

Humanities in School as a Tool of the Nationalities Policy: The Case of the Republic of Tatarstan

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Abstract. The article investigates how humanities disciplines are taught in schools of the Republic of Tatarstan in terms of their role in preserving and supporting national identity. Teaching practices and curricula are analyzed to find out whether the teaching methods designed to inculcate regional identity contribute to the development of national identity as well, or whether they focus on creating an image of the region that brings it outside the context of Russia. The methods used include overt observation, in-depth interviews with school administrators and humanities teach-

ers, and content analysis of textbooks on the history of Tatarstan. The study reveals a gap between the regional policy and real-life teaching practices. The region's education policy in teaching the humanities is aimed at achieving the objectives of the nationalities policy, which include the development of ethnic identity in students. In reality, however, teachers of the humanities focus on mitigating ethnic differences and disagreements, first of all by delivering regional history as part of the history of Russia and dismissing the role of students' ethnicity.

Keywords: education policy, national identity, humanities disciplines in school, ideology in the humanities, the Soviet Union's nationalities policy, Russia's nationalities policy, multiculturalism, *korenizatsiya*.

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Modern debate on the objectives of school education features a diversity of controversial viewpoints, of which two extremes distinctly stand out. The first one can be conventionally dubbed "neutrally technocratic": the school must focus on international integration and educational outcomes measured by top international studies such as PISA and TIMSS. Advocates of the "traditionally patriotic" perspective insist on the importance of patriotic education and the need to inculcate national and ethnic identity in schoolchildren¹. The key role in

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¹ The attitudes presented here only capture one plane of a more intricate debate. Heterogeneity of perceptions about the objectives of school educa-

this debate is assigned to humanities disciplines, whose paramount goal is believed to consist, depending on opponent's political beliefs, either in improving the overall sociocultural development of students or in shaping national and ethnic identity. The issue of the role and significance of the humanities becomes particularly thorny where "nation" can be associated with both ethnic and national identity, which is primarily the case with the indigenous ("national") republics.

This study provides an analysis of the nationalities policy in "elite" schools of the Republic of Tatarstan, namely of the correlation between teaching practices designed to develop ethnic (regional) and national identity. The choice of "elite" schools as the object of research is based on the assumption that such schools teach children of local administrative elites, which tend to have a great influence on the development of ethnic and national identity by virtue of their intellectual and cultural status as well as by taking personal and managerial action. Due to sample specificity, the results obtained cannot be extrapolated to other indigenous ("national") republics of Russia and by no means reflect the great diversity of the local school education system, which also features, for instance, national gymnasiums that deserve a dedicated study.

With a view to identifying how the nationalities policy is implemented in schools, we first analyze the available legal documents and historical sources and then use our findings to design an empirical study, which includes textbook content analysis and processing of the data obtained in in-depth interviews and overt observations, and finally attempt to interpret this data with due regard for all the information collected. Diversity of the research methods makes it possible to pinpoint the ambivalence of the existing perceptions about the nationalities policy as well as to emphasize the fundamental inconsistencies in implementing the nationalities policy in schools. The article is structured to capture the successive stages of research.

1. The Legal and Institutional Framework of Teaching Humanities in School

In compliance with the Federal State Education Standard (FSES), which all Russian schools will have adopted by 2020, humanities serve to inculcate ethnic identity as well as a friendly and tolerant attitude towards different peoples of Russia and foreign countries.

The FSES employs the term "nation" in two meanings: (a) as an ethnic group and (b) as a politically and legally united national entity. When it comes to nation as a national entity, the case is about the "national interests" or "national values of the Russian society". Ambivalence of the term also manifests itself in the ambiguous objectives of humanities disciplines: develop "national" identity in its ethnic sense,

tion in post-Soviet Russia is analyzed, for example, in the article *Society on the Education Objectives* [Lyubarsky 2012].

on the one hand, and in its “nation state” sense, on the other hand. A separate set of objectives is associated with settling possible ethnic conflicts, i. e. teaching tolerant behavior. Thus, education policy with regard to humanities intends to preserve and reproduce ethnicities while at the same time developing national consciousness in various ethnic groups coexisting peacefully within one country.

