
Passport Identification and Nation-Building in Post-Soviet Russia

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[I]t's absolutely clear that there should be no "nationality" line in the Russian passport. If the authorities give in on this matter, Russia will spend another 30 or 40 years trying to build a state, and the outcome will be uncertain. (Tishkov, 1997a)

Abstract: From 1934, ethnicity in the internal passport was a key feature of the USSR's ethnicity regime. Following Stalin's death, all attempts to abolish ethnicity from the Soviet internal passport failed. This article examines the removal of ethnicity from the internal passport in the post-Soviet period as a key indicator of the new state policy on ethnicity. Grounded in the scholarly literature on ethnicity in post-Soviet Russia, drawing on the media, interviews, and the work of a key actor, Valeriy Tishkov, ethnologist and Yel'tsin's Nationalities Minister, this paper traces the process of passport reform. The central government's policy towards ethnicity outside the federalism framework is analyzed.

How visible and relevant should ethnicity be in state-society relations in post-Soviet Russia? Should Russia continue to attach political significance to ethnic identity, even at the individual level, as the Soviet Union

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did? Or should it promote a supra-ethnic territorial, civic nationalism? Should Russia move away from a multinational state model towards a non-ethnic "state-nation"?² Is the category *natsional'nost'* still necessary in the context of post-Soviet nation-building (Arel, 2002, p. 216)? These are some of the questions addressed in the debates surrounding the removal of ethnicity (*natsional'nost'*, or "point five") from the internal passport in Russia.

Proponents of removing ethnicity from the passport argued that ethnicity should be much less visible and relevant in post-Soviet Russia than it was in the USSR. They favored moving towards a territorial definition of nationhood that is supra-ethnic, or non-ethnic, encapsulated in the idea of a "Rossian" nation (Tishkov, 1997b).³ The removal of ethnicity from the internal passport under Yel'tsin in 1997 signified a historic departure from the conception of the political community as an "affirmative action empire" or a "communal apartment," which was based on state support for ethnic diversity and active hostility to assimilation, even in its natural and voluntary forms, which, under Lenin and Stalin, was the original orientation of the nationalities policy in the Soviet Union (Martin, 2001; Slezkine, 1994; Arel, 2002, p. 220).

From 1934, Soviet citizens were required to have their ethnicity in their internal passports. "Passport ethnicity" was considered one of the "three aspects of the structure and functioning of the neo-Stalinist state" in ethnic relations, whereby "internal passports [were] used by the regime in order to maintain almost impassable boundaries between nationalities" (Zaslavsky, 1994, p. 92). Discussions about removing ethnicity from the internal passport under Khrushchev, Brezhnev, and Gorbachev did not culminate in a tangible change (Zaslavsky and Luryi, 1979; Stepovoi and Chugayev, 1991). Moreover, of the 15 post-Soviet states, only Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia removed ethnicity from the internal passport, demonstrating the power of inertia and the strength of a primordialist understanding of individual ethnic identity as inherited, natural, and unchangeable (Slezkine, 1994, p. 449; Arel, 2002, p. 224). Ethnicity was removed from the internal passport with an executive decree issued by President Yel'tsin on March 13, 1997. How did such a momentous reform occur?

Passport reform evoked very powerful passions because it touched the heart of the Soviet mode of regulating ethnic diversity, the Soviet "regime

²The concept of a "state-nation," a model for multiethnic countries, comes from the work of Alfred Stepan and Juan Linz, and has been applied in the post-Soviet context (Stepan, 2005).

³The concept of a civic, territorial, supra-ethnic "Rossian" nation is most prominently articulated and propagated by Valeriy Tishkov, who served as President Yel'tsin's first Minister of Nationalities. He currently serves as the director of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology in Moscow, and is a member of the Public Chamber. I will follow Tishkov's usage of "*Rossia* and *Rossian*," which he uses in his book in English (Tishkov, 1997b) to embody his concept of a supra-ethnic nation, although direct transliterations would be *Rossiia* and *Rossiyan* nationalism.

of ethnicity” (Akturk, 2007, 2009). Under Lenin and Stalin “tremendous resources were deployed throughout the 1920s to incite people to identify with their ‘correct’ nationality and de-legitimize assimilation” (Arel, 2002, p. 220). The original Soviet policy was to intervene actively to prevent assimilation, and even undo the assimilation that had already taken place. Accordingly, a leading figure in the team that prepared the questionnaire for the first Soviet census (1926) wrote: “If it turns out that a rather significant part of representatives of one or another ethnic group [*narodnost'*] prefer not to use their language [*ne svoim yazykom*] (which is highly doubtful), we could thus ... conclude, not that the situation is fine and must remain as is, but, on the contrary, that we have to change it so that conversational language corresponds to ethnic affiliation” (quoted in Arel, 2002, pp. 221–222).

After Stalin, however, there were conflicting impulses toward the preservation of ethnic differentiation versus assimilation. While the policy of *korenizatsiya* (indigenization) proceeded and succeeded in creating titular political and cultural elites in the Union and the autonomous republics, a series of policies under Khrushchev encouraged and hastened assimilation, although in official rhetoric assimilation continued to be anathema. From the education laws of 1958–1959, which encouraged linguistic assimilation, to the new Soviet rituals aimed at national integration, and from the propagation of the concept of a “Soviet nation/people” (*sovetskiy narod*) to the rotation of cadres and populations to create a supra-ethnic bureaucracy and citizenry, many policies of Khrushchev and his successors aided processes of *de facto* assimilation (Bilinsky, 1962, 1978–1980; Miller, 1977; Sadomskaya, 1990; Khazanov, 1995).

The contradictions of Soviet policies and attitudes towards ethnic diversity and attempts to build a common supra-ethnic identity were inherited by the post-Soviet states. Most post-Soviet states, such as Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Armenia, sought to equate the titular ethnicity with nationhood (Adams, 2004). While Armenia was already very homogeneous ethnically, all the Central Asian states recorded tremendous increases in the *relative* share of their populations that belonged to the titular ethnic group, which was one of many dimensions of their policy to assert ethnic “ownership” of their countries (Akturk, 2008).⁴ Some others, such as Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, displayed tremendous ethnic and linguistic diversity, which made mono-ethnic nation-building difficult and undesirable (Stepan, 2005; Dave, 2004).

⁴In the first 15 years after the collapse of the USSR (1992–2007), the share of the population belonging to the titular ethnic group increased from 40 percent to 53 percent in Kazakhstan, from 52 percent to 65 percent in Kyrgyzstan, from 62 percent to 80 percent in Tajikistan, from 72 percent to 85 percent in Turkmenistan, and from 71 percent to 80 percent in Uzbekistan. These figures correspond to increases of 29 percent, 25 percent, 29 percent, 18 percent, and 13 percent, respectively, in the relative share of the titular ethnic group in the overall population (Akturk, 2008, p. 7). In comparative perspective, these are tremendous changes in ethnic demography, especially given the relatively short time period within which they occurred.

