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**OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITS
OF SELF-CREATION AND IDENTITY POLITICS:
TATARSTAN'S PARADIPLOMATIC PROJECT**

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INTRODUCTION

The opening up of Russia's regions to world affairs could be seen as one of the manifestations of the concurrent and often competing processes of globalization and regionalization, offering new challenges and new opportunities to the actors in the international system. The new types of trans-border interactions and the phenomenon of paradiplomacy (international activities of governments on the sub-national level) became a widespread practice involving numerous regions of the Russian Federation.¹ Such practices resulted, on the one hand, from political and economic changes associated with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of a new, independent Russia, and, on the other hand, they were enabled by the growth of the border-less global economy, global communications and information systems that reduced the role of the state and brought to the fore an array of other, non-state actors.²

¹ Andrei Makarychev and Vasilii Valuev, "External Relations of Tatarstan: Neither Inside, Nor Outside But Alongside Russia" Center for Security Studies and Conflict Research Working Paper (Zurich, 2002); Jeronim Perovic, "Internationalization of Russian Regions and Consequences for Russian Foreign and Security Policy," Center for Security Studies and Conflict Research Working Paper (Zurich, 2000); Stephan De Spiegeleire, "Gulliver's Threads: Russia's Regions and the Rest of the World," Kimitaka Matsuzato, ed., *Regions: A Prism to View the Slavic-Eurasian World: Towards a Discipline of "Regionology"* (Sapporo, 2000), pp. 293-310; Leonid Vardomskiy, "Foreign Economic Relations of Ryazan Oblast in the Context of New Security Environment," Center for Security Studies and Conflict Research Working Paper (Zurich, 2001).

² Claire Cutler, Virginia Haufler and Tony Porter, eds. *Private Authority and International Relations* (Albany, 1999); Louis W. Pauly, *Who Elected the Bankers? Surveillance and Control in the World Economy* (Ithaca, 1997); James Rosenau, *Distant Proximities: Dynamics Beyond Globalization* (Princeton, 2003); *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Change and Continuity* (Princeton: NJ, 1990); Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State: Diffusion of Power in World Economy* (New York, 1996).

The autonomous (if to a limited degree) interaction of Russia's regions with different countries and regions of the world has, as one of its consequences, Russia's federal units undergoing varying external influences and developing distinct regional identities through their interaction with "the Other."³ These developments, in turn, might pose a potential challenge of weakening the "national" identity of the region as a constituent unit of the Russian Federation and, therefore, present a danger of federal disintegration.⁴ At the very least, the processes of formation of regional identities through the interaction with the external world create a need for a more refined understanding of the identity of the Russian Federation as a whole, made more complex by the activities of its constituent parts.

In the framework of the initiative advanced by the Slavic Research Center of Hokkaido University, Osamu Ieda suggests that the space of the former communist countries, referred to as Slavic Eurasia, could be currently seen as a mega-area featuring an emergence of various meso-areas inside it.⁵ The meso-areas emerge under the influence of external integration forces from the neighboring regions such as the Islamic revival impetus coming from Central Asia or the EU enlargement drive affecting Central Eastern Europe.⁶ In light of this approach, the fate of Russia – the central and the most significant country of Slavic Eurasia – is, once again, very uncertain, as various parts of Russia's vast territory fall under the influence of different external forces and develop differing versions of "the Self."

³ It has been commonly accepted that the construction of identity starts with and is based upon the opposition between self and other. On the concept of "identity," see Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1959). For a "rediscovery" of identity in International Relations, see for example, Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil, eds., *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory* (Boulder, 1996). For a discussion of regional ideologies in the context of international relations, see also Arbakhan Magomedov, "Regional Ideologies in the Context of International Relations," Center for Security Studies and Conflict Research Working Paper (Zurich, 2001).

⁴ This idea has been specifically debated in regards to the Far East region of Russia, which could be seen as falling in the orbit of North-East Asian (and, specifically, Japanese and Chinese) influence. For a comprehensive discussion of these issues, see the working papers produced at the Center for Security Studies and Conflict Research (Switzerland) in the framework of the project entitled "Regionalization of Russian Foreign and Security Policy." (Papers available at: <http://www.fsk.ethz.ch>).

⁵ See Chapter 1 of this volume.

⁶ Ibid.

Below I focus on the external relations of one unit of the Russian Federation – the Republic of Tatarstan – to assess the opportunities and limits posed by the newly-found practice of paradiplomacy for the development of distinct regional identity. The argument developed here combines a constructivist approach as a framework that allows for capturing the political significance of regional paradiplomacy with the analysis of domestic politics of the Russian Federation that allows for delineating the limits of identity-construction through the interaction with the external world.

A case study of the international activities of the Republic of Tatarstan uncovers the ways in which such activities reflect the process of regional identity formation. Particularly, it is argued below that, in the case of Tatarstan, paradiplomacy represents an incorporation of the elements of statehood into the republic's identity. Through its international activities Tatarstan has been "acting like a state" in order to be recognized by international actors. Therefore, paradiplomacy in this case has taken on an important symbolic meaning by embodying the behavior of a sovereign state. Such "acting like a state" in the absence of international recognition did not make a sovereign state out of Tatarstan, which remained an unalienable part of the Russian Federation; however, the greater international exposure did add prestige and influence to the Tatarstani government at home, in Russia.

