

# National Awareness Among The Chuvash people.

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## Introduction

As early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophers became interested in ethnic issues. First, the German philosopher, theologian, and literary critic Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) introduced the term *volk* in German, defined as a community of people who serve as resources for development of cognitive processes: he supposed that their languages and traditions form their consciousness.<sup>1</sup> He also claimed that ethnic traditions create an organic unity which in turn provides the ethnic communities with their feeling of identity. Later, the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) introduced the term *volksgeist* (literally, spirit of the people), meaning a unique "spirit" possessed collectively by each people or nation.<sup>2</sup> In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a Prussian philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) introduced the term *volkpsychologie* – a branch of psychology studying *volksgeist* and its ethno-psychological aspects. Language was seen as most important object of these studies: according to Humboldt it is a factor which influences apperceptions of humans. Therefore Humboldt supposed that linguistic differences represented, by and large, essential differences between nations.<sup>3</sup>

Later other philosophers such as Gustav Shpet (1879-1937), Heymann Steinthal (1823-1899) continued to work on Humboldt's ideas in *volkpsychologie*: in 1859 in the scientific journal *Zeitschrift für Volkpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* they claimed that each people/nation is formed generally not by its objective relations such as people's origins, their language, etc., but by the subjective viewpoint of the nation's representatives who perceive themselves as one community. These philosophers extended the term *volk*: subjective view of each member of the nation about themselves and their identification with the nation and belonging to it became also essential to the definition. Thus, they suggest that a *volk* is a group of people who perceive themselves as one ethnic community. They also give a definition to *volksgeist* which we can define as the rudiments of scientific

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<sup>1</sup> V. Khotinets, *Etnicheskoe Samosoznanie*. Moscow: Aleteia, 2000, p.12.

<sup>2</sup> V. Khotinets, *Etnicheskoe Samosoznanie*. Moscow: Aleteia, 2000, p.12

<sup>3</sup> E. Klautke, "The Mind of the Nation: The Debate about Völkerpsychologie, 1851-1900", *Central Europe*, 2010, vol. 8(1), p. 7-8.

interpretation of ethnic awareness. This was determined as awareness of the majority which is similar to the awareness of individuals about their spiritual life; *volksgeist* is a general product of community of the people. According to the authors, the life and spiritual activities of a *volk* is possible only thanks to common actions of its members.<sup>4</sup>

In the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century the German physician, physiologist, and philosopher Wilhelm Wundt defined *volksgeist* as a phenomenon which cannot be explained by individual awareness, but as a result of functioning of spiritual products such as language, myths and morals that in turn determine the formation of individual mental processes: feelings, will, ideas. In the tradition sense of Humboldt's *volkpsychologie* Wundt was particularly interested in human nature of language and studied language as a factor influencing the cognitive process. According to Wundt, language is distinguished among the collective human processes and seems to be crucial for the entire higher mental functions (e.g. voluntary memory, voluntary attention, thinking process). Wundt also supposed that *volksgeist* played an important role in the development of individual psychological processes and it was also a source for the interpretation of the lawfulness of psychological processes.<sup>5</sup>

Scientific researchers Tamotsu Shibutani (1920-2004) and Kian M. Kwan introduced the term *ethnic identity* defined as someone's identification with other members of the ethnic unity and as a part of national awareness.<sup>6</sup> In the MacMillan Dictionary of Anthropology (1986) there are a lot of works about ethnicity, ethnic identity, ethnic awareness and ethnic self-awareness.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, all these terms are not differentiated well and are often defined as the same phenomena. There is insufficient methodological and conceptual apparatus for considering the problem.

In Russia the question of Russian national awareness gained attention in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The sociologist V. V. Ivanovski defined national awareness as "conscious patriotism... and familiarizing of each citizen to its nation

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<sup>4</sup> V. Khotinets, *Etnicheskoe Samosoznanie*. Moscow: Aleteiia, 2000, pp. 12-13.