In contrast, Russia failed to see a magnitude of increase in the titular share of its population similar to what the Central Asian states experienced, which is striking given the massive emigration of Russians from Central Asia to Russia in the same time period. Indeed, Russia actually witnessed a slight *decline* in the ethnic Russian share of its population, which is hardly the picture of an ethnic, “nationalizing” state.⁵ Moreover, as the largest successor state of the Soviet Union by far, Russia had 21 ethnic republics and 11 ethnic autonomous territories in 1992 (Stepan, 2000, p. 150). Many of these territories made claims to sovereignty, and even to independence (Beissinger, 2002; Gorenburg, 2003; Walker, 2003). Even an ethnic Russian-majority region such as Sverdlovsk sought sovereignty, and aspired to establish an independent Ural Republic (Herrera, 2005). Many of these secessionists drew implicit and explicit parallels with the post-Soviet states that became independent. For example, Tatarstan, one of the most assertive ethnic republics, had a larger population than that of some of the former Union republics that became independent, such as Armenia, Estonia, and Latvia. Moreover, Chechnya seceded from Russia and has been locked into a war for independence with Russia since 1994 (Evangelista, 2005; Wood, 2004). Russia’s “ethnic revival” threatened the country’s integrity and stoked fears that Russia would disintegrate, just as the USSR had (Treisman, 1997).⁶

As a consequence of Russia’s ethnic revival, many scholars approached ethnic political processes in post-Soviet Russia from multiple disciplinary and thematic angles. Ethno-nationalist mobilization (Treisman, 1997; Beissinger, 2002; Gorenburg, 2003); the effects of interethnic contact (Kronenfeld, 2005) and marriage (Gorenburg, 2006), especially as they relate to assimilation; ethno-linguistic identity change (Laitin, 1998; Barrington, 2001); and post-communist censuses were extensively analyzed in the context of state-building (Arel, 2002; Herrera, 2004). However, one scholar aptly described “the missing link” in the study of ethnic politics in Russia: “What is still missing is a study of ethnic policy per se; that is, the central government’s policy towards ethnicity outside of the federalism framework” (Rutland, forthcoming). This article aims to provide precisely that “missing link” through a study of passport reform as a litmus test, or indicator, of post-Soviet Russia’s new state policy on ethnicity.

⁵The share of ethnic Russians in Russia’s population was 82.6 percent in 1979, but three decades later, it had declined to 79.8 percent, a relative decline of 3.4 percent in 20 years (Hosking, 2003, p. 525; CIA, 2010).

⁶Twenty years after the USSR’s disintegration, we see that the Russian Federation did not disintegrate. Not only that, all the restive ethnic republics, from Tatarstan to Tuva, from Yakutiya to Bashkortostan, accepted Moscow’s sovereignty, and even Chechnya was brought under Moscow’s control.

The Russian Federation inherited a Soviet ethnicity regime based on multiethnic federalism, including its most important features, ranging from mentioning multiethnic statehood in the Constitution, to ethnic federalism and passport ethnicity (Simonsen, 1999). Such continuity is surprisingly common in the post-Soviet space. For example, all the other post-Soviet states except for Ukraine and Belarus retained the Soviet practice of recording individual citizens' ethnicity, demonstrating the resilience of ethnic policies even after the dissolution of the state that created them (Arel, 2001, p. 2). Russia also inherited, or reverted back to, most of the symbolic markers of multiethnic statehood from the USSR (Vujacic, 2007, p. 157). In institutional, legal, and symbolic terms, then, Russia preserved the Soviet legacy of multiethnic statehood, although without the other 14 Union republics. However, because this multiethnic structure was stigmatized and perceived as a security threat, and given the political and intellectual currents pushing for a reform in an assimilationist direction, calls to change Soviet-era state policies on ethnicity within the Russian Federation soon arose. Since a proposal to remove ethnicity from the internal passport was met with vehement opposition from Central Asian deputies in the last USSR Supreme Soviet, in 1991, one could assume that with the Central Asian states (and other Union republics) having seceded, Moscow could remove ethnicity from the passport easily, as Ukraine had done in 1992, immediately after the dissolution of the USSR (Stepovoi and Chugayev, 1991; Arel, 2002). Perhaps surprisingly, however, this did not happen.

Instead, declarations of independence by Chechnya and Tatarstan demonstrated that even after the dissolution of the USSR, the central government in Moscow faced challenges from some ethnic autonomous regions that were an obstacle to changes in ethnic policies (Gorenburg, 2003). Instead of seeing ethnic federalism in its entirety as problematic, Yel'tsin dealt with the challenges arising from particular regions separately and through radically different means, ranging from military intervention in Chechnya to bilateral negotiations and treaties with Tatarstan.

Divided leadership in Moscow, whereby different suitors for leadership appealed to the ethnic autonomous regions for support in their struggles for leadership, was also a fetter on change in ethnic policies in times of succession crises. Yel'tsin's struggles, against Gorbachev and later against the Communist Party and other rivals in the Duma and in the presidential races, were conducive to continuing the *status quo*.

Finally, ideological commitments, beliefs, and habits centered on the Leninist/Soviet approach to ethnic diversity constituted an ideational fetter on change in the ethnic policies (Slezkine, 1994; Filatova, 1997). Many academics, policy-makers, and ordinary people who were accustomed to thinking of ethnicity as a primordial fact took passport ethnicity for granted and could not even conceive of the possibility of removing ethnicity from the internal passport. The Yel'tsin leadership had to battle and successfully overcome each of these formidable challenges in enacting passport reform.

YEL'TSIN, ETHNIC GRIEVANCES, LIBERALS, TISHKOV'S ROSSIAN NATION, AND STATE-BUILDING

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Yel'tsin's presidency brought a new elite to power, which repudiated Soviet policies in many areas, and represented some constituencies that had been harmed by passport ethnicity. These constituencies included, but were not limited to, Russian Jews, who were present in Yel'tsin's governments and among his advisors in larger numbers than had ever been the case in Soviet governments (at least since the 1940s), and Jews strongly supported Yel'tsin throughout his rule (Aron, 2000, pp. 723–727; Krichevsky, 2005).⁷ We must also consider as a key segment of the Yel'tsin elite the so-called “oligarchs,” the wealthiest businessmen of post-Soviet Russia, who were much liked by and very supportive of Yel'tsin, especially during the critical 1996 presidential election, and who were also disproportionately Jewish. This was the topic of much anti-Yel'tsin propaganda (Goldman, 2000; Aron, 2000, pp. 528, 594–597, 609–610, 624; Hoffman, 2002; Colton, 2008, pp. 403–404). In fact, Jews were the only ethnic group that was consistently cited in public debates and media reports, both in Russia and in the foreign press, as the victim of discrimination through passport ethnicity (Tishkov, 1997c; Hoffman, 1997). This was also the case in Ukraine, where “Jewish activists ... made passport nationality a civil rights issue and quietly campaigned for its abolition” (Arel, 2002, p. 224). However, many other ethnic groups, such as ethnic Germans, also suffered tremendously from passport ethnicity in the USSR.⁸

⁷Aron (2000, p. 723) provides the following list of Jewish members of Yel'tsin's governments: Boris Nemtsov, Yakov Urinson, Boris Berezovskiy, Alexander Livshits, Mikhail Komissar, Emil Pain, Ephim Basin, Zinovy Pak, Evgeniy Yasin. Krichevsky (2005) adds Anatoly Chubais, Sergey Kiriyyenko, Pyotr Aven, and Yevgeny Sapiro (I have retained the transliterations of names as they appear in Krichevsky and Aron). Goldman (2000, p. 112, and personal communication) also adds Prime Minister Primakov to the list of people of Jewish descent in Yel'tsin's governments. Of these, Sapiro, as Minister of Nationalities, and Pain, as an Adviser on Inter-Ethnic and Regional Problems, took on responsibilities directly linked to the role of ethnicity in state–society relations in Russia. For the rise and fall of Jewish prominence in early Soviet politics until the late 1940s, see Slezkine (2004).

