

## Ethnic, confessional and cultural patterns of regionalism in the post-Soviet Russia

VLADIMIR N. STRELETSKY<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This paper is focusing on the ethnic, confessional and cultural background of regionalism in Russia. On the one hand, the historically evolved spatial structures are considered; on the other hand, the emphasis is made on transformation processes of the post-Soviet period. The analysis covers: 1) the historical framework of ethnic settlement and ethnic identity patterns in Russia and their dynamics at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries; 2) the linguistic diversity of the country and the linguistic division of the Russian Federation; 3) the spatial pattern of confessional groups in Russia; and 4) the phenomenon of regional/local identity as one of the key driving forces of regional development. The cultural space of Russia is characterized by mosaics of various regional and local communities; its transformation is still going on and entails the permanent genesis of new regional structures and clusters as well as some risks, tensions and threats. The “horizontal” socio-cultural differentiation of Russian space is based on huge discrepancies between various historical and cultural regions, their ethnic and regional diversity. The “vertical”, hierarchical differentiation of cultural space is predominantly characterized by the increasing stratification of various population groups within the Russian regions. The inherited spatial patterns predominate both in ethnic settlement structures and in configurations of regional identity and cultural distinctions. Nevertheless, changes in the cultural geographic pattern could also be observed in the investigated period. The growing share of “titular” ethnic groups in the total population of national republics of Russia, as well as their growing concentration within the corresponding national units were the main trends in ethnic-geographical redistribution of population in the Russian Federation between 1990 and 2016.

**Keywords:** cultural regionalism, regional identity, ethnic geography, linguistic groups, confessions, Russia

### Introduction

Regionalism is one of the most important research issues in contemporary human geography. This is often interpreted as a set of social practices and attitudes of people living in the region, through their interests, priorities and needs. Furthermore, this implies the “shaped” and built-up political ideology that focuses on the interests of regions and presumes the implementation of various institutions counterbalancing the trends towards unification and centralism. KEATING, M. (1998) argues that the so-called “new regionalism” as a specific ideology of political elites emerged (in Western Europe) during the era of Modernity, representing the peculiar reac-

tion on industrialization, internationalization and, partly, secularization of social life, both in ethnically relatively homogenous and in multi-ethnic countries. Others consider the issue a little bit differently, interpreting regionalism first of all as political movements within the regional communities aimed at achieving a certain institutional status (struggle for the political or cultural autonomy, self-governance of the provinces, ensuring the civil and cultural rights of ethnic minorities, local and regional social groups etc.) (HUEGLIN, T. 1986; SCHMITT-EGNER, P. 2002).

In my view the “political-geographical” dimension of regionalism is really very important, hence I interpret regionalism first of all as a *phenomenon of culture* (STRELETSKY, V.N.

<sup>1</sup> Institute of Geography, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia. E-mail: vstreletski@mail.ru

2011a, 2012). Cultural dimension of regionalism is *primary*, its manifestations in various political forms is always (or nearly always) *secondary*. Cultural regionalism could be divided into two major strata. The objective stratum, based partly on physical and economic indicators, includes a combination of various cultural features of the region: the original, often unique and inimitable traits. The second, “reflexive” (subjective) stratum is a purely “mental space” (perceptions of the region held by its inhabitants, their regional identity and regional solidarity, local patriotism etc.). Regional identity, relating to the concept of “us – and the others” is a key element of regionalism from a cultural-geographic point of view (HARD, G. 1987; POHL, J. 1993; YAEGER, P. 1996; PAASI, A. 2003).

The idea of regionalism as a cultural phenomenon is the core issue of the present paper. The vast territory of Russia, its geographical and cultural diversity, the country’s location at the junction of different cultural realms resulted in a complicated history and a mix of different ethnic groups and cultures (BASSIN, M. 1991, 2003; KAPPELER, A. 2008). Migrations of peoples and ethnic groups, their cultural assimilation, interethnic mixing and language transfer, colonization of new lands became important features of the country’s regionalization. The main aim of this paper is to analyse the ethnic, linguistic, confessional and regional identity patterns of the Russian Federation at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. On the one hand, the historically inherited and evolved spatial structures are considered; on the other hand, the focus of analysis is on the changes of the historically evolved patterns at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

### **Ethnic settlement pattern in Russia and its dynamics**

Ethnic diversity and the spatial configuration of ethnic differences are among the main driving forces of the cultural-geographical diversity of Russia. Namely the ethnic differ-

entiation of the country is reflected especially well in the regional consciousness of people living in different parts of the country.

According to census data of 2010, there are about 160 different ethnic groups in the Russian Federation (listed in the census); 40 among them have more than 100 thousand people. Ethnic Russians account for about 77.7 per cent of the total population of the Russian Federation which is gradually decreasing. In 1959 it was 85 per cent (in the former RSFSR), in 1989 – 81.5 per cent, in 2002 – 79.8 per cent (*Table 1*).

The main cultural geographic feature of Russia is the huge so-called Russian ethnic mega-core, stretching both on the European and Asiatic parts of the country. Its historical nucleus, being located primarily in the central part of the East European plain, had largely expanded, partly to the North and South, but predominantly eastward, during the Russian colonization of Northern Eurasia in the previous centuries. The dominant ethnic mega-core includes the majority of Russian administrative units (so-called “oblasts” and “krays”) where the share of ethnic Russians in the total population is much above the average of the country (above 80%). Exceptions are relatively rare; some examples are Orenburg oblast, Astrakhan oblast and Ulyanovsk oblast where the share of ethnic Russians is below the national average. The geographical location of the ethnic mega-core is well illustrated by maps showing the share of ethnic Russians in the total population by administrative units of the Russian Federation (*Figure 1*).