<sup>5</sup> W. Wong, "Retracing the footsteps of Wilhelm Wundt: Explorations in the disciplinary frontiers of psychology and in Völkerpsychologie." *History Of Psychology*, 2009, vol.12(4), p. 245.

<sup>6</sup> Tamotsu Shibutani Kian M. Kwan, *Ethnic stratification: a comparative approach*, New York: MacMillan, 1965.

<sup>7</sup> C. Seymour-Smith, *Macmillan dictionary of anthropology*, London: MacMillan, 1986.

in a spiritual sense.” He also noticed that there is direct relation between this phenomenon and danger for state integrity. As an example, he discusses the rise of Russian national awareness during the Tatar yoke, the times of troubles (late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries) and the patriotic war of 1812.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, in 1915 the other Soviet scholar Kovalevskii defined national awareness as the act of thinking whereby a person perceives him-/herself as a part of the whole.

With great ideological and political changes in the country after the Socialist Revolution in 1917 the scientific world also went through a series of transformations. The soviet sociology as any other studies in the Soviet Union was supposed to adhere to the principles of the political ideology adopted by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union – Marxism-leninism. Its goal was the development of a socialist state through the leadership of a revolutionary vanguard and formation of the working class combined by socialist consciousness as a result of class struggle. Considering nationalities questions, in order to achieve these goals they first had to go through such capitalistic phenomena, as the existence of national states and development of national awareness, as many ethnicities in the Soviet Union had not gone through this stage of development. It was supposed by the adherents of Marxism-Leninism that after this stage the separate ethnical groups would disappear under socialism.<sup>9</sup> Suchwise, the Soviet sociologists perceived the problem from different perspective than the classical Western researches did: for the first, ethnic awareness is a temporary phenomenon – a stage of development of society, for the latter it is rather tendency of development of a nation, they do not claim that it is impermanent.

From 1920 the term ethnic self-awareness [этническое самосознание] started to be used in Soviet sociology. According to the Soviet historian, expert in the history of Russian statehood and ethnic history of the Russian people, V. V. Mavrodin, ethnic awareness is awareness of belonging to one ethnicity or nation about its unity of interests, mental makeup, etc. The Soviet sociologist Tokarev (1964) noted in his work that the historically defined relation between different kinds of social phenomena such as someone’s origins, language, territory, nationality, economic relations, cultural mode, and religion engender ethnic awareness, whereby

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<sup>8</sup> V. Khotinets, *Etnicheskoe Samosoznanie*, 2000, pp. 14-15.

<sup>9</sup> F. C. Barghoorn, “Nationality Doctrine in Soviet Political Strategy.” *The Review of Politics*, 1954, Vol.16(3), p. 284.

someone's ethnicity is defined. A. G. Agaev, a Soviet philosopher, scholar, writer and publicist, has a similar point of view: "Territory, language, economy together with historical interconnection of social-economical, religious, ethnographical and geographical conditions in the process of consolidation and differentiation, mixing and dissolving, interpenetration and dissociation engender consciousness of ethnic unity of people".<sup>10</sup> According to the author, ethnic awareness is an awareness of the people's unity belonging to one ethnic group, awareness of its ethnic autonomy. Another Soviet scientist M. V. Krukov went further by classifying three main sources of ethnic awareness formation: first, ethno-forming (territory); second, objective-adequate (language), and selective (cultural characteristics); third, components of self-perception, for example perceptions about "superiority" of one's own nation.<sup>11</sup>

From the point of view of the Russian scientist-folklorist, ethnographer, corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, K. V. Chistov (1972), "national awareness is not only the result but also one of the factors which influence the ethnic processes, its direction, tempo, content."<sup>12</sup> He also believes that "the level of national awareness can rise or fall during different historical periods". By rising and falling he refers to the theory of Marxism-Leninism and suggestion of impermanence of the phenomenon. However, Chistov also supposes that national awareness of a high level can obtain sufficient independence that enables it to exist for a long time even within territorial, economic and language avulsion. Hereby, we can also say that Russian scientists studied the problem from different perspectives: some approached it as a result of different national factors; the others, au contraire, as a factor which influenced ethnic processes.