This study allows for evaluating the expectations drawn from Ieda's conceptualization of post-communist Slavic Eurasia. As a predominantly Muslim region, Tatarstan could be expected to experience a strong pull from the outer Turkic-Muslim mega-area and stress these elements in its regional identity. The evidence below demonstrates that indeed Tatarstan has special relationships with the Turkic-Muslim and even some non-Turkic Muslim states. However, such special links did not result in the consolidation of an identifiable "meso-area" characterized by a strengthening Muslim identity of the republic and a growing "identity gap" between Tatarstan and the Russian Federation. Despite the presence of the Muslim factor and its influence on the international contacts of the republic, internal political dynamics within the Russian Federation take precedence over the external integration forces highlighted by Dr. Ieda. Over the 1990s, despite active engagement with the external world, the symbolic

significance of paradiplomacy diminished. The political meaning of paradiplomatic activities was more important in the moments of political fluidity and uncertainty in the federal center in the early 1990s. As the federal political regime stabilized and the federal authorities focused on consolidating the Russian state (especially under president Putin), Tatarstan's paradiplomacy lost its initial symbolic significance.

Furthermore, Tatarstan's interaction with the outside world carried a more varied character than that expected by the aforementioned framework. The republic pursued various paths of engagement with the external world, not limited to the Muslim direction and often emphasizing European orientation as an important component of its international strategies.

The gradually changing meaning of regional foreign policy-making in case of one of the most recalcitrant federal units in Russia reveals the limits of identity politics and the possibilities of constructing "the Self" through the interaction with the external world. In case of the Russian Federation and its constituent units, the domestic politics and the developments of the national (federal-level) political regime appear as more consequential for the fate of the regions of Russia.

PARADIPLOMACY AND THE "POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION"

The social theory of international relations promoted by constructivists emphasizes the importance of intersubjective structures influencing state behavior as opposed to material capabilities.⁷ Intersubjectivity is constituted by collective meaning systems in which states participate and which they reproduce through their practices. Thus, for constructivists sovereignty has been the single most important intersubjective structure that has underpinned the international system composed of sovereign states.⁸ This system would not be viable if

⁷ For the most systematic elaboration of the constructivist approach see Alexander Wendt's *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: UK, 1999). Despite continuing debates over the content of constructivism and particularly Wendt's version of constructivism, no other such textbook-like attempt at presenting this approach exists.

⁸ Indeed, it is also a long-contested concept; see for example Stephen Krasner's *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton: NJ, 1999).

sovereignty is not recognized and actualized by the members of the international community. In fact, constructivists claim that sovereignty is one of the constitutive norms that define states and their prerogatives and that are incorporated into the state identity.⁹

The concept of identity is understood as “relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self.”¹⁰ It has been elevated by constructivists as a crucial element in international politics.¹¹ In opposition to a primordialist view of identities as based on such non-changing characteristics intrinsic to collectivities as language and ethnicity, constructivists perceive identities as a result of “construction” that is usually done by the elites, both political and cultural.¹² Furthermore, identities are defined through interaction with the “other.” Therefore, they depend on the behavior of both parties to interaction. Thus, statehood itself “depends partly on position in the international society of states.”¹³ Some scholars have even argued that certain weak states might continue to exist mostly by virtue of their external recognition.¹⁴

Paradiplomacy might be directly related to a search for external recognition on the part of the sub-national units – recognition of the regional “self” as presented by the governments of these political entities. Such “image-making” activities or “the politics of representation” might be specifically important at the times of more fluid politics on the national arena, when the relationships between the federal center and the constituent units of the federation have not been stabilized. The external image of a sub-national unit then could be expected to indirectly affect other relevant political actors.

⁹ For one of the latest analyses of the concept of sovereignty from a constructivist viewpoint that also contains an extensive bibliography see Wouter G. Werner and Jaap H. De Wilde’s “The Endurance of Sovereignty,” *European Journal of International Relations* 7:3 (2001), pp. 283-313.

¹⁰ Wendt, *Social Theory*, p. 21.

¹¹ Wendt, *Social Theory*; Lapid and Kratochwil, *The Return of Culture*.

¹² See, for example, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: UK, 1983).

¹³ Peter Katzenstein, “Introduction: Alternative Perspectives on National Security,” Peter Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York, 1996), p. 24.

¹⁴ Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* (Cambridge: UK, 1990).

Foreign policy-making has been traditionally considered to be an inherent attribute of a sovereign state. Ashley, for example, treats foreign policy as being a “kind of social practice that constitutes and empowers the state, defines its socially recognized competence, and secures the boundaries that differentiate the domestic and international economic and political spheres of practice and, with them, the appropriate domains in which specific actors may secure recognition and act competently.”¹⁵ Therefore, international activity could carry special significance for the regions with statehood aspirations. If a region has the goal of constructing its identity as a state, it would attempt to engage in foreign activities with the aim of “signaling” its statehood to the outer world and with the ultimate aim of having other international actors to reciprocate and recognize the entity as a sovereign state. Thus, foreign activities might constitute the politics of representing a region in a certain image and could be an essential part of the identity-construction project, through which the regional government attempts to incorporate the elements of sovereign statehood in the regional identity. The Republic of Tatarstan provides an excellent case for demonstrating the distinct “identity-constructing” component in its foreign activities through which the government seeks the representation of the republic as a sovereign state.

THE CASE OF TATARSTAN

The first international contacts of Tatarstan on the governmental level occurred in the late 1980s.¹⁶ However, the more systematic pursuit of foreign contacts started after the adoption of the Declaration of Sovereignty in August 1990.¹⁷ In 1993, Tatarstan created its Ministry of Foreign Economic Affairs and put forward “The Conception of the

¹⁵ Ted Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory,” *International Security* 23 (91), 1998, p. 179.