As it is shown the spatial pattern is relatively stable in time; the comparison of the results of the population censuses 1989, 2002 and 2010 shows that the boundaries of the Russian ethnic mega-core did not significantly change during the last decades.

The Russian ethnic mega-core of the country is much larger than the ethnic peripheries of the Russian Federation, both in surface area and in demographic potential. A situation like this is extremely rare for multi-ethnic and multicultural countries. On the other

Table 1. *Ethnic composition of population of the Russian Federation according to the population censuses 1989, 2002, 2010*

Ethnic groups	1989		2002		2010	
	1,000 persons	%	1,000 persons	%	1,000 persons	%
Russians	119,866	81.5	115,868	79.8	111,017	77.7
Tatars	5,522	3.8	5,558	3.8	5,311	3.7
Ukrainians	4,363	3.0	2,943	2.0	1,928	1.3
Bashkirs	1,345	0.9	1,674	1.2	1,585	1.1
Chuvashs	1,774	1.2	1,637	1.1	1,436	1.0
Chechens	899	0.6	1,361	0.9	1,431	1.0
Armenians	532	0.4	1,130	0.8	1,182	0.8
Avars	544	0.4	757	0.5	912	0.6
Mordvins	1,073	0.7	979	0.7	744	0.5
Kazakhs	636	0.4	655	0.5	648	0.5
Azeri	336	0.2	621	0.4	603	0.4
Dargins	353	0.2	510	0.4	589	0.4
Udmurts	715	0.5	637	0.4	552	0.4
Mari people	644	0.4	605	0.4	547	0.4
Ossetians	402	0.3	516	0.4	529	0.4
Byelorussians	1,206	0.8	815	0.6	521	0.4
Kabardians	386	0.3	520	0.4	517	0.4
Kumyks	277	0.2	423	0.3	503	0.4
Yakuts	380	0.3	444	0.3	478	0.3
Lezghins	257	0.2	412	0.3	474	0.3
Buryats	417	0.3	445	0.3	461	0.3
Ingushs	215	0.2	412	0.3	445	0.3
Germans	842	0.6	597	0.4	394	0.3
Tuvinians (Tuvans)	206	0.1	280	0.2	264	0.2
Komi people	336	0.2	293	0.2	228	0.2
Jews	537	0.4	230	0.2	157	0.1
<i>Total population</i>	<i>147,022</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>145,164</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>142,857</i>	<i>100.0</i>

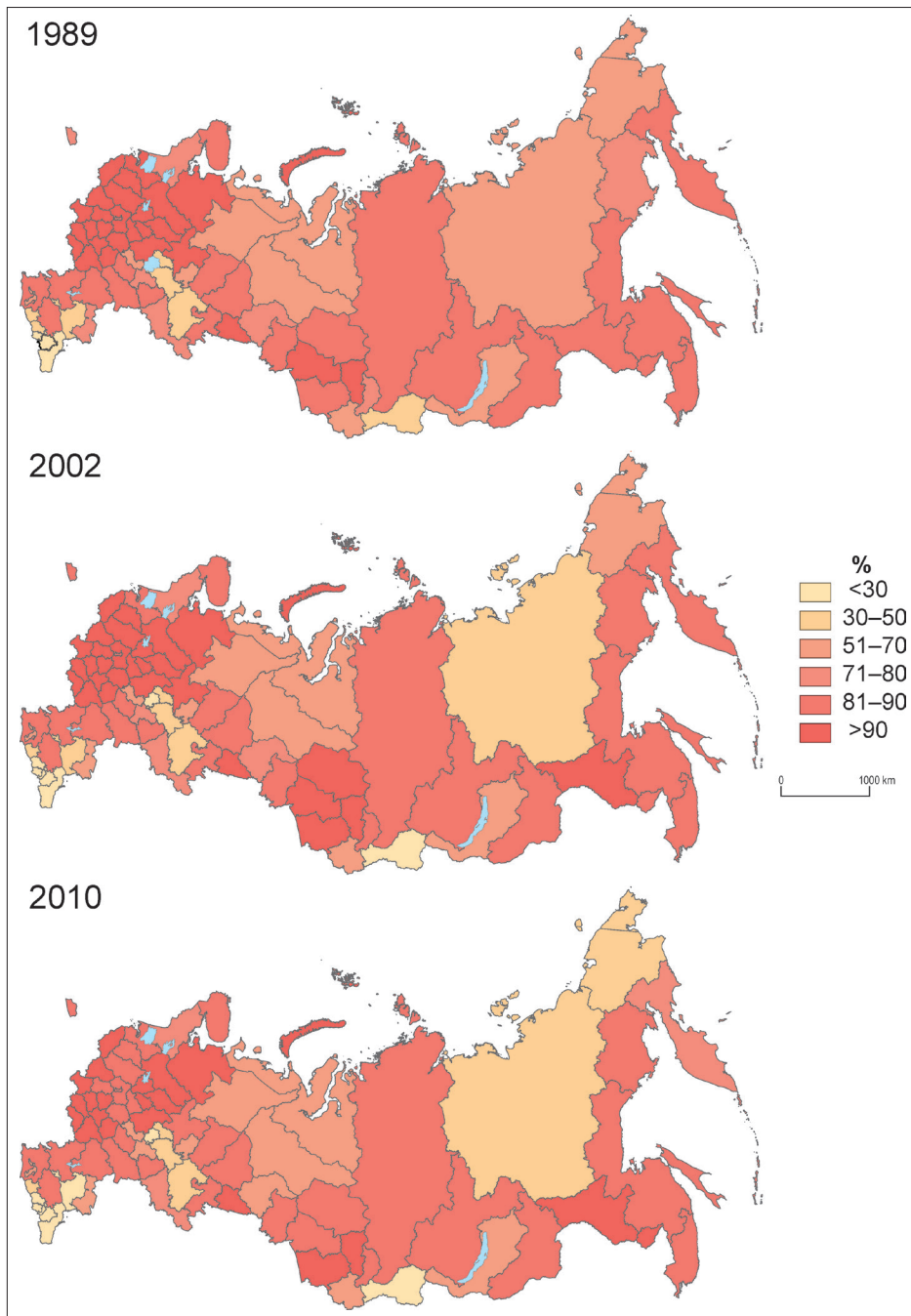
Sources: Results of the All-Union 1989 Population Census. *Ethnic Composition of Population of the RSFSR*. Moscow, Respublikanskiy inform.-izdat. tsentr. 747 p. (in Russian); Results of the All-Russian 2002 Population Census. Vol. 4. *Ethnic Composition of Population. Languages. Citizenship*. Moscow, IMTS "Statistika Rossii." 2076 p. (in Russian); Results of the All-Russian 2010 Population Census. *Ethnic Composition of Population*. Moscow, Goststatizdat, 2234 p. (in Russian).