Not only is this ambivalence typical regarding solving “national” issues in education but it also manifests itself in Russia’s nationalities policy as such. This can be illustrated by one of the key documents stipulating the main goals and objectives of the government’s nationalities policy, namely the Strategy for the Nationalities Policy of the Russian Federation until 2025², developed “in consistence with the fundamentals of the 1996 Conception of the Nationalities Policy of the Russian Federation”. On the one hand, the document suggests ensuring unity (unity of peoples, integrity) of the Russian Federation as a goal and fundamental principle. On the other hand, it lays emphasis on the right of peoples for self-determination and preservation of cultural diversity, which may implicitly carry risks for national integrity. Ambivalence in defining these objectives becomes obvious in the Strategy’s attempt to find grounds whereby solving one of the two problems would imply solving both:

The Russian State was built as a unity of peoples, of which the Russian people were historically the backbone. <...> The modern-day Russian State rests on a single cultural (“civilizational”) code which is based on the preservation and development of Russian culture and language as well as historical and cultural heritage of all Russia’s peoples. This code is characterized by explicit commitment to truth and justice, respect for the indigenous traditions of peoples inhabiting Russia, and the ability to integrate their best achievements in the unified Russian culture.

However, the idea of a single cultural code conceals a fundamental difficulty in determining the specific nationalities policy measures rather than making the policy any clearer. If the code is shared, there should be no implicit risks associated with ethnic self-determination, yet the effects of the Soviet nationalities policy render this assumption questionable in the least. Neither does the indication of the Russian people’s uniting role eliminate the fundamental difficulty, as this statement is hard to square with the ethnic equality statement. Humanities in this context are treated as a practical tool for achieving the ambivalent nationalities policy objectives. Ambivalence is tackled by functionally differentiating the curriculum: humanities disciplines of the

² Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 1666 “On the Strategy for the Nationalities Policy of the Russian Federation until 2025” of 12/19/2012. <http://text.document.kremlin.ru/SESSION/PILOT/main.htm>

federal component³ aim to develop national identity, while humanities of the regional component seek to nurture and maintain ethnic identity. For this reason, one of the key indicators of achieving these objectives is “enhancing the role of humanities”, along with “integrating classes dedicated to traditions and cultures of various peoples” and “using bilingualism and multilingualism to preserve ethno-cultural and linguistic diversity.”

The federal grant program, Enhancing the Unity of the Russian Nation and Ethno-Cultural Development of the Peoples of Russia (2014–2020), one of the fundamental cross-sectoral programs, is another illustration of nationalities policy ambivalence⁴. The whole document is built around two main objectives: develop a common national identity and preserve the ethnic diversity of Russia⁵. Education is regarded as a nationalities policy implementation tool and as the main institution to shape identities. Meanwhile, “nation” is used here in two meanings as well, referring to both the national and ethnic identity of an individual.

Measures specified in one of the annexes to the program, whether classified as designed to develop national identity or maintain ethno-cultural diversity, most often actually seek to popularize and support local cultures. Obviously, development of “national” identity in this document is understood as popularization of specific cultures and establishment of an intercultural dialogue, or “ethno-cultural diversity management” in bureaucratic parlance. In this conception, integrity is constructed by providing conditions for a dialogue of cultures whose identities are ensured and guaranteed by the government.

One of the regional programs implementing the Strategy for the Nationalities Policy of the Russian Federation until 2025 and the federal grant program Enhancing the Unity of the Russian Nation and Ethno-Cultural Development of the Peoples of Russia (2014–2020) is called Implementation of the Nationalities Policy in the Republic of Tatarstan in 2014–2020⁶. The language and wording of the main objec-

³ Although the categories of “federal component” and “regional component” of curriculum prescribed by the 2004 Standard were replaced in the new FSEs by “invariant component” and “variant component”, respectively, their functions in terms of nationalities policy implementation have remain commensurable. These categories are thus used interchangeably in some contexts.