Nevertheless, the majority of researchers agree in one aspect: national awareness is regarded as characteristic of a nation and awareness of ethnic belonging, that is to say a feeling of belonging to one nation which combines it in one social collective.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, it is a relatively stable system of conscious perceptions and estimates of ethno-differentiating and ethnic-integration features of

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<sup>10</sup> I. M. Vel'm, "Etnicheskoe Samosoznanie v Strukture Mentaliteta: Opit Socialno-Filosofskogo analiza", *Vestnik Udmurskogo Universiteta*, 2002, vol.4, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Khotinets, V. pp.18-23.

<sup>12</sup> I. M. Vel'm, "Etnicheskoe Samosoznanie v Strukture Mentaliteta: Opit Socialno-Filosofskogo analiza", 2002, vol.4, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> Khotinets, V., pp. 18-23.

vital activities of ethnic group. Features of performing ethnic functions include such components of ethnic reality, as ethnonym, the origins and historical background of the ethnic group, ethnic territory, language, religion, culture, and economy, representing different elements of subsystems or spheres of ethnic culture.<sup>14</sup>

In order to study the topic of national awareness in practice and to bring some clearness to the theoretical disagreements, a particular case considering national awareness of one ethnic group in the Russian Federation will be discussed, to be more specific the Chuvash people from the Chuvash Republic. For general information, it should be noted that the Chuvash Republic (or Chuvashia) is one of the twenty-two Russian republics. It is situated mostly on the right bank of the river Volga and extends over 18,300 square kilometers. The capital of the republic is Cheboksary. It borders with Nizhny Novgorod Oblast, Ulyanovsk Oblast, Mari El Republic, Republic of Mordovia and Republic of Tatarstan. Chuvashia contains twenty-one administrative districts, nine cities, eight towns and 1.723 villages with population of 1.238.071 people. Titular nationality in the republic is Chuvash. There are two official languages in the region: Russian and

**Picture 1. The location of the Chuvash Republic\***



Chuvash which belongs to the Turkic language family. The republic is a subsidized region. The gross regional product was 0.4 % of country's one; payment of taxes, fees and other mandatory payments comprised 0.3 % of the federal budget. It does not have strategically important mineral resources; the export-oriented industrial production is not high.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> I. M. Vel'm, *Etnicheskoe Samosoznanie v Strukture Mentaliteta*, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> V. N. Klementiev, *Chuvashskaia Respublika*. Cheboksary: Chuvashskii Gosudarstvennii Institut Gumanitarnih Nauk, 2005, pp.76-77, 82.

\* Picture 1. *The location of the Chuvash Republic*, map, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chuvashia#/media/File:Chuvash\\_in\\_Russia.svg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chuvashia#/media/File:Chuvash_in_Russia.svg), (accessed February 12, 2015), information is taken from: V. N. Klementiev, *Chuvashskaia Respublika*. Cheboksary: Chuvashskii Gosudarstvennii Institut Gumanitarnih Nauk, 2005, pp.76-77, 82.

In this thesis I would like to describe the situation considering national awareness of the Chuvash people. The central question in this research is the following: how can awareness of the Chuvash people be described and which factors are/were crucial in its formation? In order to do it: first, I will provide literature research where historical, political, anthropological, socio-cultural, social linguistic sources are studied. Differences in views and opinions are also discussed and explained. Second, interviews-conversation among the Chuvash people are made, analyzed and discussed.