hand, the share of ethnic Russians in the total population is below 80 per cent in almost all national republics. The only exception is the Republic of Khakassia in Southern Siberia where ethnic Russians accounted for 80.3 per cent of the population in 2010 (Figure 2).

Outside the Russian ethnic mega-core there are three large cultural regions in the Russian Federation characterized by striking ethnic specificities: Northern Caucasus (to be more precise, its highland part populated by so-called mountain peoples), the Volga-Ural multicultural area and the Turkic-Mongolian belt of Southern Siberia (Buryatia, Tuva, Khakassia, Altai).

The most important changes in the ethnic structure of the Russian Federation at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries can be summarized as follows. The first tendency is a gradual and slow transformation of the ethnic structure, due to demographic changes and migration processes (Table 1). Ethnic groups with high birth rates increase their number and share in the total population of Russia.

Other factors of shifts in the ethnic structure were the assimilation processes and changes in ethnic self-identification, but their impact was in the post-Soviet period relatively weak.



*Fig. 1.* Share of ethnic Russians in the total population of administrative units of the Russian Federation, 1989, 2002 and 2010. *Sources:* Results of the All-Union 1989 Population Census. Ethnic Composition of Population of the RSFSR. Moscow, 1990. Results of the All-Russian 2002 and 2010 Population Census. Ethnic Composition of Population. Moscow, Goststatizdat (in Russian).

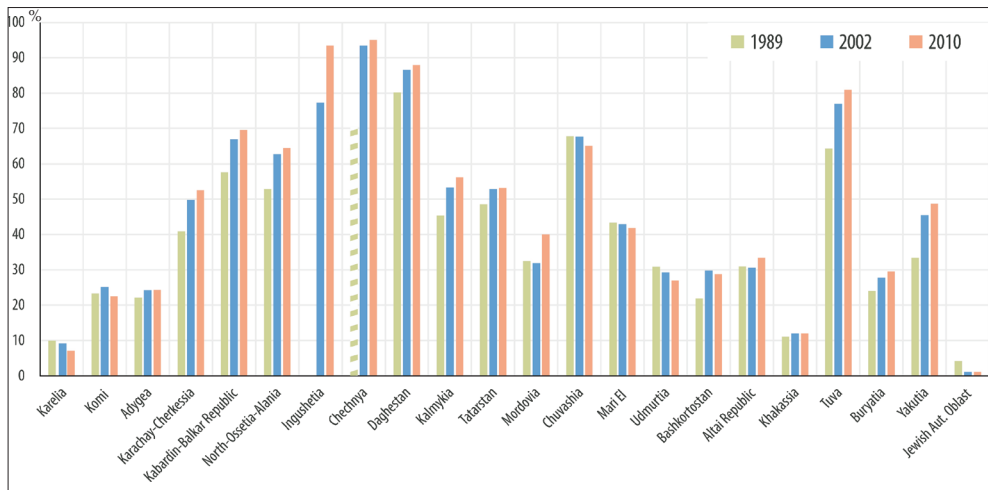


Fig. 2. Share of ethnic Russians in the total population of national republics and autonomous units of Russia, 1989, 2002 and 2010. Data refer to the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic in 1989 and separately to Chechnya and Ingushetia in 2002 and 2010. Sources: Results of the All-Union 1989 Population Census. Ethnic Composition of Population of the RSFSR. Moscow, 1990. Results of the All-Russian 2002 and 2010 Population Census. Ethnic Composition of Population. Moscow, Goststatizdat (in Russian).

The second clear tendency is the growth of the share of “titular” (indigenous) ethnic groups in the total population of national republics of the Russian Federation. Between 1989 and 2010 the share of Tatars increased from 48 to 53 per cent in the Republic of Tatarstan, similarly the share of Kalmyks rose from 45 to 56 per cent in the Republic of Kalmykia, the share of Ossetians increased from 52 to 65 per cent in the Republic of Northern Ossetia, and the share of Yakuts grew from 33 to 49 per cent in the Sakha (Yakutia) republic (Figure 3).

Main reasons for that are the significant differences in demographic conditions of ethnic Russians living in these national republics and the “titular” people (especially Muslim groups with higher rates of natural increase). In some cases, for instance in Sakha-Yakutia, the transformation of the ethnic structure was influenced significantly by the considerable out-migration of ethnic Russians to other regions of the country. The outflow of Russians from the autonomous republics of the RSFSR began already in the

late Soviet time, but after the collapse of the USSR it strengthened significantly.