⁴ Resolution of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 718 “On the Federal Grant Program ‘Enhancing the Unity of the Russian Nation and Ethno-Cultural Development of the Peoples of Russia (2014–2020)’” of 08/20/2013. <http://government.ru/docs/4022/>

⁵ For example, Annex 3 to this document mentions “enhancement of national unity and harmonization of inter-ethnic relations” and “promotion of ethno-cultural diversity of the peoples of Russia” as separate expenditure items.

⁶ Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 1006 “On Approving the State-Run Program ‘Implementation of the Nationalities Policy in the Republic of Tatarstan in 2014–2010’” of 12/18/2013. http://prav.tatarstan.ru/docs/post/post1.htm?page=6&pub_id=215329

tives reproduce the discourse of the Federal Program and the Strategy. In addition to this program, there are numerous other documents on a regional level that regulate the implementation of the nationalities policy in the Republic of Tatarstan, such as state-run programs “Preserving, Studying and Developing the National Languages of the Republic of Tatarstan and Other Languages of the Republic in 2014–2020”⁷ or “Preserving the Ethnic Identity of the Tatar People (2014–2016)”⁸.

To summarize, the nationalities policy is legally regulated by governmental documents that are put at the heart of regional programs. Supporting ethno-cultural and national identity at the same time is seen as a key objective of the nationalities policy. However, the fundamental difficulty in achieving this objective has to do with its ambivalence, since policies designed to preserve ethnic diversity and cultures carry a certain risk of disintegration. The documents mentioned above approach education as one of the key tools of the nationalities policy, the “ambivalence” of which can be eliminated, among other things, by functionally differentiating the curriculum: humanities of one module can promote national identity, while humanities of the other, ethno-cultural or local identity. As a result, the necessity of government support for ethno-cultural and national identity is entrenched in legal documents stipulating the specific aspects of implementing the nationalities policy in Russia. To understand the historical background of this conception, genesis of the nationalities policy in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia must be delved into.

2. The Development of Regional and National Identity in the Context of the Nationalities Policy in the Soviet Union and Russia

The Soviet nationalities policy was heterogeneous and varied largely throughout the history of the USSR. Still, its fundamental dominants included supporting and in some cases shaping ethnic identity (including measures designed to build ethnic groups that did not have a writing system or a high level of culture before they joined the Soviet Union), on the one hand, and constructing the identity of a Soviet citizen with international solidarity at its base, on the other hand. The international aspect of Soviet national identity, which is beyond the scope of this study, stemmed from the Marxist premise on the international nature of class solidarity (“Proletarians of all countries, unite!”), which placed the Soviet Union in a unique position among sovereign

⁷ Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 794 “On Approving the State-Run Program ‘Preserving, Studying and Developing the National Languages of the Republic of Tatarstan and Other Languages in the Republic of Tatarstan in 2014–2020’ of 10/25/2013”. http://tatarstan.ru/rus/file/pub/pub_204775.pdf

⁸ Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 785 “On Approving the State-Run Program of the Republic of Tatarstan ‘Preserving the Ethnic Identity of the Tatar People (2014–2016)’” of 10/21/2013. http://tatmsk.tatarstan.ru/rus/file/pub/pub_203779.pdf

nation states. The Soviet Union's support for ethnic minorities put up a "showcase" designed to make the Soviet political model attractive for the Third-World countries and national liberation movements in the first place. Meanwhile, this policy relied upon the doctrinal historicist idea, shared by Joseph Stalin in particular, that before progressing to international communism, an ethnic group must first develop its local culture, in keeping with the regularities of the historical process⁹ [Kurennoy 2013:14].