⁸Ethnic Germans also acquired a modest representation in Yel'tsin's governments. Ethnic Germans in Yel'tsin's cabinets included, Al'fred Kokh, Minister for Privatization, and Georgiy Boos, Minister of Taxes (the current governor of Kaliningrad). Eduard Rossel, the governor of Yel'tsin's home province, Sverdlovsk, and an ally of his, is also an ethnic German, as is Viktor Kress, another ethnic German whom Yel'tsin appointed as governor of Tomsk in 1991, a position Kress has since kept. There were also prominent ethnic Germans in the Putin elite, including German Gref, Minister of Economics and Trade (from 2000 to 2007), and Aleksey Miller, the CEO of Gazprom. For the tremendously difficult plight of ethnic Germans after the abolition of the Volga German SSR and their mass deportation (based on ethnicity), see Mukhina (2007).

More significantly, however, some leading liberal scholars on ethnicity in Russia, including Valeriy Tishkov and Galina Starovoytova,⁹ implicitly or explicitly argued that ethnic Russians themselves were the subject of ethnic discrimination in political appointments in the ethnic autonomous republics (Tishkov, 1997c; Evangelista, 1999, p. 287). Ethnic Russians, Jews, Germans, and others for whom passport ethnicity was perceived as a real or potential disadvantage were juxtaposed against titular ethnic groups in autonomous republics, such as Tatars, Bashkirs, Ingush, Buryats, Kalymyks, and others who were perceived as benefitting from the continuation of passport ethnicity.

The new Russian leadership also adopted liberal nationalism, according to which inscribing ethnic origins in passports was anathema (Lipman, 2007). This was reflected in the formulation of Article 26 of the Russian Constitution adopted on December 12, 1993, which indicates that the expression of one's "nationality" (i.e., ethnicity) should be voluntary.¹⁰ European practices also favored removing ethnicity from passports, since the European Union strongly discourages "the use of cultural markers (race, religion, ethnicity) on identity cards to prevent their potential misuse for discriminatory purposes," although the post-Soviet states received "contradictory signals from European institutions" on this issue (Arel, 2002, pp. 224–225).

Even in the Soviet period, those who supported removing ethnicity from the passport were described as liberals (Khrushchev, 2009). However, one also witnessed "liberal" arguments at least for the voluntary preservation of ethnicity in the passport, whereas the passport reform of 1997 precluded even a voluntary indication of ethnicity (Frenkel, 1997). Moreover, a close examination of the proponents and opponents of this reform demonstrates that a simple liberal–illiberal distinction would not be an accurate representation of the political and intellectual contestation that took place around passport ethnicity. Many liberals indeed advocated removing ethnicity from the internal passport, since they saw the "fifth line" as a tool of discrimination and a remnant of the Stalinist past (Lipman, 2007). Its removal was seen as serving the cause of anti-discrimination and overcoming a Soviet legacy. However, others made liberal arguments for

⁹After serving as an adviser to Yel'tsin on interethnic relations, Starovoytova was dismissed for criticizing Russian policy in the Caucasus, and she amplified her criticisms after Yel'tsin's decision to invade Chechnya (ISCIP, 1998). She was murdered in her apartment in St. Petersburg on November 19, 1998, in what appeared to be a politically motivated assassination (Eisenhower, 1998).

¹⁰Both proponents and opponents of abolishing ethnicity in the internal passport used Article 26 in their arguments, because this article also affirmed every citizen's right to determine and "indicate" his nationality/ethnicity. The relevant parts of Article 26 read as follows: "Article 26. 1. Everyone shall have the right to determine and indicate his nationality. No one may be forced to determine and indicate his or her nationality. 2. Everyone shall have the right to use his or her native language, to a free choice of the language of communication, upbringing, education and creative work" (www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-01.htm).

Table 1. The Battle over Passport Ethnicity: Beyond the Liberal–Illiberal Divide

“For” abolishing passport ethnicity	“Against” abolishing passport ethnicity
Liberals against ethnic discrimination	Liberal advocates of quotas and state-support for minority rights
Illiberal “state-builders” and assimilationists	Ethno-nationalist autocrats in the Republics, Communists, illiberal Duma

its preservation, while illiberal arguments were also made both for and against its removal (Table 1).

This makes it necessary to look at ideological strains other than liberalism in late Soviet and post-Soviet Russian politics, which point to motivations other than “anti-discrimination” for abolishing ethnicity in the internal passport. In the USSR, especially starting with Khrushchev, the “Soviet nation/people” (*sovetskiy narod*) was increasingly emphasized as a shared supra-ethnic identity (Rogachev and Sverdlin, 1963; Bilinsky, 1978–1980; Kulichenko, 1980). Those who were devoted to saving the territorial integrity of the USSR were “noticeably concerned to preserve the concept of a ‘Soviet people’” (Szporluk, 2000, p. 190). The scholars and politicians who were advocates of the notion of a “Soviet nation,” and the arguments they put forward, did not disappear overnight with the dissolution of the USSR. Advocacy of a supra-ethnic, new community, where ethnic differences would wither away and become irrelevant, continued under different guises in the post-Soviet period. In some regions outside of Russia, the supra-ethnic Soviet identity served as the ideological handmaiden of territorial secessionism: in Transdnistria, “*sovetskiy narod*” became the concept around which successful mobilization for secession from Moldova took place, making this self-proclaimed, internationally unrecognized, *de facto* state an island of supra-national Soviet identity in a sea of post-Soviet nation-states (Mason, 2009). Similarly, Crimea’s predominantly Russian population identified more with the Soviet, rather than the ethnic Russian, nation in seeking autonomy and independence from Ukraine (Sasse, 2007).

The ideological arm of the Yel’tsin elite on the issue of abolishing ethnicity in the internal passport was Valeriy Tishkov, head of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology (IEA), who strongly pushed for and created publicity around abolishing passport ethnicity, with the support of the liberal intelligentsia (Tishkov, 1997c, 2001a). While serving as the last director of the Soviet IEA, Tishkov defended the territorial integrity of the USSR against the rising tide of nationalisms in the Union republics and drew attention to the “ethnic overrepresentation” of non-Russians in the Congress of People’s Deputies, while holding the different status accorded to different ethnic groups responsible for this problem (Tishkov,

1990, pp. 112–113, 117, 120, 124–127). In the late Soviet period, Mikhail Kulichenko of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism (IML) accused the IEA of being a propagator of ethnic differences, and Tishkov's predecessor as the director of the Soviet IEA, Yulian Bromley, dismissed these allegations. (In retrospect, looking at this conflict between Kulichenko and Bromley, Tishkov (2007) sympathized more with Kulichenko's stance in favor of downplaying ethnic differences.)