The third tendency is the growing concentration of “titular” (indigenous) ethnic groups within “their” political units (national republics). The rate of concentration of “titular” people within their national republics is very different among the ethnic groups. In some case we find high concentration rates, for instance 94 per cent of Tuvians live in Russia in the Republic of Tuva (2010), 89 per cent of Komi people in the Komi Republic etc. But there are also ethnic groups with more dispersed settlement patterns. For instance, 62 per cent of Tatars live outside Tatarstan in Russia, 55 per cent of Mordvins live outside Mordovia. Nevertheless, the general trend is now the increasing concentration of ethnic groups in their own national republics. This trend is relatively new. Before the disintegration of the USSR the concentration rates of “titular” ethnic groups tended to decrease (with some exceptions), however, nowadays it is increasing everywhere (Table 2, Figure 4).

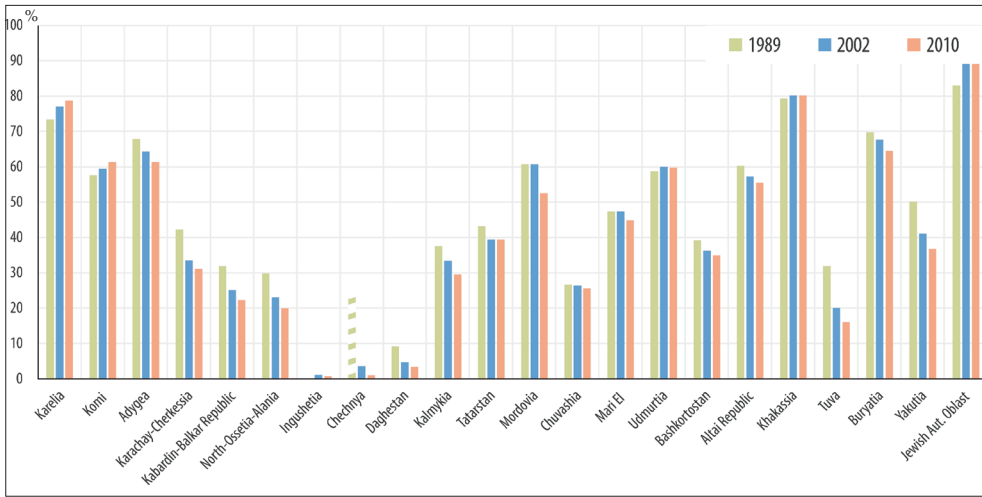


Fig. 3. Share of “titular” peoples in the total population of national republics and autonomous units of Russia, 1989, 2002 and 2010. For additional data and sources see Fig. 2.

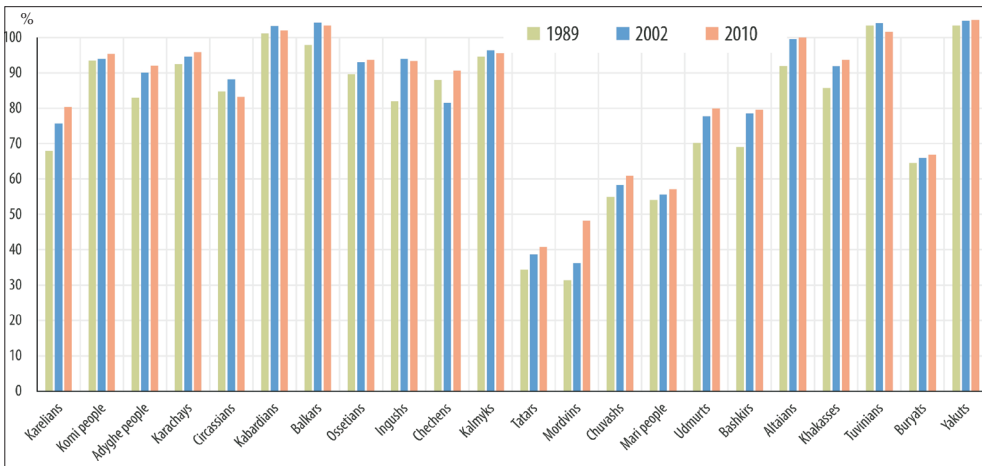


Fig. 4. Concentration rate of “titular” peoples of national republics of Russia within “their” national administrative units, 1989, 2002 and 2010. For additional data and sources see Fig. 2.

**Linguistic diversity and spatial linguistic patterns**

The spatial configuration of linguistic differences within the Russian Federation is very similar to that of ethnic differences. There is

an evident contradiction between the exclusive linguistic diversity of Russian cultural area and the predominance of the Russian language in the country overall. According to official data of the 2010 Population census, approximately 98 per cent of people living in



Table 2. Concentration rate of “titular” peoples of national republics of Russia within “their” national administrative units according to the population censuses 1989 and 2010

“Titular” peoples of national republics of Russia	Total number within “their” national administrative units	Total number in RSFSR	Concentration rate within “their” national administrative units,	Total number within “their” national administrative units	Total number in Russian Federation	Concentration rate within “their” national administrative units
	1989			2010		
	1,000 persons		%	1,000 persons		%
Karelians	79	125	63.2	46	61	74.8
Komi people	292	336	86.9	202	228	88.7
Adyghe people	95	123	77.2	107	125	85.6
Karachays	129	150	86.0	194	218	89.1
Circassians	40	51	78.8	56	73	77.4
Kabardians	363	386	94.0	491	517	94.9
Balkars	71	78	91.0	109	113	96.1
Ossetians	335	402	83.3	460	528	87.1
Ingushs	164*	215	76.2	**386	445	86.8
Chechens	735*	899	81.8	***1,207	1,431	84.3
Kalmyks	146	166	88.0	168	183	88.9
Tatars	1,765	5,522	32.0	2,013	5,311	37.9
Mordvins	313	1,073	29.2	333	744	44.8
Chuvashs	907	1,774	51.1	815	1,436	56.7
Mari people	324	644	50.3	291	547	53.1
Udmurts	497	715	65.3	411	552	74.4
Bashkirs	864	1,345	64.2	1,172	1,585	74.0
Altaians	59	69	85.5	69	74	93.0
Khakasses	63	79	79.7	64	73	87.1
Tuvinians (Tuvans)	198	206	96.1	249	264	94.4
Buryats	****250	417	60.0	****287	461	62.2
Yakuts	365	380	96.1	432	443	97.6