In the second half of the 1920s, as the idea of inevitable transition to the world revolution phase gave way to the doctrine of building socialism in a particular country, Stalin put forth a formula for hybridizing the "national" and supra-"national" aspects of Soviet identity: ethno-cultural identities should be constructed as "national in form and socialist in content" (1925) (Stalin I. (1934) *O politicheskikh zadachakh Universiteta narodov Vostoka* [On the Political Objectives of the University of Toilers of the East]. *Marksizm i natsional'no-kolonial'ny vopros* [Marxism and the Issue of Nations and Colonies], Moscow: State Political Literature Publishing House, p. 158, quoted after [Kildyushov 2012:95]). In the late Soviet period, the 24th Congress of the Communist Party defined the Soviet people as a "new historical community", "a multinational collective of urban and rural toilers, united by the all-encompassing philosophy of the socialist regime, the Marxist-Leninist ideology, the communist beaux ideals of the working class, and the principles of internationalism" [Kaltakhchyan 1976]. This way, Soviet identity had a number of aspects: ethno-cultural, Soviet—associated with identifying oneself as a citizen of the USSR,—international and class-related, and ideological, meaning commitment to a specific system of values (the Marxist-Leninist ideology). In practice, however, these aspects could rarely be harmonized, which explains the rather sharp changes in national and cultural policies, including in education. These changes can be traced by using the example of the Russian language education policy.

According to contemporary researchers, not only did the Bolsheviks contribute actively to the preservation of various ethnic cultures in the early Soviet period (between the two wars) but they also took part in constructing such ethnic cultures, in particular in shaping ethnic cultural elites. The idea of such policy was born as early as in the

⁹ See, for example, Joseph Stalin's closing speech for the 10th Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks): "... the Ukrainian ethnicity does exist, and development of its culture is a responsibility of communists. Going against history is no good. Clearly, the Ukrainian cities that still keep elements of the Russian culture will unavoidably be Ukrainized over time" (Minutes of the 10th Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), 1933, p. 216, quoted after [Kurennoy 2013:14]). For comparison: "The humanity can approach the inevitable merger of all nations through the transition period of full liberation of all oppressed nations" [Lenin 1969:256].

1920s, when the Soviet Union was laying the foundation for the *korenizatsiya*, mostly built around constructing and preserving ethnic cultures, with a view to winning over the political loyalty to the Soviet regime among various ethnic groups. “This policy, largely elaborated by Stalin, suggested promoting indigenous population to the key positions, creating local national systems of higher, secondary and elementary education, encouraging the development of ethnic languages, cultures and sciences in the indigenous republics and regions in order to win their support for the Soviet regime” [Dmitriev 2013:115]. The *korenizatsiya* involved a series of measures, including “nativization” of school and culture in remote indigenous communities. “The preference in education was given to teaching the local language and the culture of the so-called “titular” nation, while teaching of the Russian language, literature, history and culture receded into the background” [ibid.:125].

This policy had caused some grave management issues by the second half of the 1930s. In particular, the government realized that effective military leadership was unachievable due to heteroglossia among recruits from the republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus, many of whom could not speak Russian when they arrived in military units. For this reason, and for the purpose of solving the industrialization problems, the Russian language became a mandatory subject in all schools. The pragmatics behind this initiative was managerial rather than related to ethnic culture, as the main reason for making learning Russian compulsory was the need to find ways of settling management issues in the context of increased military and industrial mobility [ibid.: 125–130].

The Law “On Russian as a Required Class in Schools of National Republics and Regions” was adopted in 1938, the same year that Russian literature was made a compulsory course, too¹⁰. Before that, Russian had been an optional class, however centralized the education system was. The effects did not come immediately, which can be explained by the low quality of teaching Russian in non-Russian-speaking schools as well as by the bureaucratic reorientation difficulties [Blitsteyn 2011:310]: the implementers found it hard to realize the pragmatic and managerial objectives concealed behind the official narrative. On top of that, institutional inertness of the preceding *korenizatsiya* was still affecting the situation. Teaching in the native language was not forced out by making Russian a required class. A period of elaboration and approvals was followed by adopting a curriculum for native-speaking schools where the number of hours allocated to

¹⁰ Resolution of the Council of People’s Commissars of the Soviet Union and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) No. 324 “On Russian as a Required Class in Schools of National Republics and Regions” of 03/13/1938. <http://lawru.info/dok/1938/03/13/n1195090.htm>

Russian did not increase in the 1938/39 academic year as compared to the preceding year and even shrank at the expense of adding hours for teaching native languages [Ibid.:314].