This conversational method of interviewing enables the researcher to obtain substantive information about people's lives, experiences and beliefs. Interviews are used in the frame of narrative approach where attention is paid to the role of a human being as a conscious subject who co-constructs his/her lifeworld in accordance with the values, stereotypes and cultural norms of the community they belong to. These norms and values are represented in the cultural texts and everyday human interactions in the forms of verbal and nonverbal narrative constructions which in a certain sense are subjective. Thanks to this quality of the chosen method, we can study the issue more deeply than the quantitative approaches, but it should be not ignored that they still remain subjective opinions. However, personal life stories can certainly reflect gender, age, class and ethno-cultural constructions which exist in society. In the conducted research, interviewees consisted of twenty four representatives of the Chuvash ethnicity, half of whom were born and raised in urban areas and the other half in rural districts: that was the most important criteria as there is a noticeable difference between these groups. Furthermore, sixteen females and eight males aged from twenty two to fifty six participated. No significant differences between the gender groups were noticed, but some differences were found between the responses of the younger interviewees and those in an older age group. In order to understand the situation with national awareness and identity, the questionnaire is made with attention to the following criteria: the role of the Chuvash language in the interviewees' life, as it plays a key factor in ethnic identification and respectively in national awareness; their identification, as it takes a significant part of national awareness, their perception of the Chuvash cultural heritage and culture at all, self-perception, involvement in the social-cultural life of the Chuvash. Third, already existing quantitative socio-cultural and socio-linguistic researches are taken into



consideration while discussing the topic and compared with the results of a qualitative research – the conducted for this thesis interviews.

Thereby, in order to analyze the problem in greater depth, the historical background of the region and the Chuvash people since the 10<sup>th</sup> century till post-communist period is studied in the first chapter. Additionally, socio-political awareness of the national elite and its development was studied for a broader understanding of the topic. Particular attention is paid to Ivan Iakovlevich Iakovlev, the pedagogical activist, nationalist, founder of the Chuvash alphabet and first Chuvash national schools. This person played an important role in the development of the national awareness among the Chuvash as his activities contributed to formation of national intelligentsia and thereby to establishment of the Chuvash statehood. The situation considering national awareness among the Chuvash in modern Russia is analyzed in the second chapter. Contradictions in evaluation of the situation are explained there: was it a period of national awakening or rather of “national nihilism”, in other words underestimation of own ethnic group, lack of confidence in the prospects of their development and orientation on other nation. In the third chapter, the results of interviews and current situation are described. Possible economic, political and socio-cultural reasons for the current situation considering national awareness among the Chuvash are discussed there too.

The chosen topic has not been extensively studied in the works of many historians, anthropologists and philosophers. It should earn more attention from the scientists, in order to create a more complete picture of the chosen topic with deeper understanding of existing problems such as relatively understated level of national awareness of the Chuvash people. Already existing sources about the history of the region and the Chuvash people were analyzed in this thesis as national awareness of people and self-affirmation among other ethnic groups cannot be explained without historical memory of these people. Works of the local researches at the Chuvash State Humanities Institute: V. P. Ivanov,<sup>16</sup> V. V. Nikolaev,<sup>17</sup> and the Chuvash

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<sup>16</sup> V. P. Ivanov, *Etnicheskaia Istoria Chuvashskogo Naroda. Nauchnii Ocherk*. Cheboksary: Chuvashskii Gosudarstvennii Institut Gumanitarnih Nauk, 2010; V. P. Ivanov, *Sovremennaia Etnopoliticheskaia Situatsia v Chuvashskoi Respublike i Problemi ee Optimizatsii*. Cheboksary: Chuvashskii Gosudarstvennii Institut Gumanitarnih Nauk, 1999.