Once the USSR dissolved, Tishkov served as the first Minister of Nationalities of Russia under Yel'tsin, from February to November 1992.¹¹ This is when Tishkov intensified his advocacy of a new concept of territorial, as opposed to ethnic, nationhood, based on *Rossian* nationality (Tishkov, 1997b, pp. 246–271). Tishkov's nationalism relied on the distinction in the Russian language between the words that denote ethnic Russians and inhabitants of Russia: "two distinct words exist in the Russian language: one is *Rossia* as the name of a state, the other is *russskiy* (Russian) as the name of the people, their language and culture" (Tishkov, 1997b, p. x).¹² A professional ethnographer and policy-maker, Tishkov self-consciously constructed what he believed was a "territorial nationalism" in order to transcend ethnic differences and build up a new patriotism that could claim the allegiance of Russia's non-Russian citizens. This seems similar to the invention and propagation of the *sovetskiy narod* concept in the USSR. Tishkov's *Rossian* nationalism appeared as the new ideology of a nation-building project.

Tishkov's novel conception should be placed within the context of his effort to overcome the primordialism that has been an intrinsic feature of the Soviet understanding of ethnicity and nationhood from Stalin to Bromley, which was also the intellectual foundation upon which state policies on ethnicity were based in the USSR (Slezkine, 1994; Filatova, 1997). Tishkov was consistently critical of the intellectual justifications for independence, first those of the Union republics within the Soviet Union and, once the USSR collapsed, of similar claims made by non-Russian republics within the Russian Federation. Tishkov emphasized the difficulty of dividing the USSR (1991), criticized what he characterized as the "deadly gamble" of nationalism (1992), and, in an article originally published in 1995, questioned the claims to "self-determination" advanced by various ethno-nationalists (2001b).¹³

Tishkov made repeated references to the United States, Canada, Spain, India, and other multiethnic federal democracies in justifying his calls for

¹¹His experiences and recollections as the Minister of Nationalities can be found in Tishkov (1997b).

¹²This word is transliterated as *Rossia* according to the Library of Congress transliteration system and as *Rossiia* in the US Board on Geographic Names system but in this article, I follow Tishkov's transliteration of this word into English. See footnote 3.

¹³These articles by Tishkov are reprinted in *Etnologiya i politika* (2001a).

a new national identity that subsumed multiple ethnic identities.¹⁴ Comparing Russia with these countries might have had the effect of making non-Russian claims in post-Soviet Russia seem anomalous and unjustified in comparative perspective, whether this was Tishkov's intention or not. However, the USSR's (and consequently, as the heir of the RSFSR's territory, Russia's) "federation" was the result of a forceful and involuntary "putting together," as opposed to a democratic and voluntary "coming together," as in the United States, or "holding together," as in Belgium (Stepan, 2005). Hence, this difference—namely, the involuntary and undemocratic origins of Russian federalism—might make ethnic regions' union with Russia more questionable than federal unions of the United States, Belgium, Spain, India, or Canada, or even illegitimate.

As the Minister of Nationalities, occupying the most prominent political position on state policies on ethnicity, Tishkov was very active in the 1990s. In the process of drafting the new Russian Constitution, he proposed to describe Russia's citizenry as *mnogonarodnaya natsiya*, reversing the typical Soviet description of the political community as *mnogonatsional'nyy narod* (Tishkov, 2007). This suggestion was not taken up, and Russia's citizenry was described as *mnogonatsional'nyy narod* in the preamble to the Constitution, just as the Soviet Union had been, demonstrating another striking continuity in state policies on ethnicity (Konstitutsiya, 2007). Tishkov's suggestion was nonetheless very curious and unconventional, especially since it sounds strange in Russian but not at all odd in English. If one uses the conventional way of translating *natsiya* as nation and *narod* as people, which I intentionally avoid, Tishkov's suggestion would amount to calling the new political community a "nation of multiple peoples," instead of a "multinational people." On the other hand, if we translate *natsiya* as ethnicity and *narod* as people or nation, as these are understood in Russia, then his suggestion would amount to calling the new political community a "multinational ethnicity" or an "ethnicity of multiple peoples/nations," a very strange formulation indeed. Tishkov may have sought to neutralize the secessionist potential embedded in describing the Russian citizenry as a "multinational people," especially in translations and international perceptions of these formulations.¹⁵ He also unsuccessfully advocated broadcasting in non-Russian languages, noting in dismay that "after 10 years of liberalization, there is still not one word in Tatar, Bashkir, Chuvash, Chechen or any other major non-Russian language spoken on Moscow-based TV broadcasts." In response, Mikhail Poltoranin, Deputy Prime Minister in charge of mass media, said, "It [non-Russian

¹⁴Tishkov began his academic career as a Soviet specialist on Canada.

¹⁵This is indeed how the preamble to the Russian Constitution is translated: "We, the multinational people of the Russian Federation" in English; "Wir, das multinationale Volk der Rußländischen Föderation" in German; and "Nous, peuple multinational de la Fédération de Russie" in French. The Russian original and its translations into English, German, and French can be found at www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-01.htm.

broadcasting from Moscow] will blow up the whole country. Russians will not stand for it" (Tishkov, 1997b, p. 86).

FROM FAILURE TO SUCCESS: THE PROCESS OF REMOVING ETHNICITY FROM THE INTERNAL PASSPORT AND THE POLITICAL BACKLASH

On March 13, 1997, Yel'tsin eliminated ethnicity in the internal passport with a presidential decree (No. 232), "On the Basic Document Certifying the Identity of the Russian Federation Citizen on the Territory of the Russian Federation" (Sadkovskaya, 1997). This change came not in 1992, when Tishkov was the minister, but in 1997, six years after a similar proposal had failed in the USSR Supreme Soviet, which suggests that there was a period of gestation before its successful reintroduction. By 1997, Yel'tsin had also defeated and subdued most of his political opponents. He eliminated the Supreme Soviet in 1993, and vanquished his Communist rival, Zyuganov, in the presidential election of 1996. He had a year without any serious rivals before the 1998 economic crisis brought his popularity down. Nonetheless, the removal of ethnicity from the passport faced stiff resistance at the regional level, for example, from Presidents Shaymiyev of Tatarstan and Rakhimov of Bashkortostan, who, among many others, objected to the removal of ethnicity from the passport as a step towards destroying ethnic minority identities. In response, the Tatar government introduced an insert to the new passports indicating the ethnicity of the passport holder (Arel, 2001). At the federal level and in most regions, however, passport reform succeeded. Passport reform abolished a policy and practice that had been deeply ingrained in the legal-institutional structure of the multiethnic Soviet/Russian state since 1934, when internal passports were introduced. As such, passport reform was the most important change in state policies toward the ethnic identity of individuals in post-Soviet Russia, and was potentially a major step towards voluntary assimilation, with less emphasis on ethnicity and a supra-ethnic territorial patriotism. How did such a momentous change in state policy occur?

As early as June 1991, during the last months of the USSR, removal of ethnicity from the internal passport was proposed in a draft resolution of the USSR Supreme Soviet prepared by the parliament's Joint Committee on Legislation and Law and Order. Apart from Sebentsov, the deputy who presented the draft resolution, two other deputies, Rybachenko and Borodin, supported it during the debate and lauded its "democratic nature," but the resolution drew very spirited and overwhelming opposition, especially from Central Asian deputies:

For example, Deputy Z. Beishekeyeva said that for her to vote to adopt the resolution would be *tantamount to betraying her own people*. Many speakers assessed the document as an attempt to *deprive people of their nationality, as a rejection of their history, and as*

a manifestation of *disrespect for their ancestors*. Deputy A. Khusanov expressed his conviction that a *citizen does not himself have the right to determine his nationality* only his parents do (Stepovoi and Chugayev, 1991, p. 14; emphasis is mine).