\*In the Chechen-Ingush ASSR; \*\* in the Republic of Ingushetia; \*\*\* in the Chechen Republic; \*\*\*\* in the Buryat ASSR; \*\*\*\*\* in the Republic of Buryatia; taking into account the former Aginski and former Ust-Ordynski Buryat autonomous districts as well. the concentration rate of Buryats within “their” national administrative units in 2010 should account for 84 per cent. Sources: Results of the All-Union 1989 Population Census. Ethnic Composition of Population of the RSFSR. Moscow, Respublikanskiy inform.-izdat. tsentr. 747 p. (in Russian); Results of the All-Russian 2010 Population Census. Ethnic Composition of Population. Moscow, Goststatizdat, 2234 p. (in Russian).

Russia understand and speak Russian fluently; this share exceeds 95–96 per cent also for the majority of the ethnic groups in the Russian Federation. These figures illustrate the enormous importance and integrative role of the Russian language in the Russian cultural area. Three clusters of ethnic groups are less integrated into the Russian speaking area and the level of Russian language fluency is far below the national average among them.

a) The first cluster is made up by some small indigenous nationalities living in the Russian North, Siberia and Far East (e.g. Yukaghirs, Teleuts, Telenghits etc.). But it should be emphasized that the contrary situation among small nationalities is also frequent. Many of them know Russian much better than their own languages. The oblivion of native languages, ethnic traditions and customs, the inherited land use and nature

management patterns are the “reverse” of long-term social integration and cultural assimilation of small nationalities of the Russian North and Siberia.

b) The second cluster includes the former migrants (or their descendants) from some Asiatic and other Non-European countries outside the CIS region. Good examples are migrants of Chinese or Vietnamese origin, living in the Russian Federation. As a rule, this group does not include migrants from the former Soviet republics, involved and integrated for several decades or even centuries into the Russian linguistic space.

c) The third cluster embraces some smaller ethnic groups of Northern Caucasus, particularly in Dagestan (e.g. Ghinoukhs, Andians etc).

Compared to the national average, this share is relatively low for some more numerous peoples of the Eastern Caucasus; it varies between 80–90 per cent among the Dargins, Avars, Lezgins, Chechens, Ingushs and is a little bit higher among the Laks and Kumyks.

More than 80 among the 150 main languages of the ethnic groups living in Russia represent the cluster of the so-called “literary languages” (or, in other words, written languages). Approximately one third of the total number of ethnic languages in the Russian Federation are specific for ethnic groups that have the main area of their settlement outside Russia. 94.7 per cent of the inhabitants living in Russia have their own ethnic native languages as mother tongues.

The main focuses of linguistic assimilation in the Russian Federation (including substitution of native languages for the Russian language) are the following:

- Dispersal of ethnic groups in cities.
- Ethnic groups living outside “their” administrative territories (republics, autonomous districts) and surrounded by other (more populous) ethnic groups.
- Small-numbered aboriginal (native, indigenous) peoples in areas of their settlement.

The “titular” ethnic groups inhabiting the areas of national republics in the Russian Federation preserve their own native lan-

guages, as a rule, more effectively than other ethnic groups. So, the ethnic native languages are mother tongues for 98–99 per cent of Karachais, Kabardians, Ingushs, Chechens, Tuvinians. This share is much lower for some “titular” peoples constituting ethnic minorities even in “their” national republics. It accounts for approximately 70 per cent among Udmurts, Komi and Mordovians, 60 per cent among Bashkirs and less than 50 per cent among Karelians.

### Confessional landscape of Russia

The main features of the confessional landscape of Russia are the following:

- Exclusive confessional diversity (heterogeneity);
- Predominance of the quantitatively prevailing confession (the Orthodox Christianity) over the majority of the country’s territory;
- Confessional cleavages and gradients as basic elements of the Russian cultural space;
- Sustainability and historical continuity of main spatial patterns of confessional landscape;
- Different ways of spatial self-organization by various confessions (STRELETSKY, V.N. 2011a).

The revival of religious life in post-Soviet Russia and the growth of confessional consciousness of various population groups have moved the confessional issue into the foreground in cultural studies. Many academic papers have been published since the early 1990s focusing upon the geography of the leading Russian confessions, local and specific ethnic-religious groups, providing holistic and complex studies of confessional regions. Some research was also devoted to the principal pattern of confessional space in contemporary Russia as a whole (KRINDACH, A.D. 1996a,b; SAFRONOV, S.G. 2001a,b).

The description of the confessional landscape of Russia cannot be based on official statistics. It is necessary to use indirect indicators and results of various surveys and researches.



Sociological polls show that the share of religious people (believers in traditional sense) is somewhere between 6–8 per cent to 13–15 per cent of the total population. Religious people are identified as people going to church services at least once a month (the share of the so-called passive believers is much higher). The share of the religiously indifferent people is about 11–15 per cent (STRELETSKY, V.N. 2011b). At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is slowly decreasing (at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it had declined abruptly).

From a cultural geographic point of view, it is important to emphasize that different confessions have different patterns of spatial self-organization. On the one hand, there are confessions closely linked with the ethnic composition of population, and geographically spread in areas inhabited by distinct ethnic groups. On the other hand, there are also confessions whose geographical distribution is not ethnically determined.

Examples of the first group are confessions traditional for Russia: Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism. The Russian Federation ranks first in the world regarding the number of Orthodox Christians (up to 65 million believers, according to calculations of the Service Ortodoxe de Presse, 2015)<sup>2</sup>. But at the same time, among all the countries of the so-called Orthodox realm (i.e. the states where Orthodox Christianity is a dominant religion), the share of Orthodox Christians in the total population is smallest in the Russian Federation.