¹⁶ Timur Akulov, “Mezhdunarodnaia deiatel’nost’ Respubliki Tatarstan,” *Gasyrlar avazy – Ekho vekov*, No. 1-2, 2000, pp. 61-66.

¹⁷ Declaration of Sovereignty, 1990: “Deklaratsiia o gosudarstvennom suverenitete Tatarskoi Sovetskoi Sotsialisticheskoi Respubliki,” 30 August 1990, Special publication of Tatarstan-related documents (Kazan: Obrazovanie, 1998), pp. 7-8.

Foreign Economic Policy of Tatarstan.”¹⁸ Currently, the Department of Foreign Affairs of the President of the Republic of Tatarstan is the main institution coordinating and organizing the foreign activities of the government of the republic. Created as a small body by a presidential decree in 1995, the department was transformed and expanded in August 1997 with the addition of the Department of State Protocol and a few specialized sections. The decree on the creation of the State Protocol department specifically mentioned that this new body was established as a step towards “further practical realization of state sovereignty of the Republic of Tatarstan in the sphere of international relations.”¹⁹

This reorganization resulted in transferring the control over foreign relations from the Cabinet of Ministers to the Presidential Administration.²⁰ It also reflected the significant enlargement of the scope of foreign activities of Tatarstan and specifically, the emerging representational role of the President.²¹ These activities have increasingly acquired the character of state-to-state interactions with certain countries and, in some cases, the President of Tatarstan has been received with the protocol accorded to the heads of sovereign states.²² Furthermore, the government advanced an idea of training its own foreign policy personnel. In March 1995, a Department of International Relations (a branch of the prestigious Moscow State Institute of International Relations) was opened at Kazan State University with the aim of producing Tatarstani diplomats and specialists in the International Relations field. In fact, this new department has received special financing from the Cabinet of Ministers.

In the 1990s Tatarstan has developed a broad practice of foreign representation by opening 16 missions abroad. On the other hand, the representation of foreign countries in Tatarstan is almost non-existent. There is only one foreign consulate – the Consulate General of Turkey –

¹⁸ *Izvestiia Tatarstana*, 20 October 1993. The ministry was dissolved in 1997 with the enlargement and reorganization of the Department of Foreign Affairs of the President of Tatarstan.

¹⁹ “Polozhenie ob Upravlenii gosudarstvennogo protokola pri Departamente vneshnikh sviazei Prezidenta Respubliki Tatarstan,” p. 1, <http://www.tatar.ru/append86.html>.

²⁰ Tatarstan has a mixed presidential system akin to the system of the Russian Federation.

²¹ Shaimiev’s personal reputation grew enormously during the 1990s.

²² For example, in his official trip to Egypt in February 1997.

that was opened in 1996. In addition, there is a permanent representative of the Republic of Dagestan and a trade representation of Kabardino-Balkaria, as well as the representation of Ivanovo oblast. Tatarstan also hosts a permanent representation of the Chechen Republic, which was closed down under pressure from Moscow in February 2000 and reopened again in October 2000.²³

The list of agreements signed by the government of Tatarstan includes over 50 documents (international agreements, declarations, protocols on cooperation or intentions, and memorandums). From this list, 14 agreements are with foreign states (Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Hungary, Lithuania, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkey, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Cuba, Poland, San-Marino and the Czech Republic). All of these agreements are confined to cooperation in economics, trade, science, technology or cultural and educational issues; no agreements concerning security issues have been signed. Many agreements have been signed with sub-national entities; they are also confined to the issues mentioned above.²⁴

While all the agreements signed by the government of Tatarstan are economic or cultural in character, some of them have a considerable political flavor to them. For instance, the agreement on friendship and cooperation signed with Abkhazia in August 1994 spurred a large amount of controversy around it. This was not the first international agreement for Tatarstan. More than 15 agreements had already been signed by the republican government prior to that treaty. What was novel about this agreement was that it went against the official Russian stance on the Georgian-Abkhazian issue.²⁵

The republican government denied that this agreement had anything to do with Russia and claimed that "the treaty between Tatarstan and Abkhazia was not aimed against any third country, nor

²³ This information is available at the Tatarstani government's official website at www.tatar.ru

²⁴ "Perechen' deistvuiushchikh dogovorov (soglashenii, protokolov), zakliuchennykh ot imeni Respubliki Tatarstan i ot imeni Pravitel'stva Respubliki Tatarstan s zarubezhnymi gosudarstvami," http://www.tatar.ru/index.php?&node_id=178.