Since there appeared to be no hope of passing the draft resolution, it was postponed for further discussion and consultation with the republics, until after the signing of the new Union Treaty, which never happened.

If the Union republics, especially those in Central Asia, were the major obstacle to removing ethnicity from the passport, then the dissolution of the USSR should have been enough for passport reform. However, this was not the case. Even after the dissolution, the political terrain provided opportunities for defenders of the *status quo*, mainly because of the leadership struggle in Moscow. First, even post-Soviet Russia counted 21 autonomous republics with their respective titular ethnic groups in its federal structure, which it inherited from the USSR, and many of these were the adversaries of a reform in this direction (Petrov and Slider, 2007, p. 77).

Second, public opinion in Russia was *against* removing ethnicity from the passport. In public opinion polls conducted in 1995–1996, 45 percent of Russian citizens favored keeping “nationality” (i.e., ethnicity) in the passport, while only 23 percent were against retaining it (Andreyev, 1996). Since ethnically non-Russian people constituted only about 20 percent of the Russian citizenry, non-Russians’ opposition to reform alone cannot explain this result. In other words, even if *all* non-Russians favored keeping it (a very unrealistic assumption), another quarter of the population (almost a third of ethnic Russians) must also have favored keeping it. Moreover, some ethnic groups that had suffered from discrimination (e.g., Jews, Germans), and ethnic groups that did not have their own ethnic republics, which amounted to 6.4 percent of the population in 1989, most probably favored the reform, thus indicating a great deal of ethnic Russian support for keeping ethnicity in the passport (Tishkov, 1997b, pp. 268–269).

Furthermore, “[a]lmost 49 percent of those polled believe that nationality is given to a person by nature or by God and cannot be changed. By contrast, the liberal view that a person is entitled to choose his own nationality is accepted by only 9.7 percent” (Andreyev, 1996). Also noteworthy was the finding that loyalty to the former Soviet Union was higher among Muslims than among Orthodox Christians, which corroborated the higher support for the preservation of the USSR not only in the Muslim Union republics (e.g., Azerbaijan), but also among the (mostly Muslim) non-Russian autonomous republics *within* the Russian Federation (Andreyev, 1996; Tishkov, 1997b, p. 51). These findings are also significant because they suggest that non-ethnic Russian citizens of Russia felt a stronger attachment to the USSR than to the post-Soviet Russian state, which poses a challenge for Russian state- and nation-building.

Yel'tsin's political weakness and power struggles at the federal level may also have impeded the implementation of reform in the first term

of his presidency (1991–1996). In the words of Yitzhak Brudny, “[i]n no other communist country was the collapse of the regime followed by so intense, prolonged, and ultimately violent a conflict within the ‘regime founding coalition’ as in Russia” (Brudny, 1995, p. 75). Yel’tsin’s struggle, first against the Supreme Soviet (1991–1993), then against a Duma dominated by nationalists and Communists, alongside the First Chechen War (1994–1996), might have kept him too powerless in his first term to make reforms.

Yel’tsin’s weakness at the federal center was exacerbated by other conflicts between Moscow and the regions. Tatarstan, the second most assertive ethnic republic in the Federation after Chechnya, did not conclude an agreement with Moscow until February 1994, after it acquired major concessions from the center (Agreement, 1994). Similar negotiated treaties with other ethnic autonomous republics led to the emergence of an “asymmetric federalism” in Russia, whereby ethnic republics gained more autonomy than Russian oblasts, and the most assertive among these ethnic republics, which were also the richer ones, gained the most autonomy. These negotiations helped Russia avoid state collapse, even if they devolved power away from Moscow to the regions (Alexseev, 2001). Through these agreements, aspirations for secession were muted in all the republics except for Chechnya.

The war in Chechnya proved to be another conflict with ethnic dimensions that was particularly challenging for Yel’tsin. His aides assured Yel’tsin of a quick victory, which would boost his popularity domestically. The reality turned out to be exactly the opposite: Russian forces suffered heavy losses from their surprise attack on Grozny in December 1994 until the end of the First Chechen War in August 1996.¹⁶ Some concluded that the Russian defeat in the First Chechen War signaled “the end of Russia as a great military and imperial power” (Lieven, 1999, p. 1). The Chechen conflict might have also highlighted ethnic difference as a potential security threat—just as the collapse of the USSR did earlier—and as a challenge to state-building in post-Soviet Russia.

In the meantime, Yel’tsin suffered political setbacks, with his opponents, the Communists, scoring a victory in the December 1995 parliamentary elections. Worse still, Yel’tsin fared very badly in the polls leading up to the presidential elections, which were held in June and July of 1996. What is most important to understand about the 1996 presidential elections in the context of the passport reform is that these elections did not revolve around the plans for the passport reform, to say the least. Indeed, passport reform, which did not fully take shape until later in 1997, was

¹⁶As Wood (2004, p. 22) put it: “The first Russo-Chechen war was a humiliating defeat for the Russians and, despite their victory, a cataclysm for the Chechens. Conservative estimates give 7,500 Russian military casualties, 4,000 Chechen combatants and no less than 35,000 civilians—a minimum total of 46,500; others have cited figures in the range of 80,000 to 100,000.”

not at all an important issue in the election, and hence it is not possible to count the votes for Yel'tsin or Zyuganov as being for or against a passport reform that did not even occur at that time.

Nonetheless, one question is still relevant: Did Yel'tsin have the support of constituencies with ethnically specific grievances against passport ethnicity, that is to say, most prominently, Jews, Germans, and other ethnic groups that did not reap benefits but, rather, suffered from ethnicity in the passport? Although we do not have ethnically specific voting results, especially in the case of ethnic groups not concentrated in specific territories as "titular" ethnic groups, the qualitative evidence and observations suggest unequivocally that Jews not only voted overwhelmingly for Yel'tsin against Zyuganov, but played a role in supporting Yel'tsin in the media and financially (Aron, 2000, pp. 579–633). This is understandable since Zyuganov emphasized his ethnic Russian blood and relied heavily on anti-Semitism in his campaign against Yel'tsin. Given the heavy dose of ethnic Russian nationalism observed in Zyuganov's campaign, we might expect that most non-Russian minorities supported Yel'tsin over Zyuganov, not only the ones with grievances against passport ethnicity, but also those (such as Tatars) who were very supportive of and benefited a great deal from passport ethnicity. In short, even though ethnic minorities had different incentives and attitudes vis-à-vis ethnicity in the passport, we would expect them mostly to have supported Yel'tsin over Zyuganov, given the latter's ethnic nationalism. Indeed, this was the case: in the 1996 presidential elections, Yel'tsin's average vote was 8 percent higher in the ethnic republics than in the non-ethnic regions (Rutland, forthcoming; Marsh and Warhola, 2001). In other words, even ethnic republics with titular ethnic groups, which would become the most vocal opponents of Yel'tsin's passport reform in 1997, supported Yel'tsin against Zyuganov in 1996, another indirect indication that the 1996 elections did not revolve around passport ethnicity.

