effectively required to study within the framework of the course ‘History of the Fatherland’?*” he asked rhetorically.

The speech of the authoritative mufti was promptly responded to by publicist Yegor Kholmogorov [13], who emphasized that Russia is a state with a clear national Russian tradition, and that any attempts to question this postulate benefit exclusively “*derussifiers and decolonizers*” seeking “*to destroy Russia as a whole and leave its peoples without a common home, inciting interethnic*

hostility.” Kholmogorov dismissed the mufti’s statements regarding the “Golden Horde yoke” as false, asserting that it was a period of enslavement that provided no advantages for the future Muscovite state. He interpreted the very fact of reviving the discussion about the role of the Horde as “*a manifestation not only of Russophobia but also of latent separatism,*” similar to what he claimed was observed among certain communist figures from Muslim peoples in the 1920s.

A similar “specter of separatism” is perceived by Russian politicians and publicists in the fact that, historically, the most significant moment for the Tatars remains the loss of their statehood in the mid-16th century. In 1552, the troops of Ivan the Terrible captured and destroyed Kazan, the capital of the Kazan Khanate (a state that existed from 1438 to 1552). This event is regarded as one of the most tragic in the history of the Tatar people and continues to be a politically sensitive issue, repeatedly causing tension in relations between Tatar national activists and the Russian authorities.

Since 1990, supporters of Tatar national organizations have commemorated the “Day of Remembrance” (“Хәтер көне”), dedicated to the fallen defenders of Kazan, who heroically defended their land and accepted martyrdom. However, since the early 2000s, rallies on this day have been banned, and after the start of the so-called “Special Military Operation,” even public mourning ceremonies were prohibited [14]. In addition, censorship restrictions extended to any mention that the restored Kul Sharif Mosque (reopened in 2005 and named after the leader of Kazan’s defense in 1552) is not only a religious building but also an informal monument to the defenders of Kazan against Ivan the Terrible’s troops. In particular, the text of the speech by the first president of Tatarstan, Mintimer Shaimiev, delivered at the opening of the mosque, in which Kul Sharif was called a national hero, was removed from official websites of the republic [15].

Russian official historiography deliberately imposes an alternative interpretation of the events of 1552, presenting them not as the conquest of the Kazan Khanate but as its “union” with the Russian state. Any references to the loss of Tatar statehood are considered undesirable and conflict-prone.

The thesis actively propagated is that there is no unity among the modern Tatar population in their attitude toward these events, and that ideas of restoring statehood or glorifying the defenders of Kazan are portrayed as artificially imposed by radical nationalists [16]. Instead, the official beginning of “state traditions” of the Tatars is proposed to be May 27, 1920 — the day of the establishment of the Tatar ASSR. References to the Kazan Khanate, according to this approach, should remain exclusively within a “cultural-ethnographic” context.

All this directly affects the work of the Shihabuddin Marjani Institute of History, founded in 1996, which is the most prominent and publishing-active historical institution among the national republics of the Russian Federation. The Institute plays a key role in the study of Tatar history, paying particular attention to the legacy of the Golden Horde period. However, the current policy of the

Russian authorities, aimed at unifying the historical narrative, significantly restricts its activities, influencing research topics, the nature of publications, and the overall direction of its work [17].

Unlike Tatarstan, the Chechen Republic has not had and does not have sufficient resources to support historical research at a high academic level. One manifestation of this is the uncritical acceptance by part of the Chechen elites of the hypothesis about a possible connection between the Chechens and the ancient **Urartian kingdom** [18], which existed on the territory of present-day Armenia, northeastern Turkey, and southwestern Iran in the 9th–6th centuries BCE. A separate study is warranted of the version that this very idea may have been deliberately imposed on the Chechens as a kind of “parody” of the Soviet historiographical tradition, in which **Urartu** was presented as the first example of statehood on the territory of the future USSR. This concept, on the one hand, contributes to the construction of historical continuity of Chechen statehood, and on the other — can be used to discredit it as unjustifiably speculative and detached from scholarly realities [19].