²⁵ Unofficially, Russian policy has been more complex and Russia had, in practice, supported Abkhazian separatism, so in this situation Russia was more bothered by the fact of Tatarstan's interference into the realm of foreign policy as such than by Tatarstan's specific position on the Georgia-Abkhazia issue (I thank Peter Rutland for this useful comment).

did it affect the two sides' commitments under other agreements."²⁶ However, based on the fact that Tatarstan does not have any economic interest in Abkhazia (Georgia is ranked 49th among the foreign economic partners of Tatarstan), or any cultural and religious affinity, it is clear that the agreement between the two republics had a purely political rationale. Specifically, it was a demonstration of a certain level of commonality of interests between the two regions fighting for greater autonomy within a larger state and striving for international recognition. Not surprisingly, Moscow reacted harshly to this agreement. The Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement in which it acknowledged that "The signing of the treaty between Tatarstan and Abkhazia contravenes the Russian Federation's obligations under its treaty of friendship, goodneighbourliness and cooperation with Georgia signed on February 3, 1994."²⁷ The statement noted that the treaty "directly affects Russia's foreign policy and international relations."²⁸

A similar agreement on friendship and cooperation was signed between Tatarstan and Chechnia and between Tatarstan and Ingushetia in May 1997.²⁹ Although Chechnia and Ingushetia are not foreign countries (Chechnia is an arguable case because in 1994-1999 it was de facto independent, though not recognized by the international community), the rationale behind these agreements certainly went beyond merely economic considerations. It would have arguably made much more economic sense to develop links with geographically close neighbors, such as Udmurtia or Mordovia. These bilateral agreements do not necessarily indicate strong economic and trade links between the partners. In fact, the majority of the agreements carry a merely declaratory character and are not being actually implemented.³⁰ Thus, many of the agreements signed by Tatarstan cannot be comprehended using functionalist logic and are better viewed as symbolic deeds on the part of the republic.

²⁶ "Tatarstan in Need for Coordinated Foreign Policy," FBIS-SOV-94-173.

²⁷ "Moscow Says Tatarstan-Abkhazia Accord Violates Obligations," FBIS-SOV-94-162.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²⁹ Boris Bronshtein, "Voz' met li Maskhadov primer s Shaimieva," *Izvestia*, 22 May 1997.

³⁰ The author's own work experience in the Department of Foreign Affairs of the President of the Republic of Tatarstan (1997-1998).

During the past decade Tatarstan has also demonstrated its interest in joining international organizations and participating in international forums. It is a member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe³¹ and, despite the fact that the republic does not get any economic and other direct benefits from this membership, it is viewed as having a symbolic value for the republic's sovereignty.³² Furthermore, in his assessment of the foreign policy of Tatarstan, the state adviser to the President noted that Tatarstan could represent Russian interests in the Islamic international organizations.³³ Tatarstan had also initiated contacts with some organizations of the UN (such as UNESCO and UNIDO) and the League of Arab States.³⁴ Furthermore, Graney noted that Tatarstani officials tried to stress "the unmediated quality of its ties with international organizations, and the republic's pretensions to join international multilateral regimes" to differentiate the republic's identity as a sovereign state actor.³⁵

Furthermore, in a number of cases Tatarstan has been involved with the issues related to the overall Russian foreign policy. As was mentioned earlier, some of its agreements (as with Abkhazia) even went against Russian commitments in the international arena. The most recent well-known case of Tatarstan developing its own independent position on the issue concerning the larger Russian foreign policy occurred in relation to the Kosovo crisis. On April 8, 1999 the State Council of the Republic of Tatarstan voted for a declaration, which expressed concern regarding the war in Yugoslavia and called for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. This declaration followed the interview given by President Shaimiev in which he offered his opinion about the events in Yugoslavia. During the interview he expressed his opposition to Russia's involvement in the crisis in Yugoslavia and suggested that no volunteers

³¹ This organization was established in 1994 as a consultative body of the Council of Europe with the main aim of helping the member-states to establish effective local and regional self-government (see their website: <http://www.coe.fr/cplre>).

³² From the interview with Mikhail Stoliarov (ex-deputy chief of the Tatarstan's Representation in Moscow).

³³ R. Khakimov, "Vneshniaia politika Respubliki Tatarstan: real'nost' i perspektivy" (unpublished manuscript), p. 10.

³⁴ Akulov, "Mezhdunarodnaia deiatel'nost'."

³⁵ Katherine Graney, "Projecting Sovereignty: Statehood and Nationness in Post-Soviet Russia" (Ph.D., diss; University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1999), p. 213.

should be allowed to go to fight for any side of the conflict. He criticized the position of the Russian government that "went too far already in supporting the rather questionable politics of the Yugoslav leader Slobodan Milosevic."³⁶ Still further, he spoke sharply against the idea of providing military aid to Yugoslavia that was proposed at the Federation Council on March 31, 1999, arguing that Russia's involvement in the Yugoslav conflict might lead to unexpected consequences.³⁷ A similar position was expressed by the state adviser to the President, Rafael Khakimov, who viewed the NATO strikes against Yugoslavia as justified.³⁸

Furthermore, on July 5, 1999, the State Council adopted another declaration in response to the decision by the Council of Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation regarding sending Russian peacekeeping troops to Kosovo. The Declaration criticized the decision on the grounds that the peacekeeping operations, at a time when the Russian state itself is in a deep crisis and cannot provide a decent living for its citizens, are an indication of "political hypocrisy and immorality."³⁹ Further, the State Council of Tatarstan declared that it would not let its citizens participate in military units of the Russian army in Kosovo (meaning that no conscripts from Tatarstan will be sent to Kosovo).

This type of critical reaction towards Russian policy on the Balkans has arisen not only in Tatarstan but also in some other republics in Russia. Specifically, the presidents of Bashkortostan and Ingushetia have also expressed their critical assessment of Russia's involvement in the Kosovo crisis.⁴⁰ At first glance, this foreign policy demarche on the part of these republics could be viewed as driven by the fact that part of

³⁶ "M. Shaimiev: Yugoslavii nuzhna pomoshch'. Diplomaticheskaja i gumanitarnaja," *Respublika Tatarstan*, 9 April 1999.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ RFE/RL Tatar-Bashkir Report, 6 April 1999, <http://www.rferl.org/bd/tb/reports/archives/1999/04/060499.html>.