The ethnic Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians account for about 95 per cent of the believers of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Russian Federation. The Finno-Ugric peoples of the Russian Federation are predominantly Orthodox Christians as well (up to 3% of the Orthodox Christians in Russia). The Finno-Ugric ethnic groups were converted into Christianity considerably later; the Orthodox faith has taken root among the Karelians and the Komi-Zyrians

since the 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries, among the Komi-Permyaks since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Peak of conversion of the Volga-Ural Finnish peoples (Udmurts, Mari people, Mordvins) as well as the Ob-Ugric ethnic groups (Khanty and Mansi people) took place in the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Finno-Ugric peoples have preserved their Pre-Christian beliefs for a long time; and signs of revival of paganism as a new trend in religious life in Russia became evident at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Orthodox Christianity is also traditional confession for Ossetians, Georgians, some groups of Abkhazians and widely spread among some peoples of Turkic origin – Chuvashes, Yakuts, Altaians, Shors and partly Khakasses. As a consequence of Russian colonization, the Orthodox faith was also adopted by Samoyedic ethnic groups, including the biggest among them – Nenets people and some dispersed smaller groups living in different areas of Siberia, the Russian Far East and the Euro-Asian North.

The second most wide-spread confession in Russia is Islam. The majority of Muslims in the Russian Federation are Sunnis. Shiism is less spread (being confessed, first of all, by Azeri people living in Russia). Small groups of Shiites also live in Dagestan, in towns of the Lower Volga, in Moscow. The Muslims inhabit, first of all, the Northern Caucasus and the Volga-Ural region. Islam has been penetrating into the Volga-Ural region since the 10<sup>th</sup> century, but became firmly established in the 14<sup>th</sup> century (in the age of Golden Horde). It has conserved up to now as a traditional confession for Tatars and Bashkirs. Tatars are the biggest ethnic group among peoples of the Islamic cultural realm in Russia.

In the Northern Caucasus Islam has been partly rooted since the Arabic invasions of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, nevertheless, the Islamization of aboriginal mountain peoples has lasted until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Most peoples of the region are of the Mohammedan confession nowadays, except for the Ossetians who remained (predominantly) Orthodox Christians. The peculiarities of cultural evolution of abo-

<sup>2</sup> It should be mentioned that, according to alternative calculations, this figure might be over-estimated or, vice versa, under-estimated.

original highlander societies in the Northwest Caucasus and the Northeast Caucasus were associated, to a considerable extent, with different madhhabs of Islam, historically rooted in those large areas (RADVANYI, J. 2011).

In the Northwest Caucasus the Hanafi madhhab is rooted, being widely spread among all Circassians, or Adyghe peoples – Adygeans in the Republic of Adygea, Cherkessians in Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardians in Kabardino-Balkaria and Shapsugians in the Krasnodar kray; all the four are essentially the same people residing in different administrative units. The turkic peoples of the Northwest Caucasus (Karachays and Balkars) are also predominantly Hanafi Muslims, as well as several smaller groups of Ossetians.

At the same time, ethnic groups of the Northeast Caucasus, including Nakh peoples (Chechens and Ingushs), as well as Daghestani peoples (including Turkic-speaking Kumyks, but excluding also Turkic Nogais – followers of Hanafi school) are mostly Shafi'i Muslims. That's why Sufism, which is organic to Shafi'i madhhab, is rooted much more in the Northeast Caucasus; the region was the main focus of Muslim resistance against Russian expansion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Islamic traditions were conserved in the Northeast Caucasus (though not officially declared) even in the Soviet times, and the post-Soviet renaissance of Islam developed here much faster and more significantly than in the Northwest Caucasus.

The main regions of Buddhism in Russia are Kalmykia (the only compact area of Buddhist culture in Europe) as well as Tuva and Buryatia in the Asiatic part of the country. Buddhism is represented in all three regions in the form of its northern derivate – Lamaism. Buryatia is more heterogeneous than Tuva in confessional dimension. On the one hand, western Buryats have been practicing the settled way of life for a long time; and the share of Orthodox Christians is considerable among them. On the other hand, the eastern (Transbaikal) Buryats are predominantly nomads and keeping Lamaism.

The list of confessions closely connected to ethnic composition of population has to be supplemented by Catholicism. It is predominantly confessed in the Russian Federation by ethnic Poles, Lithuanians and partly by Germans (about one third of the Russian Germans are Roman Catholic). Some protestant denominations can also be mentioned e.g. Lutheranism is practiced in Russia mainly by ethnic Germans, Estonians, Finns.

The most important changes in the geographical distribution of confessions in the Russian Federation at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries are as follows:

- The first tendency is a rapid expansion of Islam due, predominantly, to demographic shifts. According to some estimations (MALASHENKO, A.V. 1998), the total number of Muslims in the Russian Federation exceeded 15 million people at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; nowadays it should be as high as 20 million persons.
- The second tendency is a long-term revival of paganism (including shamanism) in some areas of Russia. This trend is typical not only for smaller indigenous ethnic groups in Siberia, but also for some peoples (of Finnish origin particularly) in the European part of the country (in the Republic of Mary-El, Udmurtia etc.).
- The third tendency is the reinforcement of some protestant denominations, especially in Siberia and in large cities in the European part of Russia.