Beyond this, the number of contradictions between Russian and national versions of Chechen history (self-designation — *Nokhchiy*) is extraordinarily large. There are several key historical episodes for which no compromise interpretation can be found that would be based on reality rather than imitation. Above all, this concerns the **Caucasian Wars** and the role of Chechnya in the **state of Imam Shamil** (1825–1859), the **Stalinist deportation of 1944**, and the two Russo-Chechen wars of the 1990s – early 2000s. In Russian official historiography, these events are presented as “inevitable measures” in the fight against “separatism” and “terrorism.” In the Chechen national discourse, however, they are interpreted as episodes of a long struggle for independence, accompanied by brutal repressions and attempts to annihilate the Chechen people as a political and ethnocultural community [20].

In April 2018, the Head of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, signed a decree establishing the State Commission for the Study and Preservation of the Historical and Cultural Heritage of the Peoples of Chechnya. The main purpose of the commission’s activities was to reduce tensions in the interpretation of historical events by “smoothing” them and adapting them to the all-Russian historical narrative. As a result of its work, a number of monographs and collections of historical documents of varying quality were published, aimed at partially revising the most conflictual issues of Chechen-Russian relations. Particular attention was devoted to rare examples of peaceful interaction between Chechens and Russians in the 19th century, with an emphasis on cases of cooperation and “common interests” of the two peoples, intended to create an alternative historical discourse convenient for the Kremlin [21].

A key role in this work was played by Chechen Deputy Prime Minister Djambulats Umarov, who repeatedly made statements about “*Russian-Chechen friendship*” and even referred to the Chechens as the “*younger brothers*” of

Russians [22]. His rhetoric was directed at demonstrating loyalty to the federal center and shaping a historical narrative that emphasized the commonality of interests and “historical destiny” of the two peoples. However, until April 2022, the official portal of the Head of the Chechen Republic still contained a historical reference in which the colonial and assimilationist policies of tsarism were named as the main and sole cause of conflicts during the imperial period [23].

Even under conditions of demonstrative loyalty and emphasized allegiance (currently informally voiced by Aпти Alaudinov, deputy chief of the Main Military-Political Directorate of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation), which intensified after the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the historical policy of the Chechen leadership remains contradictory and distinctive. On the one hand, Ramzan Kadyrov and his entourage appear ready to publicly interpret the **Russo-Chechen wars** in a manner acceptable to Moscow, particularly stressing the need to preserve the unity of the federation. On the other hand, figures of independence leaders such as Dzhokhar Dudayev or Shamil Basayev are not demonized, and the very fact of Chechen resistance is not denied. Moreover, symbolic memory of the Chechen struggle against Russian expansion in the late 18th–19th centuries continues to be preserved. This is manifested, in particular, in the naming of Chechen military units after historical national heroes such as Sheikh Mansur (who died in 1794 in a Russian prison) and Baysangur of Beno (executed by Russian authorities in 1861) [24]. Such “dualism” in official historical policy demonstrates the Chechen leadership’s attempt to balance between satisfying the Kremlin’s demands and preserving narratives vital to national self-consciousness.

The Stalinist deportation of 1944 remains one of the most sensitive historical issues for Chechen society, as it is perceived as a profound national trauma. Despite the general trend toward rehabilitating the Soviet period in official Russian historiography, the Chechen leadership takes a distinct position on this topic. In public speeches, Ramzan Kadyrov has often voiced sharp anti-Stalinist statements that contradict the all-Russian “renaissance” of honoring Joseph Stalin [25]. At the same time, Kadyrov managed to demonstrate his political weight by securing changes to the all-Russian school history textbook in the section devoted to the deportations of the peoples of the Caucasus [26]. This step not only underscores the special status of Chechnya in contemporary Russia but also reflects attempts by local leadership to preserve autonomy in interpreting key events of national history.