³⁹ "Zaiavlenie Gosudarstvennogo Soveta Respubliki Tatarstan v sviazi s priniatiem Sovetom Federatsii Federal'nogo Sobranija Rossiiskoi Federatsii postanovleniia 'Ob ispol'zovanii voinskiikh formirovanii Vooruzhennykh Sil Rossiiskoi Federatsii v mezhdunarodnom prisutstvii po bezopasnosti v Kosovo, Soiuznaia Respublika Yugoslavii'" (<http://www.tatar.ru>).

⁴⁰ Vera Postnova, "Tatarstan protiv otpravki nashikh voisk v Kosovo," *Nezavisimaja gazeta*, 7 August 1999.

their population, in fact their titular population, is Islamic and, therefore, the leaders of these republics refuse to be involved in a war against Albanian Muslims. Russia, on the other hand, with a predominantly Orthodox population, was on the side of Serbia. This view, though plausible, is not quite satisfactory. Assuming that politicians are rational actors with the main goal of surviving in power, a more instrumental interpretation seems to be necessary for explaining this particular demarche. Considering the political context of the upcoming presidential elections in Russia and the high level of uncertainty regarding the position of ethnic republics in the Russian Federation (revealed in much talk about the necessity of reconsidering the federal relations), this policy could be viewed as an attempt to reassert the special status that the republics were able to achieve during previous years.

Similar motivations, I would argue, evoked a negative reaction on the part of Tatarstani leaders to the idea of a union between Russia and Belarus. This was another major line of opposition of Tatarstan to Russian foreign policy. The President of Tatarstan repeatedly stated that if Russia and Belarus signed the Union Treaty, Tatarstan would enhance its status to the level of the Union republic (to be on the same level as Russia and Belarus). He argued that in the case of the Union between the two countries, the 1994 Treaty⁴¹ between Tatarstan and Russia would change its meaning (since Russia then would be a new state). The fact that this position was merely a bluff was revealed immediately after the agreement was reached and the Presidents of Russia and Belarus signed the treaty on December 8, 1999. Shaimiev commented that there was no need for Tatarstan to become a union republic as the agreement was not really about creating a new unified state but rather amounted to a treaty of an economic nature between two sovereign independent states.⁴² It is not clear whether his reaction would have been very different if the treaty between Russia and Belarus was more serious (though it is hard to imagine what he could have

⁴¹ Dogovor Rossiiskoi Federatsii i Respubliki Tatarstan "O razgranichenii predmetov vedeniia i vzaimnom delegirovanii polnomochii mezhdru organami gosudarstvennoi vlasti Rossiiskoi Federatsii i organami gosudarstvennoi vlasti Respubliki Tatarstan" (15 February 1994), *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, No. 33 (890), 18 February 1994, p. 5.

⁴² Vera Postnova, "Shaimiev prochital dogovor i uspokoilsia," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 12 October 1999.

realistically done to counter this union). However, the politics of Tatarstan's government vis-à-vis this treaty with Belarus demonstrated particularly clearly the extent to which the leaders are concerned with the image of Tatarstan rather than some substantive, practical issues.

These independent positions taken by the Tatarstani elite regarding foreign affairs seem to confirm the idea that the republican government has been in practice trying to project the sovereign status of the Republic of Tatarstan despite its location within the political space of the Russian Federation.

FOREIGN ECONOMIC RELATIONS

The main economic partners of Tatarstan are in the West. The statistical data on foreign trade demonstrate that during 1997-2001, Tatarstan's main trade partners were Germany, Finland, the UK, Switzerland, Ukraine, Poland and France. Furthermore, among the joint ventures with participation of foreign capital, most companies in Tatarstan are created with capital coming from the US, Germany and the UK. Thus, it seems plausible to suggest that, indeed, it would make the most economic sense to develop diplomatic relations with these states. However, among these countries, only two of them – the US and France – have Tatarstani plenipotentiary representations. While Finland and Poland have, at least, Tatarstani trade missions,⁴³ the UK and Switzerland lack any permanent representation in the republic. No major agreements have been signed with most of these countries, except for Ukraine, Poland, and some German Länder. It appears, therefore, that these countries cannot be considered as the main diplomatic partners of the republic; they do not have significant contacts with Tatarstan on a state-to-state level.

The analysis of most diplomatic efforts made by Tatarstani leaders reveals the significance of the Islamic factor in developing foreign relations. Specifically, over the past decade Tatarstan has developed

⁴³ The major difference between the plenipotentiary representations and trade missions is the source of financing. While the republican budget is used to finance plenipotentiary representations, most trade missions are self-financed through their own commercial activities.

special relations with Turkey, Egypt, the UAE, and Jordan. It was in Egypt that President Shaimiev was received as a head of a sovereign nation-state.⁴⁴ It was in Jordan that the Prime Minister of Tatarstan met King Hussein in November 1997 and was awarded the prestigious order dedicated to the friendship between the two peoples.⁴⁵ It was in Turkey where during his vacations the President of Tatarstan never passed a chance to meet with the then President Suleiman Demirel.⁴⁶

These special diplomatic ties with some of the Muslim countries cannot be justified on pure economic grounds. Therefore, a case could be made for cultural and religious factors as driving forces behind these contacts. Due to cultural and religious links, Tatarstan gets distinct attention and recognition from these states, which consider Tatarstan's "statehood" more seriously than the countries in the West. This is clearly revealed in the formalities surrounding the visits of official delegations. To the extent that the sovereignty of the republic depends on the recognition by other states, it is not surprising that the republican leaders would pursue wider contacts with states that recognize Tatarstan as a sovereign state (at least through the protocol) and are willing to bypass Moscow in their relations with Tatarstan.