<sup>17</sup> V. P. Ivanov, V. V. Nikolaev, V. D. Dimitriev. *Etnicheskaia Istoria i Traditsionnaia Kultura*. Moscow: DIK, 2000.

politician and nationalist A. P. Khuzangay<sup>18</sup> were taken into consideration; they studied questions of ethnic history of the Chuvash, starting from their origins till nowadays. Their works contain a number of valuable information, however, patriotic tone and glorification of their nation is present in their articles/book. The same tendency is observed in works on national questions too by other researchers on national questions at the Chuvash State Humanities Institute such as V. D. Dimitriev,<sup>19</sup> V. N. Klementiev, E. K. Mineeva,<sup>20</sup> I. I. Boiko,<sup>21</sup> V. G. Kharitonova, V. G., Shabunina<sup>22</sup>. However, they studied different aspect of the problem: Boiko and Kharitonova discussed civil and ethnic identity in the Chuvash Republic, who claimed that most of the Chuvash is characterized by mono-ethnic identity and in some case by duo-ethnic identity. Dimitriev, for example, pronounced that national “nihilism” is widespread among the Chuvash. He claims that the Chuvash did not believe in the future advancement of their nation and disparaged their language and culture.

Furthermore, an amount of surveys were made by the Chuvash State Humanities Institute on interethnic relations within the republic, to be more specific by the local researchers I. E. Ilin,<sup>23</sup> V. P. Ivanov,<sup>24</sup> I. I. Boiko, Iu. N. Isaev.<sup>25</sup> Socio-linguistic aspect was also taken into account in this research as language plays an important role in the formation of ethnic identity and awareness. The articles of

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<sup>18</sup> A. P. Khuzangay, “Problema Iazikovogo Sushchestvovaniia Chuvashskogo Etnosa i Perspektivi Iazikovoii Politiki.” In *Problemi Natsionalnogo v Razvitiu Chuvashskogo Naroda*, by V. A. Prokhorova, 88-107. Cheboksary: Chuvashskii Gosudarstvennii Institut Gumanitarnih Nauk, 1999.

<sup>19</sup> V. D. Dimitriev, “Istoria i Natsionalnie Problemi Chuvashskogo Naroda.” *Mezhetnicheskie Otnosheniia, Natsionalnie Problemi i Dvizheniia v Srednem Povolzhie i Preurale v XVIII-XX vekakh. Cheboksary, 1996*. Cheboksary, 1996, May: 27-28. 57-61, V. D. Dimitriev, “Istoshchaet Natsiia Nihilizm.” *Sovetskaia Chuvashia*, 8 October 1992: 2-3.

<sup>20</sup> V. D. Dimitriev, V. N. Klementiev, E. K. Mineeva, and others. *Natsionalnaia Gosudarstvennost Chuvashskogo Naroda: Istoria i Sovremennost*. Cheboksary: Chuvashskii Gosudarstvennii Institut Gumanitarnih Nauk, 2011.

<sup>21</sup> I. I. Boiko, V. G. Kharitonova, *Obshegrazhdanskaia i Etnicheskaia Identichnosti Naseleniia Chuvashii*. Cheboksary: Chuvashskii Gosudarstvennii Institut Gumanitarnih Nauk, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> I. I. Boiko, V. G. Kharitonova, D. M. Shabunina, *Chuvashskaia Respublika. Sotsiokulturnii Portret*. Cheboksary: Chuvashskii Gosudarstvennii Institut Gumanitarnih Nauk, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> I. E. Ilin, “Mezhnatsionalnie Otnosheniia v Chuvashii: Etnosotsialnie Problemi Perekhodnogo Perioda.” 127-139. In *Problemi Natsionalnogo v Razvitiu Chuvashskogo Naroda*, by V. A. Prokhorova, Cheboksary: Chuvashskii Gosudarstvennii Institut Gumanitarnih Nauk, 1999.

<sup>24</sup> V. P. Ivanov, *Etnicheskaia Karta Chuvashii*. Cheboksary: Chuvashskii Gosudarstvennii Institut Gumanitarnih Nauk, 1997.

<sup>25</sup> Iu. N. Isaev, *Etnokulturnoe Razvitiie i Mezhetnicheskie Otnosheniia v Chuvashskoi Respublike*. Cheboksary: Chuvashskii Gosudarstvennii Institut Gumanitarnih Nauk, 2012.