The complexity of understanding and interpreting the “roots” and “key moments” of one’s own statehood can be illustrated by the example of another Caucasian people — the Ingush (self-designation: “*Galgai*”). The historical self-identification of the Ingush differs significantly from external perceptions of their past, which are often simplistically reduced to a shared history with the Chechens. In reality, the Ingush emphasize their connection to the **Alanic kingdom** (9th–13th centuries), which played a crucial role in shaping their

culture and ethnogenesis. Alanic influence is reflected not only in material monuments but also in a number of social institutions, as well as in the spread of elements of the Christian tradition among the ancestors of the Ingush. The emphasis on continuity from Alania became an important element of national revival at the end of the 20th century, expressed, in particular, in the symbolic choice of the name for the new capital of Ingushetia — Magas, which refers to the historical capital of medieval Alania [27].

Such an emphasis on ties with Alania not only heightens historical tensions in relations with the Ossetians, who officially secured for their republic the name North Ossetia-Alania and consider themselves its sole “successors” [28], but also provokes disagreements with the Karachays, who likewise claim the Alanic heritage [28]. In addition, such historical narratives are often viewed with caution in Georgia, since the territory of medieval Alania included part of modern Georgian lands, potentially creating grounds for various territorial speculations and disputes [30].

Unlike the Chechens, the Ingush focus less on the period of the Caucasian Wars of the 18th–19th centuries, although this stage of history also had a significant impact on their fate. As for the **deportation of 1944 (Operation “Chechevitsa”)**, although this tragedy remains one of the most painful chapters in the people’s history, the specifics of modern relations with the Chechen authorities — particularly due to territorial disputes [31] — complicate the development of a common position. As a result, the Ingush do not openly demonstrate solidarity with Chechen initiatives aimed at resisting Russian historical narratives about this event.

Another people repressed during the Stalinist period — the Kalmyks (self-designation: *Khalmg*, *Khalmud*, as well as *Oirats*) [32] — also have a radically different perception of their history of interaction with Russia than that imposed from Moscow. The official version of the “voluntary accession” of the Kalmyks to Russia and narratives of its “civilizing mission” toward the Oirat nomads provoke rejection at the local level. The Kalmyks trace the origins of their statehood to the **Dzungar Khanate** — a state formation of the Oirat tribes that existed in the 17th–18th centuries. Particularly significant is the fact that the territory of this state was located far beyond the borders of modern Kalmykia and even the Russian Federation, which creates additional space for alternative historical concepts and complicates the official Russian version of the integration of the Kalmyks into the empire.

In 1994, during the adoption of the constitution of the Republic of Kalmykia, it was given the name “Steppe Code” (Kalmyk: *Ik Tsaazhin Bichg* — “Great Code of Laws”), intended to emphasize continuity with historical traditions and a symbolic link to the Oirat past [33]. Significant discrepancies can be observed between the “Russian” and “Kalmyk” versions of the history of the Kalmyk Khanate (17th–18th centuries), which existed in the Lower Volga region. Kalmyk historians and national figures regard it as a sovereign state that was in a

military alliance with the Muscovite Tsardom (and later the Russian Empire). Meanwhile, official Russian historiography insists on the “voluntary incorporation” into Russia and justifies the central government’s policy aimed at eliminating the khanate.

These discrepancies are particularly evident in the interpretation of the events of 1771, known as the “**Great Migration**” (in Russian historiography — the “**Torgut Flight**”). This event, of exceptional importance for Kalmyk national memory, involved the mass migration of most Kalmyk clans to China in response to increasing oppression by Russian authorities. For the Kalmyks, it was an act of preserving independence and a protest against imperial policy, whereas in Russian sources the “departure” of the Kalmyks is often depicted as “treason” and a “disastrous episode” that threatened the stability of imperial borders [34].