This is not the entire story, however. The composition of exports from the republic reveals that Tatarstan's relations with its main trade partners are based on the export of oil and petrochemical products – a fact that explains the stability of these contacts since the demand for oil does not fluctuate significantly. On the other hand, the Islamic (Southern) direction of foreign contacts of the republic presents an opportunity to promote the industrial goods and products produced in Tatarstan. While not competitive in the advanced European countries, trucks, helicopters, equipment, and even defense-related products manufactured in Tatarstan attract more interest in the lesser-

⁴⁴ This visit to Egypt in February 1997 is actually treated as a landmark in the development of foreign ties with Egypt. The fact that the President of Tatarstan was honored as a head of a sovereign state is given a lot of symbolic meaning by the authorities of Tatarstan (from interviews with the officials from the Foreign Affairs Department).

⁴⁵ The press in Tatarstan emphasized the exceptional quality of this award noting that it has not yet been awarded to any Russian leader.

⁴⁶ *Tatar-Inform Weekly*, No. 34 (28 September – 5 October 1999).

developed countries.⁴⁷ Thus, the attention paid by the Tatar government to relationships with India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, Iran, the UAE, and Egypt – the southern direction of foreign contacts – could be explained by a combination of two goals on the part of the government. First, it is an attempt to open up new markets for Tatarstan's products and, second, to establish closer ties with culturally closer countries to enhance the distinct status of the republic within the Russian Federation by actualizing its statehood. Further, it is plausible to suggest that these two goals are closely interrelated since cultural affinity and the special ties between Tatarstan and these states could be conveniently used by the government for promoting its industrial goods in that region.

THE LIMITS OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION: WHO SETS THE BOUNDARIES?

How can one understand such behavior on the part of the Tatarstan's elites? What enabled them to get involved in the pursuit of state sovereignty, while denying the accusations that they wish to separate from Russia? Why did the republican elites start to "imagine" themselves as a state and "construct" the republican identity as that of a sovereign state? How exceptional is this case within the Russian Federation?

The idea of the "constructedness" of identity does not mean that it could be "imagined" in any way. There are boundaries as to how one can imagine "the self" and Tatarstan had always remained within those boundaries or otherwise it would not have received a growing

⁴⁷ Unfortunately, no statistical figures on the export structure by countries are publicly available. The analysis of specific foreign visits and the results of their negotiations demonstrates that delegations from Poland, Finland, and Germany show interest in oil and petrochemical products, while the visits to and from Iraq, India, Algeria, Pakistan, and Iran generally result in agreements related to purchases of helicopters, planes, ships, trucks, oil equipment as well as opening branches of Tatarstan's companies producing cars. For some examples see Shamil' Idiatullin, "Mezhdunarodnye svyazi: V Tatariu privezli ne tekhnologiy," *Kommersant-Daily*, No. 124 (18 July 2002); Sergei Babusenko, "Rupii idut v delo," *Trud*, No. 221 (28 November 1998); "Poland: Kwasniewski on Expansion of Cooperation with Tatarstan," FBIS-EEU-96-209-A.

recognition from all of its main partners – including the Russian Federation and other states. The interesting theoretical and practical question is who sets those boundaries or “rhetorical frames” that “engender a collective field of imaginable possibilities”⁴⁸ and how this is achieved.

Constructivists argue that the field’s boundaries are set up at critical points “along with new sets of power relations and the rhetorical settlements that accompany their construction.”⁴⁹ The pursuit and projection of Tatarstan’s identity as a sovereign state originated in the critical juncture of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. At the time when the USSR was the state recognized by the international community as representing the people living in that territory, the declarations of sovereignty – be it the Russian Federation’s or Tatarstan’s – did not have any qualitative difference in their degree of legitimacy. In fact, Tatarstan and other republics within Russia followed on the footsteps of Russia, simply imitating all the actions undertaken by Yeltsin (adopting declarations of sovereignty and holding elections of the president). Republics used the same arguments of democratization and national self-determination as used by Russia vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.⁵⁰ Furthermore, based on the claims of representing the distinct ethnic group of Tatars and historical claims of statehood, Tatarstan demanded participation in the signing of the Union Treaty as an equal partner, along with Russia as opposed to being a part of the Russian delegation.

The events of August 1991 prevented signing of the Treaty and led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, in some ironic way, the ultimate victory of Russia that emerged as the legitimate and recognized state after the Belovezh agreements legitimated the actions of the Tatarstani elites that were grounding their actions in the same

⁴⁸ Concuelo Cruz, “Identity and Persuasion: How Nations Remember Their Pasts and Make Their Futures?” *World Politics* 52:3 (2000), pp. 275-312.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

⁵⁰ In fact, the main ideas and even some wording in the Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Russian Federation and that of the Republic of Tatarstan are strikingly similar (the English version of the text of the Russian Declaration of State Sovereignty can be found in FBIS-SOV-90-115, p. 102-103; for the text of Tatarstan’s Declaration of Sovereignty see fn. 17.

arguments as the actions of the Russian elites were framed prior to the Soviet collapse. The rhetorical frame set by Russia emerged as a victorious one following Yeltsin's victory. Based on that same frame of adhering to democratic principles and the right for national self-determination, the republic maintained its stand on equality with Russia and did not participate in signing of the Federal Treaty in March 1992, demanding instead a separate treaty on delegation of powers between Russia and Tatarstan. The republic was the first constituent unit in the federation to conclude in February 1994 a Treaty on Delimitation of Powers and Authorities with the central government.⁵¹ The Treaty endowed the government with wide-ranging powers that included the right not only to conduct its foreign economic affairs, but more generally, to engage in international activities.