### **Development patterns of cultural regionalism in Russia**

Cultural regionalism is a historically rooted phenomenon in Russia and its study has a long academic tradition. The famous historian KOSTOMAROV described the origin of the historical Russian regions as far back as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (KOSTOMAROV, N.I 1860, 1995 [1863]). The cultural peculiarities of the “parceled” Russian lands have emerged and developed under conditions of political division processes in Eastern Europe as long as

since medieval feudalism. A similar point of view was shared by many other historians (SHCHAPOV, A.P. 1861a,b; MILYUKOV, P.N. 1896; LYUBAVSKY, M.K. 1909) and geographers (SEMYONOV-TYAN-SHANSKY, P.P. 1892; SEMYONOV-TYAN-SHANSKY, V.P. 1910). According to this viewpoint, cultural regions in the historical core of Russia are predominantly successors of ancient Russian lands. This means that cultural regionalism is an old phenomenon in Russia, at least in its European part. The historically rooted regional identity is a strikingly distinctive feature of its cultural geographic space.

Nevertheless, to be compared with other countries, other nations, other cultures, various regional identity patterns are in some cases overlapped in Russia by national and ethnic identity patterns. Some authors (SMIRNYAGIN, L.V. 1999) argue that Russian culture is, in a certain sense, “a-spatial” (that implies the absence of significant regional cultural contrasts within the space of Russian ethnic settlement structure and, as a result, weak point of local patriotism). Russian people settled within an enormous space, on a vast territory with relatively small natural barriers and borders. Russian people did not have to fundamentally change their way of life in the process of long-distance migrations. Due to these conditions the cultural traits did not change significantly from place to place, from area to area. In other words, the Russian culture remained to be relatively uniform in spatial dimension, “a-spatial” in terms of the aforementioned concept (SMIRNYAGIN, L.V. 1999).

This idea has equally strong and weak points. On the one hand, the arguments in favour of this concept are the predominance of all-Russian cultural features on a huge territory of the ethnic mega-core of the country and its relatively small variability among Russian cultural regions. In comparison to other cultural realms, the distance between contrast cultural regions in Russia is very long. The vast and relatively homogeneous cultural areas in Russia could exceed, sometimes, the aggregate surface of several

European countries with strikingly different cultural patterns.

The Russian geographical space is also characterized by strong “vertical” socio-cultural differences: urban areas – rural areas, big city – small town etc. While these distinctions emerged long ago, they have significantly strengthened during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, under conditions of the Soviet over-centralization. The “vertical” socio-cultural contrasts are marked in the Russian geographical space more strongly than the “horizontal” distinctions between various cultural regions of the country. Sometimes the over-centralization really hinders the cultural regionalization of the society, erodes the territorial integrity of local communities, entails slackening of regional consciousness, and even contributes to “frustration” of certain regional identity patterns, especially on the local level. People living in large cities (like Omsk and Irkutsk, Perm and Vladivostok etc.) often have much more common cultural features among themselves as urban residents than between them and inhabitants of the surrounding rural areas located closely to the major regional centres.

The excessive, hypertrophied significance of administrative division in various strata of Russian society is also to be mentioned in the context of the “a-spatiality hypothesis”. Administrative boundaries often divide up the organically evolved cultural and historical regions of the country, strongly determining regional development processes. To some extent, administrative division is a phenomenon that significantly influences regional consciousness and regional identity patterns in Russia.

But on the other hand, the historical experience of the development of cultural regionalism in the European part of Russia also contradicts the hypothesis of “a-spatiality” of Russian culture. The cultural originality of historical Russian lands, which emerged in medieval times, is a real and strong precondition of Russian regionalism. Spatially changeable patterns of the role of traditions shape the contemporary regional identities of Russians (for example, KRYLOV, M.P. 2010).

In my view, the real phenomenon interpreted sometimes as “a-spatiality” is not a “genetic,” ancestral, inherited feature of Russian culture. It is rather the result of the deformation of traditional rural culture during the Soviet period (STRELETSKY, V.N. 2011b).

The main factors determining the development patterns of cultural regionalism in Russia are the following:

1. The crucial role of the inherited cultural geographic distinctions within the historical core of the European part of Russia.
2. The long-distance transfer of people and their cultural traits from the historical core in Eastern Europe into Northern Asia and the impact of that process on regional identity patterns.
3. Cultural borrowings from aboriginal populations.
4. A continuing cultural interchange between the ethnic “megacore” of the country and the ethnic peripheries of the former Russian Empire.
5. Drastic social transformations during the Soviet period and their impact on the erosion of local consciousness, regional identity and cultural regionalism patterns.

The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a new period in the cultural regional development in Russia. This new period is characterized by the evident revival of regional and local identity in various parts of Russia, including both the European part of the country and Siberia.

The increase of cultural geographic distinctions within the space of Russian ethnic settlement is a gradual new phenomenon. The revival of regionalism in the Russian Federation in the last decades was accompanied by strengthening comprehension of *regional interests* by the local population. Slogans of regional interests were broadly adopted by local authorities and regional political elites. The transition from the unitary centralized state to the federal political system also influenced the upsurge of regional consciousness in ethnically “Russian” oblasts and krais. The constitutional fixation of “titular” distinctions between “ethnic” republics and “Russian”

oblasts stimulated the search for their own regional identity in areas that were devoid of specific ethnic patterns and attributes.

After the breakdown of the USSR, the cultural regionalization of Russia embraced first of all two vast areas (macro-regions). One of them is *European South of Russia* (predominantly the belt of steppes and forest-steppes) where some groups have been preserving their local consciousness even during the Soviet period. The Steppe Caucasus as part of the European South of Russia is at the same time a spacious and extended contact zone that links cultural “heartland” of the country with diverse and mosaic cultural realm of Mountain Caucasus. Ethnic and cultural interaction of both realms was also promoted by their economic complementary reciprocity.

In historical retrospective, the interactions between North and South in the European part of Russia were always complicated. Traditionally, the South of Russia accepted endless streams of fugitive peasants from the historical core of the country, becoming a refuge and asylum for different groups of religious and political dissidents and being at the same time the main hearth of disturbances and revolts. The political culture in the so-called “Cossack regions” of Southern Russia has been determined for a long time by ethos of military democracy, and the social institutes were often based, to a certain extent, on principles of self-organization.