Unlike Tatarstan, Chechnya, or Kalmykia, a chronologically much closer “point of incompatibility” between imperial and national visions is the case of Tuva. The **Tuvan People’s Republic** (TPR, Tuv. *Tyva Arat Respublik*), established in 1921 under the name Tannu-Tuva, formally remained an independent state until its annexation by the Soviet Union in 1944. Until 1911, Tuva was part of the **Qing Empire**, and after its collapse, part of the Tuvan elite appealed to Russian Emperor Nicholas II for “protection.” From that time, the so-called Uryankhai Territory (modern Tuva) became a Russian protectorate, which meant the preservation of its de jure independent status under Russia’s de facto control.

After the 1917 revolution, Tuva did not join the Soviet state, and in August 1921 it officially proclaimed independence. During this period, its territory was also claimed by China and Mongolia. In the 1920s, the USSR forced Mongolia to recognize the independence of the Tuvan People’s Republic (TPR) and its borders, while China continued to regard the region as part of its former province of Outer Mongolia.

Some researchers suggest that the decision to annex Tuva in 1944 was accelerated by information received by Joseph Stalin after the Cairo Conference in November 1943. During a meeting between U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt and Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek, the latter reportedly stated that Tuva was an integral part of China, illegally controlled by the USSR. This may have influenced Stalin’s decision to finally secure Tuva within the Soviet Union [35].

The process of annexing the Tuvan Republic in 1944 took place in violation of both international norms and the internal legislation of the republic itself. The incorporation of the TPR into the USSR was carried out contrary to the provisions of the 1936 Soviet Constitution, which stipulated that the admission of new entities into the Union was the exclusive competence of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

In the case of the TPR, however, the decision was arbitrarily made by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, without consideration at the level of the Supreme Soviet, which contradicted the established procedure. Moreover,

no referendum was held that could have recorded the will of the republic's population regarding its status. Thus, the incorporation of the TPR into the Soviet Union occurred unilaterally, without legitimate confirmation either from the international community or from the Tuvan people themselves [36].

Some contemporary Tuvan historians demonstrate remarkable acrobatics in their research and dissertations, claiming that "*although the accession of Tuva to the USSR was carried out with clear legal and constitutional violations, the very fact of voluntary entry cannot be disputed*" [37]. Nevertheless, collective memory of their own statehood remains vivid among the Tuvan people, and its "echo" can be traced even in self-censored official sources. For example, government websites of the republic often contain hints at the sovereign status of the TPR in 1921–1944 [38], although the official discourse continues to insist on the thesis of "*voluntary reunification with the fraternal Soviet people.*"

Thus, we can conclude that

- In the Russian Federation, a deliberate policy of "unification" of historical memory continues, aimed at preserving the imperial integrity of the state. Narratives of the "voluntary accession" of territories to Russia and the "civilizing mission" of ethnic Russians continue to dominate official historiography, ignoring national versions of history. The central authorities actively employ censorship, repression, and official propaganda to control historical narratives.

- Concepts designed to deny the historical prerequisites for separate state-building processes of national minorities are highly manipulative. Most peoples currently living in the territory of the Russian Federation not only recognize periods of existence outside Russia, but often regard these stages of history as the "golden age" of the formation of their national identity.

- Numerous "versions" of history imposed by the central authorities and superficially adapted locally contain internal contradictions that cannot even theoretically be overcome. A vivid example is the key "unifying" myth of the "Great Patriotic War" and the "heroic deeds of the grandfathers," which is difficult to reconcile with the fact that a number of peoples (including Chechens, Ingush, and Kalmyks) suffered mass repressions under the pretext of alleged "collaboration" with the German fascist occupiers.

- The agreement of the leadership of the national republics of the Russian Federation not to raise "controversial issues" in order to demonstrate "unity" is rather a tactical step aimed at temporarily reducing tensions. In reality, it is only about creating the illusion of loyalty to the historical narrative scheme imposed by Moscow. The symbolic position of allegiance adopted by local elites, manifested in silencing contentious topics or rhetorically emphasizing the role of "younger brothers of the great Russian people," is unlikely to remain stable in the event of a weakening of the imperial center.