The Soviet regime, guided by the logic of managerial decisions, was not alone in generating the need for learning Russian. Indigenous republics themselves also began to translate this need in the post-war period, reflecting the increased demand for educational mobility of youth. Some of the regions, including the Tatar ASSR, in the second half of the 1940s came up with the proposal to increase the number of hours for teaching Russian in native-speaking schools and synchronize lessons of Russian between Russian- and native-speaking schools. The motivation behind this request is clear: graduates of native-speaking schools had no opportunity to enter a Russian-speaking institution of higher education. However, no immediate approval followed, in particular because other Soviet republics refused to support the proposal. Nevertheless, in 1949 the Central Committee began to satisfy requests of individual republics and regions asking to add hours for teaching Russian. This resulted in building the model of a “national” school in 1958, where teaching in Russian prevailed, and native parents were entitled to send their children to Russian-speaking schools [Ibid.:328]. The need to learn Russian was ideologically legitimated in the early 1970s, when Russian began to be treated as the language of the “Soviet people, a new historical community”. Researchers also describe the Soviet education policy of that time as a special version of the policy of multiculturalism actualized in the centralized education system [Malakhov 2007:48–49; Zajda 2006:15–17]. Unified textbooks, curricula, and teaching methods were used all over the country, but subjects designed to teach the languages, cultures and literature of the Soviet peoples varied from region to region.

During the post-Soviet period, in particular under the President, Boris Yeltsin, the formula “take as much sovereignty as you can swallow” was coupled with the focus on “Russian people” as the new Russian civic nation. In the 2000s, the ambivalent nature of the nationalities policy was documented on the level of curricula¹¹, which were structured to include three components—federal, ethnic/regional, and school—pursuant to the 2004 Standard. The federal component served to ensure the integrity of the educational environment; the ethnic/regional component was aimed at supporting and preserving ethnic and regional cultures (knowledge of native language, literature, history and geography); and the school component allowed for

¹¹ The curriculum adopted in 1993 and revised in 1995 consisted of two components, invariant and variant. The variant part was designed by schools in collaboration with the local government. That is why it is acceptable to talk about curriculum continuity in terms of the national issue, despite the change in categorization [Zajda 2006:95–96].

individualization of education [Zajda 2006:97–98]. The new FSESs¹² divide curricula into the invariant and variant components. Yet, the structural change does not imply getting rid of regional specificity. A comparison between curricula designed in compliance with the 2014 Standard and the new FSESs reveals no grounds for seeing a distinct tendency toward “unification”, at least in terms of regional and national identity inculcation practices. However, the transition to the new FSESs has intensified the discrepancies between Russian- and native-speaking schools: whereas Russian-speaking schools are reducing the proportion of classes designed to construct and preserve ethnic and regional identity, this proportion is growing in native-speaking schools (or at least has every opportunity to grow). The reverse is true when the role of classes, charged by the FSES with the function of promoting the development of national identity, is increasing in Russian-speaking schools and diminishing in native-speaking ones.

As we can see, the preliminary analysis of the historical and legal framework of developing regional and national identities in Russian schools reveals a specific, historically-grounded governmental discourse, which not only aims to consolidate different ethnic groups but also provides a wide range of tools to nurture such consolidation. Still, the nationalities policy in education is not devoid of disagreements, and this survey seeks to explain their historical grounds. The empirical part of the study is designed to find out to what extent prestigious educational institutions of the Republic of Tatarstan inculcate ethnic identity and how the latter correlates with national identity.

3. Results of Examining the Humanities Teaching Practices in Tatarstan Schools

Overt observation, in-depth interviews with school administrators and humanities teachers, and content analysis of textbooks on the history of Tatarstan were used to examine the humanities teaching practices in the schools of Tatarstan. Nearly all the respondents mentioned the pro-Russian ideological component in such courses as literature or history. Interviews have revealed two prevailing types of attitudes toward this ideological bias. Some respondents regarded ideology as an indispensable element of the learning process charged with educational functions, while others were concerned with the associated risks, namely with how course content was dependent on the teacher’s personal (including political) preferences.