As early as 1995, Yel'tsin sent a draft law on the new internal passport to the Duma, but it was returned by the Duma to the president with the unconvincing explanation that the necessary funding for issuing the new passports had not been set aside (Sadkovskaya, 1997). There was speculation that this demonstrated the general incapability and unwillingness of the Duma to pass laws pertaining to new state symbols, such as Russia's new state emblem (the "double-headed eagle" associated with tsarist Russia), which the Duma never approved (Sadkovskaya, 1997, p. 21). This was more than a legislative impasse, indicating Russia's elusive quest for new national symbols and identity in the post-Soviet period. For example, following his victory in the 1996 presidential elections, Yel'tsin called for a contest to define the "Russian idea" (a concept often evoked by ethnic nationalist, anti-Western ideologues), along liberal, democratic lines more appropriate to post-Soviet Russia (McDaniel, 1996; Helleman, 2004). However, "[t]he contest produced a brief and inconsequential discussion in *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, and a brochure by Igor Chubais (the elder brother of Anatoly Chubais) who formed a small think tank to respond to

official demand" (Volkov, 2005, p. 19). Nothing came out of this endeavor. Accordingly, analysts argue that "of all the national republics that emerged out of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia has had the most profound difficulties in determining its national identity" (Diuk, 2009, p. 57). Thus, any issue that pertained to defining Russia's national identity led to major debates, often without a resolution, and this was also the case with the Duma's resistance to having the two-headed eagle adorn the new Russian internal passports.

It is also notable that Yel'tsin removed ethnicity from the internal passport despite public opinion, which was in favor of keeping it (Andreyev, 1996). Moreover, opposition to the removal of ethnicity from the passport persisted over time and was intergenerational, with those who favored keeping ethnicity in the internal passport outnumbering those who supported its removal among both the young and the old.¹⁷ Once one includes those who favored allowing the option of voluntarily registering one's ethnicity in the passport, which was the position of many ethnic republics who opposed the reform, then large majorities (ranging from 62 percent to 72 percent) appear to have opposed the reform among the young and the old.¹⁸ The timing of the presidential decree and the dynamics of the reform were described as a "bureaucratic mystery novel" by one reporter, who noted:

As a rule, Boris Yel'tsin uses decrees to resolve pressing legal problems. The question of a new Russian [internal] passport was a pressing problem five years ago. So why has this document appeared only now, and, what's more, in defiance of the opinion of overly strict legal experts who believe that this matter cannot legitimately be dealt with by decree (Sadkovskaya, 1997, p. 21)?

Although some scholars argue that Russia has a glaring lack of an "ethnicity policy" (Rutland, forthcoming), passport reform in 1997 provided a unique moment when the new "ethnicity policy" of the post-Soviet Russian state was revealed. Whether they advocated or criticized passport reform, political actors and civil society were very much aware that this was a significant change from the previous "ethnicity policy," enshrined throughout 70 years of Soviet rule, based on inherited, primordial, and codified

¹⁷An article in *Nezavisimaya gazeta* made this point (New Russia, 1998, p. 11): "[A graph accompanying the article gives the following percentages for various opinions about what to do with the nationality line: remove it—22.4 percent of young people, 17.3 percent of the older generation; keep it—23.7 percent and 33.3 percent; keep it, but make filling it in optional—38.7 percent and 39.3 percent; and hard to say—15.2 percent and 10.1 percent.]" (The brackets appear in the English-language version of this article in the *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*.)

¹⁸See New Russia (1998, p. 11): 62.4 percent among the young and 72.6 percent of the old favored keeping ethnicity in the internal passport, either as a compulsory or a voluntary/optional feature.

individual ethnicity, to a new national identity and ethnicity policy. At least one reporter hailed the disappearance of the ethnicity category in reference to—what she imagined to be the strength of—American nationhood: “Now all of us, following the Americans’ example, will proudly bear the name of Russian Federation citizens” (Kolomeiskaya, 1997). Depending on their political orientation, Russian politicians and citizens might or might not welcome “being like Americans.” The decree specified a period of more than eight years for the replacement of the old passports with the new ones, from October 1, 1997, until December 31, 2005.

However, not everybody approved of the new non-ethnic national identity that the new passport implied. While the government did not face a major outcry against the new passport in Moscow, as soon as the new passports began to be issued in October 1997, and it became apparent that there was no space for ethnicity, protests erupted in the ethnic republics. Tatarstan was the first to protest against and reject the new passport for its lack of a “nationality” category. Its state council passed a resolution on October 16, 1997, arguing that “the passport’s lack of a line for ‘nationality’ is ‘the biggest provocation in the history of Russia’ and is aimed at destroying accord between nationalities in the country;” and it stopped the issuing of the new passports in Tatarstan (Pechilina, 1997). This was preceded by a “public burning of a copy of the new document . . . by activists of Tatar national movements on the 445th anniversary of the taking of Kazan by Ivan the Terrible’s troops.” The reaction in Tatarstan to the new passport was expressed in the strongest terms possible, comparing it to a “genocide”:

Deputy Tufan Minnullin, one of Tataria’s classic playwrights, called the document “a passport for warring peoples and gangsters” (it does not indicate nationality, but there is a line for military service) and demanded that the question of the new passport be submitted to a referendum. Rinat Mukhamadiyev, his literary colleague, suggested that, by removing national-languages texts from the passport (such texts were contained in the Soviet-model passports issued in the national republics), Moscow is in effect declaring those languages to be second-rate, and he urged that “appeals for support be made to the parliaments of Russia’s other sovereign republics.”

Some Deputies proposed that, in order to combat “the genocide that has been unleashed by the federal authorities,” an appeal be made to Russia’s Constitutional Court, and if that does not help, that the republic adopt its own law on citizenship and introduce its own republic passport. The Deputies rejected the option envisaged by the statute “On the Passport of the Russian Federation Citizen,” whereby the republics may add an insert bearing all the necessary symbols of sovereignty, because such an insert would not be valid outside Tataria.

State Council deputy speaker Zilya Valeyeva tried to calm passions by explaining that the innovations were not made with malicious intent but stemmed from “thoughtlessness and stupid imitation” of the Americans (Pechilina, 1997, p. 7).¹⁹

There was a perception that the ethnicity policy was dramatically moving from a Soviet tradition towards an American one (an assimilationist melting pot?). Spearheaded by Tatarstan, protests rapidly spread to other republics. Representatives of Bashkortostan, Kabardino-Balkariya, Dagestan, and Ingushetiya spoke out against the removal of ethnicity in the passport (Aksyonov and Gulko, 1997). Tatar President Shaymiyev argued that the new passport was “unconstitutional,” and stated that “[b]efore introducing a new passport, the federal center should have cleared its design with the heads of Russia’s republics and national entities.” Shaymiyev’s adviser, Rafael Khakimov, noted, in addition to the lack of the “nationality” category: “[t]he image of a two-headed eagle on the passport also draws a negative reaction from the republic’s residents. Many people associate this symbol with the empire.” The press secretary of Kabardino-Balkariya’s parliament stated that they had a consensus: “It’s too soon to dispense with the ‘nationality’ line, because our citizens haven’t outgrown it yet.” The head of the Dagestan People’s Assembly, Mukhu Aliyev, “promised an ‘outburst of nationalist sentiments in the republics’ from those who are unhappy about the removal of the ‘nationality’ line,” while the President of Ingushetiya, Ruslan Aushev, declared that “[w]e in Ingushetiya will try to see to it that nationality is indicated in the passport” (Aksyonov and Gulko, 1997).