- It is important to take into account the current aspirations of representatives of the national republics of the Russian Federation in the sphere

of historical memory policy. These are not about radical confrontation with Moscow or attempts to “settle historical scores,” but about rejecting the imposition of a unified Russocentric interpretation of the past and demanding recognition of equal status with Russians as “co-founders” of the federal state. In a certain sense, this resembles processes in the late USSR, when national elites of the republics insisted on revising and reforming the Soviet federal model.

– The conflict potential of differences in the interpretation of the historical past goes beyond the opposition “Moscow – national republic” and includes contradictions among the national republics themselves. Differences in the perception of the historical heritage of ancient states and questions of exclusive rights to it, which currently remain mostly within theoretical discussions, may in the future acquire a practical dimension, influencing the determination of administrative borders or the distribution of cultural heritage.

– The most striking examples of self-sufficient historical discourse, fundamentally different from that imposed by the center, are Tatarstan, Tuva, and Chechnya. Moscow’s efforts to “silence” the fundamental contradictions between its historical vision of these regions and the local national perceptions formed in Kazan, Kyzyl, and Grozny are becoming increasingly unconvincing. In all three cases, decisive factors are not only the awareness of deep traditions of statehood distinct from the “all-Russian” ones, but also events of recent history, which are much easier to “convert” into the practical sphere of political independence. For Tatarstan, such arguments are the results of the 1992 referendum on sovereignty and the refusal to sign the Federal Treaty; for Tuva – the violations of its rights during incorporation into the USSR in 1944; for Chechnya – the declaration of independence in June 1991.

1. On the different stages of the ‘fusion’ of Russian-imperial and Soviet ‘visions’ of Russia’s history: Бушуев, В. (2012). Историческая политика в СССР: императивы и специфика реализации [Historical Policy in the USSR: Imperatives and Specifics of Implementation] *Ценности и смыслы*, 4, 119–128.

2. An example of describing Russia’s history carried out within such a ‘paradigm’: *Долгий путь к единству. Как народы и территории входили в состав России* [A Long Road to Unity: How Peoples and Territories Became Part of Russia]. URL: <https://etnokonf.astrobl.ru/press-release/dolgiy-put-k-edinstvu-kak-narody-i-territorii-vhodili-v-sostav-rossii>

3. The problems of conflict between different versions of national histories in the Russian Federation (particularly in Tatarstan, Buryatia, Chuvashia, and Chechnya) have repeatedly been the subject of scholarly debate. See, for example: Овчинников, А. (ред.). (2015). *Конфликтогенный потенциал национальных историй (сборник научных статей): материалы Международного научно-методологического семинара, г. Казань, 26 марта 2015 г.* [The conflict-generating potential of national histories]. Казань: Изд-во «Юниверсум».

4. A vivid example of this is the “core” uprisings against Russian domination that are central to Bashkir national self-consciousness: in 1584, 1633–1635, 1645, 1662–1664, 1681–1684, 1704–1711, 1735–1740, 1755–1756, 1773–1775, and 1834–1835. The leader of

one of these uprisings, Salavat Yulaev (1754–1800), is a key figure in the national pantheon. On the anti-colonial/anti-imperial character of the Bashkirs' struggle, see: Donnelly, A. (1968). *The Russian Conquest of Bashkiria 1552-1740. A Case Study in Imperialism*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press.