Katherine Graney, who studied the political discourse of the elites in Tatarstan, found that that the republican elites have consistently represented their efforts in the international arena within the framework of the overall sovereignty project, "holding up their foreign policy activities as evidence of Tatarstan's sovereign statehood."⁵² In fact, such rhetoric could be viewed as an element of the "power politics of identity" in which power is expressed not through physical force, but through a specific kind of "representational force" embodied in forceful narratives (in this case made forceful by the Russian elites themselves).⁵³

The conduct of foreign activities has been only one of the components of Tatarstan's strategy aimed at the pursuit of sovereignty. In addition to other symbolic measures such as acquiring the formal attributes of statehood - a flag, anthem, and Constitution - the government made legal provisions for Tatarstan's status as a sovereign state. Starting with the Declaration of Sovereignty of August 1990 and a referendum to determine a public support for sovereignty held in March 1992, the government adopted the Constitution of Tatarstan in

⁵¹ The practice of signing such Treaties (though with different rights and jurisdictions) has been widely spread since then. In all, 46 treaties were signed between the federal center and the constituent units of the federation. The recent trend in the context of Putin's federal reforms has been to abrogate these treaties.

⁵² Katherine Graney, "Projecting Sovereignty," p. 213.

⁵³ For a more specific elaboration of this idea see Janice Bially Mattern's "The Power Politics of Identity," *European Journal of International Relations* 7:3 (2001), pp. 349-397.

November 1992, which declared the republic “a sovereign state, and subject of international law.”⁵⁴ Further, the republican authorities have undertaken policies designed to “realize” the declared sovereignty of the republic. This is clearly seen at the level of educational policy, for example. Katherine Graney has demonstrated that the attempts to project sovereignty in the domain of educational policy consisted of “the republicanization of the former branches of the RAN (the Russian Academy of Sciences – G. S.), ...efforts to transfer the production of textbooks used at all levels of the educational process away from Moscow to the republican level, the introduction of a significant republican-initiated component into the general education system, and the reform of the ‘national schools’.”⁵⁵ In brief, both in its actions and in its rhetoric, the republican government has demonstrated a commitment to the goal of realizing its sovereignty and actualizing its status as a state.

How far did this state sovereignty project bring the republic? The political significance of Tatarstan’s paradiplomatic activities faded away along with the political consolidation that occurred in the federal center. The main breakpoint in this regard is associated with the policies and politics of President Putin.

PUTIN’S REFORMS

The policies of recentralization undertaken by President Putin since May 2000 represent a powerful challenge to the rhetorical frame that originated in the period of struggle between Yeltsin and Gorbachev and was maintained during Yeltsin’s presidency through the efforts of such republics as Tatarstan. The challenge came in the

⁵⁴ The Constitution of the Republic of Tatarstan, Article 61. “Konstitutsiia Respubliki Tatarstan,” adopted by the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Tatarstan with alterations, Law No. N1665-XII (30 November 1992). The constitution was amended several times from 1992-2000, and a version incorporating all amendments was published in *Izbratel’ Tatarstana* (Kazan: Tsentral’naia Izbratel’naia Komissiia Respubliki Tatarstan, 2000), pp. 2-33.

⁵⁵ Katherine Graney, “Education Reform in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan: Sovereignty Projects in Post-Soviet Russia,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 51:4 (1999), p. 613.

form of the new rhetoric of “dictatorship of law” and the interests and the strength of the state. This rhetoric was supported by a set of concrete actions demonstrating the seriousness of the intentions directed towards reformulating the unstable federal bargain that was achieved under Yeltsin. Putin established seven federal districts and placed trusted people as presidential envoys in these districts (the envoys’ first task was a campaign of legal standardization and harmonization).⁵⁶ In addition, the State Duma adopted a set of new laws removing the regional governors from the Federation Council (and thus depriving them of their immunity) and allowing the president to fire the governors under certain circumstances. Within the same campaign of revising the federal relations and strengthening the position of the center, in June 2000 the Constitutional Court ruled against the Republic of Altai’s Constitution and, specifically, its declared sovereignty status.⁵⁷ This was widely perceived as the beginning of a campaign against all the other declarations of sovereignty adopted by Russia’s republics.

How did Tatarstan react to these policies? In the face of enormous difference in resource endowment of the two political actors (Tatarstan and Russia), Tatarstan could not contain the pressure coming from the federal center without making some concessions. However, while making the concessions, the government remained true to the model of relationships with Russia that emerged in the 1990s: the government demanded bilateral negotiations over each and every point of the necessary changes. Ultimately, the concessions were made from both sides. Tatarstan’s State Council worked on revising the republican laws and the Constitution but left the new Constitution containing some articles that contradicted the federal legislation.