Apparently, ideologization of humanities in school does provide a breeding ground for political speculation. As shown above, the ambivalence of the nationalities policy objectives in education is handled by functionally differentiating the curriculum, i. e. by dividing the humanities into disciplines responsible for the development of national iden-

¹² Federal State Education Standard of General Secondary Education No. 1897 of 12/17/2010. Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation [website]. URL: <http://минобрнауки.рф/документы/938>

tity (invariant or federal component) and those designed to inculcate regional or ethnic identity (variant or regional component). However, the curriculum structure as such cannot ensure coherence between courses of the two components.

Content analysis of 7th and 8th grade teaching textbooks on the history of Tatarstan and Tatars was conducted for the purpose of this study. The following textbooks were analyzed: Gilyazarov I., Piskarev V. (2012) *Istoriya Tatarstana: vtoraya polovina XVI—XVIII v. 7-y klass* [History of Tatarstan: Late 16th-18th Centuries. 7th Grade], Kazan: Heter, and Piskarev V. (2012) *Istoriya Tatarstana: XIX v. 8-y klass* [History of Tatarstan: The 19th Century. 8th Grade], Kazan: Heter. The contexts of using notions like “Russia”, “Russian people”, “Tatarstan”, “Tatars”, “Russians”, and “non-Russians” in the textbooks were analyzed to reveal the fundamental correlations among them that vary little depending on the historical narrative of the textbook: Russians treat non-Russians in the same manner as the privileged ruling class would treat the oppressed; Tatars are one of the most oppressed nations in terms of rights and freedoms afforded¹³; the basic mechanisms of oppression include tax increases, forced russification, and forced Christianization; uprising and rebellion are the main anti-oppressive practices deployed to change the imposed policies; the political and economic confrontation between the Russian and non-Russian population levels out when it comes to Russia and Russian people; religious tolerance and respect for the interests of the local population are tacitly viewed as the key prerequisites of the region’s peaceful existence in the Russian context¹⁴.

Respondents who have used the analyzed textbooks on a regular basis reported having to make additional efforts to smooth out “the bumps in the history of Tatarstan” and integrate regional history in the context of the history of Russia. Teachers most often tend to avoid using textbooks directly when teaching the history of Tatarstan. Nearly all the respondents, regardless of their ethnicity, complained about the reduced number of hours allocated to the history of Tatarstan. It has recently been recommended, they report, that they teach the history of the region as part of the course on the history of Russia without

¹³ The motif of Russian population oppressing Tatars can also be found in studies devoted to teaching the Tatar language in schools. See, for example, [Musina 2011].

¹⁴ The role of religious tolerance is emphasized, in particular, when comparing the Russian rulers. While Peter the Great and Anna Ioannovna are depicted as hardliners maltreating the Tatar population, Catherine the Great, still referred to as *aby-patsha* (“granny-empress”), is described as a wise and sensible ruler. Catherine the Great abolished forced Christianization of non-Russians which had been practiced since Peter the Great’s era and which is classified in the textbook by Gilyazarov and Piskarev as ethnic discrimination—given the fact that Christianity was mostly rejected by Tatars [pp. 71–74].

providing additional hours—or, alternatively, to include it as an isolated module of lessons at the end of the academic year. The following arguments are suggested to justify such recommendations: (a) local history may serve as an illustration for the history of the country as a whole, allowing to engage students in learning and develop both local and national identities in them; (b) there are a wide array of sources for studying local history by involving students in practical work; (c) local history may be taught via excursions and direct contact with its subjects. In general, regional history serves as a testing ground for designing and elaborating new educational technologies as evidenced in the interview data. Judging from the fact that teachers try to avoid using study guides in teaching regional history and adopt a creative approach in this course instead, there is an obvious gap between how regional history is presented in the textbooks and how it is taught in practice.

However, the logic of presenting material in textbooks on regional history is partially reproduced in alternative teaching practices. For instance, the geography of educational excursions is confined to Tatarstan and the symbolic centers of Russian culture, leaving out the neighboring regions. The textbook narrative also touches little upon the history of relations between the region and its neighboring territories; of all the regions of Russia, the textbooks only describe the interaction with Moscow as the remote “center” whose reforms affect the interests of Tatarstan directly. Not only geographic but also ethnic factors are important in constructing the narrative of the textbooks analyzed. In other words, the history represented in these textbooks is the history of Tatars inhabiting a specific region. They do not give any details on the specific characteristics of other peoples in the region (other than Tatars and Russians) or their cultures and provide no information on the culture of Tatars living outside the region.