5. *Кто такие эрзя и что такое Эрзянь Мастор: этнический аспект колонизации (часть 1)*. [Who Are the Erzya and What Is Erzyań Mastor: The Ethnic Dimension of Colonization (Part 1)] URL: <https://idel-ural.org/archives/kto-takie-erzya-i-cto-takoe-erzyan-mastor-etnicheskij-aspekt-kolonizaczii-chast-1/>

6. *Сувары или чувашы?* [Suvars or the Chuvash People?]. URL: <https://сувары.рф/ru/content/suvary-ili-chuvashi>

7. *Историки предложили переименовать Чувашию в Волжскую Болгарию* [Historians Have Suggested Renaming Chuvashia as Volga Bulgaria]. URL: <https://ria.ru/20130221/924100852.html>

8. *Переименование Чувашской Республики в “Республику Чувашия – Волжскую Болгарию” считаем необоснованным и нецелесообразным* [The Renaming of the Chuvash Republic as ‘Republic of Chuvashia – Volga Bulgaria’ Is Deemed Unfounded and Inappropriate] URL: <https://сувары.рф/ru/content/pereimenovanie-chuvashskoy-respubliki-v-respubliku-chuvashiy-a-volzhskeyu-bolgariyu-schitaem>

9. *Государственные символы Чувашской Республики* [State Symbols of the Chuvash Republic] URL: <https://culture.cap.ru/action/activity/arhivnoe-delo/pozdravlenie-glavi-chuvashskoj-respubliki-mihaila>

10. Юхма, М.(2005). *Сто великих болгаро-чуваш : [ист. очерки]*. [One Hundred Great Bulgaro-Chuvash: [Historical Essays] Чебоксары : ВОКЦ.

11. In a broader context, problematic is the adaptation of the “historical heritage” of the entire Mongol Empire of the 13th–14th centuries. In particular, among the Buryats, the notion of a direct historical connection between them and the state created by Chinggis Khan is widespread. See, for example: *Потомки Чингисхана. Как в Бурятии пытаются сохранить традиционные язык и культуру* [The Descendants of Genghis Khan: Efforts in Buryatia to Preserve Traditional Language and Culture] URL: <https://fedpress.ru/article/2438822>

12. *Выглядывая за пределы Руси: истоки и стадии формирования полиэтнического государства в истории России* [Looking Beyond Rus’: The Origins and Phases of Multiethnic State Formation in the History of Russia]. URL: <https://dumrf.ru/upravlenie/speeches/24302>

13. *Зачем радикальный муфтий объявил историческую войну славянам и русским* [Why Did a Radical Mufti Declare a Historical War on Slavs and Russians] URL: https://spb.tsargrad.tv/articles/zachem-radikalnyj-muftij-objavil-istoricheskuyu-voynu-slavyanam-i-russkim_1083171

14. *Митинг в честь Хәтер көне вновь запретили* [The Commemoration Rally for Khäter Köne Has Once Again Been Prohibited] URL: <https://idel-ural.org/archives/mytyng-v-chest-h%D3%99ter-k%D3%A9ne-vnov-zapretyly/>

15. Шаймиев, М. Ш. (n.d.). *Выступление Президента Республики Татарстан М.Ш. Шаймиева на церемонии торжественного открытия мечети Кул Шариф* [President of Tatarstan M. Sh. Shaimiev’s Address at the Grand Opening of the Kul Sharif Mosque] URL: https://1997-2011.tatarstan.ru/index.html@node_id=3049.html. The Deletion of This Text from Official Websites Is Estimated to Have Occurred in 2021.

16. An example of manipulative ‘justification’ of the thesis that ordinary Tatars did not perceive the fall of Kazan as a tragic page in their people’s history: Карбаинов, Н. (2018). Идеологема 1552 года в постсоветском Татарстане: версия элит и массовые представления [The 1552 Ideologeme in Post-Soviet Tatarstan: Elites’ Interpretation and Popular Perceptions]. *Власть и элиты*.5, 211–237.