⁵⁶ For one of the most recent analyses of Putin’s federal reforms, see Peter Reddaway and Robert W. Orttung, eds., *The Dynamics of Russian Politics: Putin’s Reform of Federal-Regional Relations* (Lanham, Boulder, 2004). For one of the earlier analyses, see Matthew Hyde’s “Putin’s Federal Reforms and their Implications for Presidential Power in Russia,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 53:5 (2001), pp. 719-743.

⁵⁷ Postanovlenie Konstitutsionnogo Suda Rossiiskoi Federatsii po delu o proverka konstitutsional’nosti otdel’nykh polozhenii Konstitutsii Respubliki Altai i Federal’nogo zakona “Ob obshchikh printsipakh organizatsii zakonodatel’nykh (predstavitel’nykh) i ispolnitel’nykh organov gosudarstvennoi vlasti sub’ektov Rossiiskoi Federatsii,” *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 21 June 2000, p. 5.

Particularly, it incorporated the 1994 Treaty as an essential part of the republic's basic law, and maintained the rhetoric of sovereignty (despite the earlier rulings by the Russian Constitutional Court regarding the unconstitutionality of sovereignty of the subjects of the Russian Federation).⁵⁸ This could be seen, on the one hand, as a confirmation of the power of identity and representational force. Tatarstan was able to maintain and re-enforce the rhetoric of sovereignty and statehood in its founding document despite the enormous pressure emanating from Moscow. On the other hand, it has to be noted that the real sovereignty (or the control over domestic affairs) is fleeing the republic's elites as they have to adapt to the changes promoted by the federal center. The government of Tatarstan was not able to oppose such practical federal steps as the opening of the branch of the federal treasury in Kazan and reconsidering the division of taxes between the republic and the center.⁵⁹ The republican elites also have to adhere to the new law on political parties that made it impossible to create regionally-based parties. Furthermore, the new rules on forming regional legislatures require that at least half the seats in regional legislatures be allotted to candidates from party lists, thus ensuring federal reach into the regions. This innovation unavoidably enhances the influence of the central authorities in the regions through the party of power.

Tatarstan will also have to adjust its rules governing the local governments. Currently, the republic adheres to the Soviet model of local self-government in which local government is essentially a part of the state controlled by the executive branch of power. An introduction of the system of local government that would be independent from the state control would undoubtedly threaten the current political regime in Tatarstan, as it would allow for the emergence of autonomous political forces in the republic.

⁵⁸ The new constitution can be found in "Zakon Respubliki Tatarstan 'O vnesenii izmenenii i dopolnenii v Konstitutsiiu Respubliki Tatarstan'," *Respublika Tatarstan*, No. 87-88 (30 April 2002), pp. 3-4

⁵⁹ The issue of taxation was probably one of the most significant blows to the sovereignty of the republic – the balance between the republic and the center in terms of tax division changed significantly in favor of the center. Although the republican government was able to negotiate a federal program of socioeconomic development of the Republic of Tatarstan for 2001-2006 that provided for a large amount of financial inflow into Tatarstan's economy from the center, this was more of a one-time deal and could not compensate for the loss of autonomous control over financial resources.

In this context of national re-centralization, the political meaning of paradiplomacy loses its ground in Tatarstan. Although the government has continued its state-like behavior, claiming that Russia's Constitution itself proclaims the republics to be states, its foreign policy actions are devoid of real political meaning and represent more of an attempt to "keep the face."⁶⁰ It is becoming apparent that the republic's foreign activities are shifting more into the functional realm as its symbolic significance is rendered meaningless by Putin's project of the consolidation of the Russian state.⁶¹ On the symbolic level, this is seen from the fact of the opening of the representation of the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation in Kazan as well as other developments within the republican institutional environment.⁶²

CONCLUSION

This study attempted to capture the symbolic aspect of paradiplomacy and bring to light its significant role in constructing the identity of a region as a sovereign state. As was demonstrated in this chapter, Tatarstan sought to practice its statehood through the conduct of its foreign policy, projecting its state-like identity externally. However, such practice of statehood started to lose its symbolic meaning as the center sought to consolidate its powers under President Putin. Hence, it appears that the construction of the self through the interaction with the external world in the context of a federation appears to be only

⁶⁰ The most recent examples included such a state-like gesture on the part of the republic as humanitarian aid to Afghanistan (Irina Ksenofontova, "Gumanitarnaia pomoshch' dlia naseleniia Afganistana," *Respublika Tatarstan*, No. 2-3 (5 January 2002) and direct contacts with the Pope in Vatican (that once again raised much controversy within Russia because of the problems in the relationships between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church) (Don Hill and Rim Guilfanov, "Tatarstan: Three-Way Tug of War Strains "Kazan Mother of God's Icon," *RFE/RL Report*, 10 August 2001).

⁶¹ This assessment is based on my conversations with the officials from the Foreign Affairs Department in the past several years.

⁶² The protocol section of the Foreign Affairs Department, for example, has been universalized to serve all the domestic visits and republican official events, which indirectly demonstrates the loss of clout associated with international affairs and their meaning for the republican identity.

meaningful in the moments of political fluidity and chaos in the center. In the moments of political stability in the center, it is the domestic political regime and the domestic actors that define what a region is.

Returning to the initial issue of how the evolution of regional identities through external interaction could affect the identity of Russia as a whole, it appears possible to suggest that the impact of the politics of identity on the sub-national level should not be overestimated. The sub-national involvement in international policy-making does not pose a threat of disintegration for Russia. Ultimately, the issues of state integrity depend on the strength of the national political regime and the policies of the center in regards to consolidating and integrating the various territories of Russia economically, politically and culturally.