In the face of mounting protests spreading across the Federation, Tishkov published articles in national newspapers, urging the leaders in Moscow not to back down because of protests. In implicit agreement with those who protested against the reform, Tishkov called the removal of ethnicity from the internal passport “the most important event in Russia in the sphere of nationalities policy in the past few years,” but characterized this event as an unqualified positive development, and argued that “the absence of an indication of nationality in a Passport is a sign of democratization, not discrimination” (Tishkov, 1997c). Tishkov concluded one of his articles with a call for facilitating civic allegiance to the Russian state among citizens of all ethnicities, in line with his formulation of *Rossian* nationalism, the ideological handmaiden of the reform, and described the new passport as an “important step in that direction”:

Russia faces the problem of achieving general civil allegiance and overcoming the rigid official division of citizens into ethnic categories, which provokes conflicts. The state has a right to concern

¹⁹Note again the perceived parallel with the American model of nationhood that Russians saw.

itself with solving this problem. A modest but important step in that direction has finally been taken (Tishkov, 1997c).

According to Tishkov, not only was the reform not a manifestation of ethnic discrimination, but it was aimed at *preventing* ethnic discrimination. He stated that “[t]he expression ‘line five’ entered Soviet folklore as a symbol of discrimination against citizens based on ethnicity; it was especially obvious with regard to Jews” (Tishkov, 1997c). However, as some of his other writings suggest, Tishkov, like Starovoytova, another leading liberal ethnographer, considered ethnic Russians living in autonomous republics also subject to discrimination. For Tishkov, the concept of ethnic discrimination might apply not only to some ethnic minorities, but also to ethnic Russians.

When protests continued unabated, Tishkov published another article in a popular daily newspaper, warning political authorities not to back down from the passport reform because of pressures from the ethnic republics (Tishkov, 1997a). Interestingly, he devoted much of his article to criticizing the option of allowing individuals to voluntarily report and record their ethnicities in their passports, an option that was voiced by multiple ethnic republics as a “compromise” solution. “If nationality is entered in passports today on the basis of individual choice, and that entry is changed whenever an individual wants it changed,” Tishkov argued, “we can expect some big problems and surprises” (Tishkov, 1997a, p. 11). He noted with disapproval that “it’s also no secret that some prestigious appointments are made on the basis of nationality,” a reference to the *de facto* positive discrimination favoring titular ethnics over Russians and others in the ethnic republics. Tishkov depicted ethnic Russians, with justification, as a group that is discriminated against through passport ethnicity in the autonomous republics. Starovoytova also compared the status of the Kalmyk Republic with that of St. Petersburg, and complained that it was unjustifiable and discriminatory for St. Petersburg (with five million people) to enjoy less autonomy than the Kalmyk Republic (with 350,000 people), just because St. Petersburg was an ethnic Russian subject of the Federation (Evangelista, 1999, p. 287).

Tishkov warned that Russians and Tatars, the two most prominent ethnicities that seemed to be at odds over this issue, would “suffer” the most if individuals self-reported their ethnicity, because subgroups would split off from these ethnic categories. As in his previous article, Tishkov concluded with a stern warning, which connected the passport reform with the fate of state-building in Russia:

[I]t’s absolutely clear that there should be no “nationality” line in the Russian passport. If the authorities give in on this matter, Russia will spend another 30 or 40 years trying to build a state, and the outcome will be uncertain (1997a, p. 12).

Tishkov’s opinion columns clearly demonstrated that the new passport was conceived as a key, indeed, the most important new policy change for

post-Soviet Russian state- and nation-building. The new nation-building project was self-consciously civic and non-ethnic (or, supra-ethnic). The fearful comparison with the dissolution of the USSR along ethno-territorial administrative lines is also implicit in his columns, including the comparison in the stern warning cited above.

An unexpected rebuttal to Tishkov's arguments came from Aleksandr Frenkel, the vice-chairman of the Jewish Association of St. Petersburg, in an article published in *Nezavisimaya gazeta* 18 days after Tishkov's article appeared in this newspaper (Frenkel, 1997). This was unexpected because in arguments such as Tishkov's, supporting the passport reform, Jews were the most prominent example, if not the only one, of an ethnic group discriminated against through the ethnicity entry in the passport. In the limited international coverage of the Russian passport reform, too, Jewish individuals, such as human rights activist Viktor Kogan-Yasnyy, were cited as being very supportive of and happy about the removal of ethnicity from the passport (Hoffman, 1997). In contrast, Frenkel argued:

The elimination of "line five" will not only make it more difficult to identify instances of discrimination, but will also effectively deprive ethnic minorities of grounds to demand state support for their cultures and will create all the necessary conditions for the unchecked pursuit of a policy of Russification.... I fear that ... there could soon be an all-out assault on all "ethnic manifestations" in Russia. Valery Tishkov modestly refers to this as overcoming "the problem of achieving general civil allegiance" and "the weakening of people's sense of identity as citizens of the whole country." Dropping "line five" from the passport is a signal for such an assault. And Mr. Tishkov is providing scholarly and ideological support for it (Frenkel, 1997, p. 14).

Frenkel stated in unequivocal terms how the reform and Tishkov's role in it were perceived by many minorities—not only among those individuals or ethnic groups who had their own titular republics—as a justification for a new policy of unchecked assimilation/Russification.²⁰ Accordingly, Frenkel urged the government to retain ethnicity in the internal passport, arguing that recording ethnicity in the internal passport corresponded to a

²⁰Jews nominally had their titular autonomous region, the Jewish Autonomous *Oblast'* (JAO) in the Far East, with its capital in Birobidzhan. However, the overwhelming majority of Jews (more than 95 percent) did not live in the JAO. For the JAO's historical development, see Weinberg (1998). Nonetheless, representatives of Tatarstan counted the JAO among the ethnic regions opposed to the report (see Aksyonov and Gulko, 1997). I did not find any additional evidence corroborating or contradicting this claim.

real need, and that those who were supporters of this position should not be stigmatized as "ethnic separatists" and "National Bolsheviks."²¹

Protests in the ethnic republics against the reform continued, and the opposition took a coherent position, advocating at least the option of voluntarily registering one's ethnicity (Sadkovskaya, 1997). The opposition was channeled to Moscow through the representatives in the Duma, who asked Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin "to reconsider the deletion of 'line five' from the new Russian passports." The Duma speaker spoke of protests by the constituent republics, including "Tatarstan and some of the North Caucasus republics" (Gorodetskaya, 1997). However, these protests were rapidly quelled by Shaymiyev's address to the Tatar State Council upon his return from Moscow. He stated that "the new passport must include pages in the republic's state language and an entry indicating republic citizenship," in addition to the option of registering one's ethnicity on a strictly voluntary basis (Idiatullin and Kamyshv, 1997). Apparently, this was the result of talks Shaymiyev held in Moscow, and Sergey Shakray, head of Yel'tsin's commission on demarcating powers with members of the Federation and mediator between the republics and Moscow on this issue, reportedly recommended the "Tatar option" as a compromise solution to the passport imbroglio.

Despite the appearance of a solution, the problem was not solved in the following years. In December 1997, the Bashkir State Assembly sent a query to the Russian Constitutional Court, asking to be allowed to implement the "Tatar option" by adding two pages in the titular language of the ethnic republic (in this case, Bashkir), and registering the ethnicity of the individual on a voluntary basis (Poryvayeva, 1997). Almost three years later, in February 2000, Murtaza Rakhimov, the president of Bashkortostan, raised the issue in a conversation with Vladimir Putin, who was the acting president, and claimed that he convinced Putin to "give the Bashkirs back their nationality," by allowing them to insert a page including the ethnicity of Bashkortostan's citizens (Ofitova, 2000).