17. An example of an information attack on the activities of the institute: “Рядом, но не вместе”: СМИ нарисовали портрет Казани как рассадника сепаратизма [“Side by Side, Yet Apart’: Media Representations of Kazan as a Center of Separatism”] URL: <https://pravdapfo.ru/blogi/ryadom-no-ne-vmeste-smi-narisovali-portret-kazani-kak-rassadnika-separatizma/>

18. Урарту становится союзником чеченцев в борьбе с терроризмом [Urartu Joins the Chechens in Their Fight Against Terrorism] URL: https://www.ng.ru/problems/2018-08-01/12_447_chec.html

19. The version is based mainly on the hypotheses of the Armenian-born historian A. Stepanyan. Див.: Степанян, А. (2021). Древние чеченцы и Урарту [Ancient Chechens and the Kingdom of Urartu]. URL: <https://checheninfo.ru/55352-ao-stepanyan-drevnie-chechency-i-urartu.html>

20. On three centuries of Chechen resistance to Russian expansion, see: Gammer, M. (2006). The lone Wolf and the bear: three centuries of Chechen defiance of Russian rule. Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press.

21. Джамбулат Умаров представил Главе ЧР книгу “Истоки идентичности” [Dzhambulat Umarov Presented the Book Origins of Identity to the Head of the Chechen Republic] . URL: <https://grozny-inform.ru/news/society/133966/>

22. Джамбулат Умаров: Русский народ – наш старший брат [Dzhambulat Umarov: The Russian People Are Our Elder Brother] URL: <https://grozny.tv/news/society/9152>

23. Around April 6, 2022, this section (URL: <http://chechnya.gov.ru/respublika/istoriya-religiya-kultura/istoriya/>) of the official website became password-protected.

24. Герои борьбы против России. Зачем Кадыров назвал батальоны в честь командиров Кавказской войны [Heroes of Resistance to Russia: Why Kadyrov’s Battalions Bear the Names of Caucasian War Commanders] URL: <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/geroi-borjby-protiv-rossii-zachem-kadyrov-nazval-bataljony-v-chestj-komandirov-vremen-kavkazskoy-voyny-/32659844.html>

25. Кадыров назвал идола россиян «проклятым» [Kadyrov Called the Russians’ Idol «Cursed»] URL: <https://glavcom.ua/ru/news/kadyrov-nazval-idola-rossijan-prokljatym-910420.html>

26. Минпросвет представил Кадырову исправленный учебник истории [The Ministry of Public Education Presented Kadyrov with a Corrected History Textbook] URL: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/minprosvet-predstavil-kadyrovu-ispravlennyy-uchebnik-istorii/32680665.html>

27. Город солнца и добра [The City of the Sun and Goodness] URL: <https://www.ingushetia.ru/news/007341/>

28. Аланское национальное пространство как основа сохранения идентичности осетинского народа [The Alan National Space as the Basis for Preserving the Identity of the Ossetian People] URL: <https://south-ossetia.info/alanskoe-nacionalnoe-prostranstvo-kak-osnova-soxraneniya-identichnosti-osetinskogo-naroda/>; Тайны Аланского царства [Mysteries of the Alan Kingdom] URL: <https://etokavkaz.ru/istoriya/tainy-alanskogo-tcarstva>

29. *Битва за аланское наследие. Ингуши, карачаевцы, осетины* [The Struggle for the Alan Legacy: Ingush, Karachay People, and Ossetians] URL: <https://magas.bezformata.com/listnews/alanskoe-nasledie-ingushi-karachaevtci/42612089/>

30. See, for example, publications on this topic in the outlets of the so-called South Ossetia: *Больные фантазии ингушских националистов, провоцирующие очередную нестабильность на Кавказе* [Sick Fantasies of Ingush Nationalists Provoking Another Instability in the Caucasus] URL: <https://respublikarso.org/analytics/3131-bolnye-fantazii-ingushskih-nacionalistov-provociruyuschie-ocherednuyu-nestabilnost-na-kavkaze.html>

31. The conflict over the administrative border between Chechnya and Ingushetia has deep historical and political roots dating back to the early 1990s. After the collapse of the USSR, the Chechen Republic declared independence, while Ingushetia remained within the Russian Federation. In 1993, the first agreement on delimiting the administrative border was signed between Presidents Ruslan Aushev (Ingushetia) and Dzhokhar Dudayev (Chechnya). The document stipulated the transfer of most of the Sunzha district to Ingushetia, with the final settlement of the border to be carried out by special commissions.