The mention of other peoples in the textbooks is restricted to enumerations that serve first of all to represent Tatarstan as a multinational region. Besides, such enumerations can also be found in the following contexts: (a) description of the ethnic composition of separate social groups, often with an indication of economic differences among peoples as well as differences in the rights and freedoms afforded to them; (b) description of the ethnic composition of rebel groups opposing the policies of Moscow; (c) description of the economic and religious oppression of non-Russian peoples by the Russian government. Therefore, Tatarstan is represented as a multinational region whose peoples unite every time the “national” Russian state attempts to homogenize its population, as it was with the accession of the Khanate of Kazan. At the same time, recognition of the regional population’s right to religious and ethnic self-determination contributes to the establishment of Russia as a multicultural country.

Taking into account the focus on ethnic conflicts between Russians and Tatars in the textbooks on regional history, interviewers

asked school administrators and humanities teachers about possible ethnic conflicts in Tatarstan today. Nearly all the respondents maintained that they had never observed any ethnic tension in their schools, which they thought could be explained by the great number of mixed marriages and the fact that some of the surveyed schools avoided emphasizing ethnic differences among schoolchildren. In fact, such schools even try to smooth out these differences by encouraging their students to solve problems of essentially different kinds, in particular to show good academic performance.

INTERVIEWER: Don't children have problems with their identity when they have to perceive both Russian and Tatar literature as their own?

RESPONDENT: Well, you see... this is never discussed...

I.: You mean you don't develop any methodology to mitigate the problem?

R.: We just never focus on it. Deliberately. We say that we have two official languages, and this is typical of many countries... This problem should be hollowed out, I mean we should deliver this way of learning languages and cultures as normal... Once you've put emphasis, the child's mind will go like, "there's something fishy about it"...

Overt observations have confirmed the respondents' belief that there are no ethnic conflicts in schools in Tatarstan today. No effects of ethnic differences on communication among students were spotted in any of the schools surveyed: students behaved and took seats in the classroom, in the canteen, and in the hallways with no signs of ethnic division. It is rather in accounting practices than in everyday school life that teachers and students are discriminated against because of their ethnicity. The classification principle adopted in school accounting systems stigmatizes the school community as carriers of ethnicity as their specific trait. For example, as judged from the accounting reports provided by one of the schools, the school is supposed to collect data on the ethnic composition of classes, thus forcing students to "choose" their identity when answering to a questionnaire item. Many of them get confused and check both options.

R.: You know, we live here cheek by jowl with Tatars, there are so many mixed marriages... So, we have three options in social passports: "Russians", "Tatars", and "other nationalities". We demonstrate the forms and hand them out to students. And some children don't know who they are. They check both "Russians" and "Tatars". But we need to make calculations somehow... And so, we are having troubles... because we want figures to match.

Another example of formal ethnic division is how Tatar language learners are referred to: students are divided into the “Russian” and “Tatar” groups. Although these categories are ethnicity-based, in reality the groups are formed based on the level of language proficiency, i. e. for less and more advanced learners. It means that there is a considerable disagreement between the accounting classification designed to divide the population by their ethnicity and manifestations of ethnic differences in reality: when schools organize the educational process, they deliberately avoid emphasizing ethnic differences and focus on academic achievement goals as priorities that do not interfere with students’ ethnic identity.

The realm of local programs turned out to be absolutely impervious to examination. All the documents on local programs promoting Tatar culture in schools, posted on the website of the Ministry of Education of Tatarstan, are presented exclusively in the Tatar language. An empirical survey has shown that every school has a Supervisor for National Education—which is part of local program implementation—who is responsible for the national component in education, including additional initiatives to popularize the Tatar culture. Such supervisors also present the ethnic component of education to third-party agencies and delegations. Responding to the item on the national component’s role in identity development, all the respondents referred to the legal regulations and laws of the republic, according to which both Tatar and Russian language classes are required in every school in Tatarstan. At the same time, they reported that many of the students had no motivation to learn Tatar.