Despite Rakhimov's expectations to the contrary, a few months after Putin's victory in the presidential elections of March 2000, Federal Prosecutor General Viktor Ustinov warned prosecutors in the ethnic republics, including those in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, to bring their laws into conformity with federal laws, and singled out "unauthorized attempts" to add ethnicity to the internal passport as examples of the breach of federal law (Akopov, 2000). Putin's emphasis on "vertical power" and "dictatorship of the law" also entailed, it seems, a prohibition on recording one's ethnicity in a passport, even on a voluntary basis.

²¹See Frenkel (1997, p. 14): "The need for such a 'line' still exists today. Demands for its reinstatement in the Russian passport are by no means mere intrigues on the part of nationalist Bolsheviks and separatists from the national republics. They are based on very real grounds and real problems." In his article, Tishkov mentioned ethnic separatists and ethnic Russian nationalists among the groups that supported retaining ethnicity in the internal passports.

Despite the pretense that there was an agreement between the federal authorities and the republics on allowing registration of ethnicity on a voluntary basis, in reality, Moscow heeded Tishkov's advice and did not back down, preventing the ethnicity of citizens from being registered even on a voluntary basis. The attempts of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, and Ingushetiya to insert ethnicity into the new passport were deemed illegal.²² Considering that the Russian Federation had 89 subjects (regions), 21 of which were "ethnic" autonomies, failure to fully implement the new regulation in only three of these 89 regions can be seen as a major success. Russia moved, dramatically, from a mandatory recording of individual ethnicity to an uncompromising prohibition against recording individual ethnicity. This was a most revealing ethnic policy change indicative of the new state- and nation-building project in Russia.

Removal of ethnicity from the internal passport seems to have been one of the policies Yel'tsin followed with surprising consistency, as illustrated by his veto of the new birth certificate form in June 1997, for the simple reason that it included the compulsory registration of the parents' ethnicity (Denisov, 1997). It is also a policy that his successor, Putin, followed with remarkable consistency, even furthering its assimilationist thrust by undertaking additional policies aimed at asserting the legal and political supremacy of the federal center at the expense of the regions. In late 2000, deputies of Bashkortostan's State Assembly were forwarding a request to the Russian Constitutional Court for a ruling on voluntary inserts indicating ethnicity in the internal passport, at a time when parliamentarians in Tatarstan and Kabardino-Balkariya were attempting the same thing for their republics (Khannanova, 2000).

Ultimately, these repeated efforts were being made to preserve ethnicity in the internal passport because, as one non-Russian reporter pithily formulated it, "[f]or many people, especially Russia's ethnic minorities, recording their nationality in a passport is virtually *the only way they can preserve their ethnic identity*" (Khannanova, 2000; italics are mine). While scholars speak of a conspicuous "absence" of an "ethnicity policy" in Russia (Rutland, forthcoming), the Russian governments' consistent insistence on the removal of ethnicity from the internal passport, and their perseverance in the face of protests and resistance, suggests that the de-emphasis of ethnicity as a political and administrative category might be a central aspect of post-Soviet Russia's ethnicity policy. With ethnicity successfully removed from the passport, Russia broke with a key legacy of the Soviet ethnicity regime, where "ethnicity was universal, irreducible and inherently moral ... it was official: classes and their "ideologies" came and went, but nationalities remained. In a country free from social conflict, ethnicity was the only meaningful identity" (Slezkine, 1994, p. 449). Not anymore, at least not in post-Soviet Russia since 1997, at least not officially.

²²Akopov (2000, pp. 11–12) identifies these three republics as the culprits responsible for these "unauthorized attempts."

PASSPORT REFORM AND STATE-BUILDING IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA: THE YEL'TSIN ELITE, ROSSIAN NATIONALISM, AND A NEW ETHNIC POLICY'S TRAJECTORY

This article has tried to provide what one scholar called the “missing link” in studies of ethnic politics in post-Soviet Russia: “What is still missing is a study of ethnic policy per se; that is, the central government’s policy towards ethnicity outside of the federalism framework” (Rutland, forthcoming). This study of the removal of ethnicity from the internal passport addressed precisely the central government’s policy towards ethnicity outside of the federalism framework. Ethnicity in the internal passport, dating back to 1934, was a key feature of the ethnicity regime in place in the Soviet Union. It was the micro-foundation, at the individual level, of a vast multiethnic institutional architecture variously described as an “affirmative action empire” or a “communal apartment,” where people were promoted and demoted, rewarded and punished, at least in part, on the basis of their ethnic backgrounds. Following Stalin’s death, many attempts were made to abolish ethnicity from the Soviet internal passport, but they all failed. Passport reform reemerged in the *perestroika* period as part of the agenda of those seeking de-Stalinization and democratization. A proposal to remove ethnicity from the internal passport in 1991 faced virulent opposition in the nascent representative organs of the Soviet Union. Following the dissolution of the USSR, reformist politicians and scholars gained the upper hand in post-Soviet Russian debates on ethnicity and nationhood. Chief among them was Valeriy Tishkov, the Minister of Nationalities of the Yel’tsin government in 1992, and the head of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Tishkov elaborated the notion of a non-ethnic, territorial *Rossian* nationhood and nationalism for a post-Soviet Russian state and its people, and sought to cultivate allegiance to this new nation among the citizenry of all ethnic backgrounds. The new Russian Constitution, approved in December 1993, included articles that could be interpreted to allow at least voluntary self-identification of citizens’ ethnic backgrounds, while prohibiting compulsory declaration of ethnicity at the individual level. Finally, Yel’tsin removed ethnicity from the internal passport in March 1997.

Russian discussions and debates on the removal of ethnicity from the internal passport that ensued addressed some of the perennial questions of ethnic identity and political community, familiar to Western and non-Western audiences alike. The Soviet vision of a primordial and officially visible ethnicity could and did enable both positive (affirmative action) and negative (deportations and quota restrictions) discrimination, but it also made the ethnic nature of both kinds of discrimination visible and even transparent. However, post-Soviet Russia shifted from such a mode of governing ethnic diversity to one where individual ethnicity is supposed to be, at least for official purposes, invisible and irrelevant, where

assimilation is possible, perhaps desirable and even encouraged. This shift was epitomized by and manifested itself in the removal of ethnicity from the passport. As repeated attempts since the Soviet times, including one at the end of *perestroika*, suggest, and as this article has demonstrated, this policy shift was premeditated, deliberate, calculated, and even relentless in the face of protests and resistance, suggesting that post-Soviet Russia might have a new “ethnicity policy” after all.

The removal of ethnicity from the internal passport is likely to have significant repercussions for the assimilation of non-Russian minorities in the next generations, but it is too early to measure those repercussions. Nonetheless, one can conjecture, at the very least, that the passport reform opened the gates of full assimilation on a voluntary basis for those members of ethnic minorities who choose Russian names and a Russian-only education for their children, especially in the case of ethnic minorities in European Russia that do not display marked differences in their physiognomy from ethnic Russians. This, in turn, can facilitate a gradual and steady erosion in the non-ethnic Russian share of the population in the long-run, which was the demographic basis of secessionist claims in some of Russia’s regions in the 1990s (Gorenburg, 2003; Beissinger, 2002).

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