During the Civil War (1918–1920), the Cossack population in the European South of Russia was politically divided: numerous groups of Cossacks were involved into the Red Army and fought for it, but the majority of them (especially in the Don region, the Kuban region and the Terek region), on the contrary, participated in the White movement. The policy of so-called “decossackisation” (in Russian – *raskazachivaniye*) pursued by the Communist authorities in Soviet Russia and the USSR after the Civil War was aimed at the extermination of Cossacks as a separate subethnic, cultural and military entity. According to some historical interpretations (HOLQUIST, P. 2002), the Cossacks had disap-



peared as a relatively secluded regional entity in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The collectivization campaign of the 1920–1930, pursued by Bolsheviks on fertile Cossack homelands of the European South of Russia, could be regarded as a turning point. Nevertheless, the Cossack identity survived in latent forms for several decades of the Soviet epoch.

The rapid revival of Cossack consciousness appeared only at the end of the Soviet epoch. Several groups of Cossacks nowadays tend to position themselves as separate ethnic entities. According to the Russian Population censuses in 2002 and 2010, some of them were registered as ethnic groups (nevertheless, being included in generalized statistical data into the total number of ethnic Russians). According to the last Population Census, more than 95 per cent of Russian Cossacks live in the European south of the country (in the Southern Federal District and North Caucasian Federal District). The Rostov region (which embraces the Don area, the traditional and most important territory of Cossack settlement) contains 62.5 per cent of all Cossacks currently living in Russia.

On the other hand, the cultural peculiarity of the European South of Russia is not reinforced by the common and broad indivisible regional identity of “Southern Russians.” In the European South of Russia, local consciousness patterns prevail over the “common” (for a whole region) regional identity patterns. Furthermore, the crucial cultural geographic feature of the European South of Russia is the lesser integration of ethnic minorities in the regional society in comparison with the situation in the Russian North.

The other macro-region, permanently generating its particular and specific identity, is *Siberia*. Being an important part of Russian cultural space, Siberia belongs in terms of geopolitics and geo-economics to the Asiatic-Pacific area. Historically, it has experienced, in its essential territorial parts, the deep cultural influence from civilizations of Central Asia, China, Korea and Japan. The originality of the ethnic and cultural development processes in Siberia due to the intensive mixture

between Russian colonists and aboriginals became a mighty driving force for consolidation of the regional identity and cultural regionalism, strengthening of the so-called “regional tendency” (in Russian language – *oblastnicheskaya tendenciya*).

The views of Russian geographer and ethnologist POTANIN, G.N. (1906) and other Siberian regionalists (“*sibirskiye oblastniki*”), for example, YADRINTSEV, author of the book “Siberia as a colony” (YADRINTSEV, N.M. 1882) became very popular among the Siberian intellectuals on the eve of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which connected the future welfare and development prospects of Siberia with the level of its autonomy. Separatist aspirations of certain groups etc of Siberian intellectuals as well as representatives of some other strata (landowners, Cossacks, merchants, entrepreneurs) continually strengthened at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and that process was not without importance for the course of the Civil War in Siberia and the Russian Far East.

New tendencies became apparent again in Siberia towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The unity of the country was reinforced during the socialist period, not least due to the so-called “iron curtain,” which separated its regions from external cultural, economic and political impacts. Under the circumstances of the globally-oriented market economy, the vast macro-region of Siberia should focus its outer linkages, to a certain degree, upon neighbouring countries. Simultaneously, cultural expansion from the neighbouring states into Siberian geographical space is gradually increasing. And last but not least: the crash of the communist project entailed a search for alternative “modus” of public consciousness, and in this context the “Siberian idea” has chances for success.

As we demonstrated the revival of cultural regionalism is a new and important trend of regionalization of Russia in the 1990s–2000s. It should be emphasized, however, that cultural regionalism is something quite different from regional separatism. Despite several forecasts of disintegration of the Russian Federation recently, it can be ascertained

that the secession of some regions with an ethnically predominating Russian population (in Siberia etc., similar to the scenario of self-determination of settlers of Anglo-Saxon or Spanish origin in the New World in the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries) is rather unlikely in the foreseeable future.

Regional and cultural diversity, multiculturalism, historically rooted regional identity, territorial solidarity, and local patriotism are important aspects of the sustainability of society. Political separatism is rather a pathology of cultural regionalism, but on no account a natural stage or grade in its development.

## Conclusions

To be considered as a whole, the ethnic and cultural space of Russia is characterized by evident patterns of steadiness and sustainability. The inherited spatial patterns predominate both in ethnic settlement structures and in configurations of linguistic, confessional and regional cultural characteristics.

Nevertheless, there were also some cultural geographic changes and shifts in Russia at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. On the one hand, some of these shifts can be explained by newest demographic trends. The great differences in the reproduction of population belonging to various ethnic and confessional groups are becoming more and more important factors of ethnic and cultural transformation.

On the other hand, the cultural geographic transformation of the country is caused by processes of modernization of the society. The increasing spatial mobility of population entails the erosion and destruction of ethnic and cultural barriers, the formation of zones of cultural diffusion and ethnic contact areas, and increases the ethnic and confessional heterogeneity of the society.

Regional identity in Russia is based on historical roots, being the result of the long-term interaction between mobility and sedentism. Unlike the situation in many other countries (including the European nation-states as

well) where the perception of historical regional identity is gradually decreasing under conditions of globalization (see, for example, VAISHAR, A. and ZAPLETALOVA, J. 2016), post-Soviet Russia experienced a real boom of regional consciousness and the revival of regional identity at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. In a certain sense, this process can be regarded as a response to the previous erosion of regional identity in the Soviet period. There is no doubt that regional identity is one of the most important preconditions for sustainability of the Russian society, ensuring its capacity for modernization.

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