R.: We have two official languages. Children often tend to feel indisposition to learning Tatar. Some are turned against learning the second official language by their parents, who say, why would you need it...

I.: What do you do to overcome this barrier? How do you reach out to parents?

R.: We actually don’t, because it can lead to conflicts. What we do is we work with children by talking to them and explaining that they have to learn Tatar since there is a law about two official languages.

In addition to appointing Supervisors of National Education in schools, the republic also promotes “national” education by organizing municipal- and regional-level competitions and engaging schools in them. Nearly all Kazan schools, as judged from the interviews, take part in such competitions and projects. The respondents did not mention any similar initiatives aimed at popularizing Russian culture, except for a series of school events dedicated to the iconic figures of Russia’s history and culture. Olympiads in the Russian language and literature are treated as extracurricular activities.

In general, elite schools in Tatarstan seek to retain as indifferent an attitude to the ethnic issue as possible: ethnic differences are not emphasized; teachers of history construct a more coherent narrative in their lessons than the existing textbooks do, representing the history of the region as part of the history of Russia; in addition to regional competitions devoted to Tatar culture, schools organize and hold events popularizing the iconic figures of Russia's culture as a whole. The objectives of education are set forth for students under the notion of academic attainment without any correlation with ethnic differences.

I.: Doesn't such [ethnic] division make sense?

R.: You probably need to go to a Tatar gymnasium then. Here, we are focused on other things. What makes sense for us is educational outcomes.

4. Results and General Conclusions

The goals and objectives of the Russian nationalities policy are laid out ambivalently in the key legal documents and programs on different levels, being designed to develop national identity among Russians, on the one part, and the ethno-cultural identity of individual peoples, on the other part. A number of regulatory documents regard preservation and development of ethno-cultural identity and providing the conditions for an intercultural dialogue as a foundation for developing national identity. Such an attitude is quite consistent with the multiculturalism policy, in a way continuing the nationalities policy of the early Soviet period, which implied active support for and development of ethnic cultures, beginning with the korenizatsiya period until the late 1950s. Another reason for seeing the present-day Russia's nationalities policy as a special type of multiculturalism policy is the extreme extent to which local education policies of some regions are impervious to external observation. In particular, the key documents regulating national education in the Republic of Tatarstan are only available in public sources in the Tatar language.

Schools are represented in the documents analyzed as one of the key tools of nationalities policy implementation, with humanities disciplines playing a particularly important role. Ambivalence of the nationalities policy objectives is captured in the curriculum structure, namely in the functional differentiation of its components: the 2014 Standard identifies the federal, regional, and school components in the curriculum. However, this differentiation does not guarantee content coherence among the humanities. For instance, the narrative of textbooks on the history of Tatarstan evolves by describing the region's relations with the government in Moscow. The textbooks underline the discriminatory nature of the center's policies, targeted first of all against non-Russians, which is clearly inconsistent with what textbooks on the history of Russia say.

The gap between the content of recommended textbooks on the history of Tatarstan and the teaching practices becomes obvious after comparing the results of interviews with school administrators and humanities teachers with the textbook content analysis findings. Teachers see their mission in the classroom in representing the history of the region as part of the country's history. The overall attitude toward the ethnic issue in the elite schools of Tatarstan can be described as indifferent: both teachers and administrators try to avoid emphasizing ethnic differences. However, the system in which schools have to operate is organized to engage them in solving the nationalities policy problems anyway. Consequently, the efforts schools make to smooth out ethnic differences and disagreements are limited by the factors that they cannot influence in any way. Such factors include:

- The accounting system organized to stigmatize students on the basis of their ethnicity;
- The content of textbooks on the history of Tatarstan, which is not consistent with that of textbooks on the history of Russia;
- The legislative framework that puts schools under obligation to integrate and promote Tatar language education;
- The focus of the system of municipal and regional competitions and projects, which involves students of nearly all the schools in the region, on popularizing only the culture of Tatars;
- The absence of courses on cultures of the neighboring peoples in curricula of the surveyed schools and the low level of cross-regional educational mobility.

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