Throughout the 2000s, this issue remained unresolved, and only on September 26, 2018, the heads of Chechnya and Ingushetia — Ramzan Kadyrov and Yunus-Bek Yevkurov — signed an agreement on the final demarcation of the border. This provoked mass protests in Ingushetia, as a significant part of society, deputies, religious leaders, and the opposition united in the Organizing Committee of National Unity of the Ingush People demanded a referendum. The Constitutional Court of Ingushetia declared the agreement unconstitutional, but on December 6, 2018, the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation approved it, finally securing the disputed territories for Chechnya. The leaders of the 2018–2019 protests were repressed. In Ingush society, this situation is perceived extremely negatively and is regarded as an unjust transfer of historical territories in favor of Chechnya.

32. "On the collective memory of the Kalmyks regarding the deportation (Operation 'Ulusy') of 1943, see:": Вишневецкая, Ю., Пахомов, М. (2022). *Степные люди. Память калмыков об ужасах сталинской депортации*. [Steppe People. The Memory of the Kalmyks about the Horrors of Stalin's Deportation] URL: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/stepnye-lyudi-pamyat-kalmykov-o-deportacii/31710136.html>

33. *5 апреля – день Степного уложения (Конституции) Республики Калмыкия* [April 5 – Day of the Steppe Code (Constitution) of the Republic of Kalmykia] URL: <https://riakalm.ru/news/holiday/37844-5-aprelya-den-stepnogo-ulozheniya-konstitutsii-respubliki-kalmykiya>

34. *История Калмыкии после откочевки в 1771 году в Джунгарию большей части калмыцкого народа* [The History of Kalmykia following the 1771 Resettlement of the Majority of the Kalmyks to Dzungaria] URL: <https://www.kalmykianews.ru/2009/istoriya-kalmykii-posle-otkochevki-v-1771-godu-v-dzhungariyu-bolshej-chasti-kalmyckogo-naroda/>

35. For more details, see: Стародуб, А. (2021). *Тува, "исконные русские земли" та колесо истории* [Tuva, 'Primordial Russian Lands,' and the Wheel of History] URL: <https://ukrline.info/2021/08/08/tyva-yskonn-e-russkiye-zemly-ta-kole/>

36. Отрощенко, И. (2017). Вхождение Тувы в состав СССР: альтернативные мнения [Tuva's Accession to the USSR: Alternative Opinions]. *Новые исследования Тувы*, 4, 36–63.

37. Бичелдей, А. (2002). *История системы государственной власти и управления Тувы, 1921-2002 гг.* [History of Tuva's State Power and Governance, 1921–2002] URL:

<http://www.dslib.net/istoria-otechestva/istorija-sistemy-gosudarstvennoj-vlasti-i-upravlenija-tuvy-1921-2002-gg.html>

38. For example, on the official website of the Supreme Khural of the Republic of Tuva it is stated: “On the eve of joining the USSR, the Tuvan People’s Republic was a fully-fledged state with its own attributes. It had a Constitution, a flag, a coat of arms, a gold reserve, a budget, and plenipotentiary representations in the USSR and the Mongolian People’s Republic. The past largely helps us now in building new relations with Russia and the subjects of the Federation. The idea of equal relations is not a new word in the political history of Tuva. It also interested those who began to build the TPR. Time has shown that they were on the right path.” *95 лет исполняется Тувинской Народной Республике* [The Tuvan People’s Republic marks its 95th anniversary]. URL: <https://khural.rtyva.ru/press/tnr/299/>