Spanish scientists Hèctor Alòs i Font<sup>26</sup> are valuable for this research, first of all, because he describes the tendencies of the Chuvash language in the contemporary Chuvash society, its status and usage; second, because he is non-Chuvash researcher and observer “from outside”.

In addition, articles about the ideas and activities of I. Ia. Iakovlev are studied. Local scientists L. N. Pushkarev<sup>27</sup>, G. N. Plechov<sup>28</sup> and N. I. Volodina<sup>29</sup> provided bibliographical information about Iakovlev. I. V. Pavlov<sup>30</sup> discussed the ideas included in the bases of Iakovlev’s National Schools. For better understanding of Iakovlev’s motivations, his memoirs and his testament to the Chuvash people are studied too.<sup>31</sup> All of the researches glorify Iakovlev and represent him as a national hero. Indeed, he gave a significant impetus for the development of national awareness. However his certain ideas and policies considering the Russian people, contributed to Russification and assimilation in the Chuvash Republic. Paradoxically, Iakovlev influenced ambiguously the national awareness and identity of the Chuvash. This is ignored by the researches and will be highlighted in the first chapter.

Not only were the views of the local researchers, but also opinions from outside Chuvashia are taken into account. For example, some articles in newspapers and the monograph of Moscow scientist V. R. Filippov<sup>32</sup> were studied in detail. Filippov’s views reflect the centralizing viewpoint of the government in Moscow and therefore his vision differs from that of the local ones. Furthermore, the article of O. P. Vovina<sup>33</sup> explained the religious complications in Chuvashia. General information about the national policies in the country is studied in the books of R. G. Suny,<sup>34</sup> T.

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<sup>26</sup> H. Alòs i Font, *Etnoiazikovaia Situatsia v Gorodakh Chuvashskoi Respubliki: Sotsiologichskii Aspekt*. 2013.

<sup>27</sup> I. Ia. Pushkarev, "I. Ia. Iakovlev - Chuvashskii Prosvetitel' i Pedagog." *Voprosi Istorii*, 1999, vol. 1: 143-147.

<sup>28</sup> G. N. Plechov, "165 So Dnia Rozhdenia Chuvashskogo Pedagoga i Prosvetitelia Ivana Iakovlevicha Iakovleva." *Nauchnii potencial*, 2013, vol. 1(10): 90-93.

<sup>29</sup> N. I. Volodina, *Vidaiushiesia Ludi Chuvashii*. Cheboksary: Chuvashskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, 2002.

<sup>30</sup> I. V. Pavlov and V. I. Pavlov, "Pedagogicheskoe Nasledie I. Ia. Iakovleva." *Nauchnii Potencial*, 2013, vol. 1(10): 94-98.

<sup>31</sup> I. Ia. Iakovlev, *Moia Zhizn': Vospominania*. Cheboksary: Respublika, 1947.

<sup>32</sup> V. R. Filippov, *Chuvashia v Devianostikh: Etnopoliticheskii Otcherk*. Moscow: Rossiiskaia Akademia Nauk, Tcentr Tsivilizatsionnikh i Regionalnikh Nauk, 2001.

<sup>33</sup> O. P. Vovina, "Building the Road to the Temple Religion and National Revival in the Chuvash Republic." *Nationalities Papers*, 2000: 695-702.

<sup>34</sup> R. G. Suny, *The Structure of Soviet History*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Martin,<sup>35</sup> E. Shiraev,<sup>36</sup> J. M. Thompson,<sup>37</sup> in the articles of V. Tolz,<sup>38</sup> O. Shevel,<sup>39</sup> T. Lankina,<sup>40</sup> etc.

One of the central aims of this paper is to find possible reasons for established situation considering national awareness among the Chuvash. Suchlike researches have not been done yet, that is why this paper is of additional value to the Chuvash studies. Moreover, there have been done few researches about the Chuvash people in the Western scientific literature and most of the works are about the Chuvash language not the people. Furthermore, this thesis allows looking differently at Chuvash enlightener I. Ia. Iakovlev's activities and ideas than it is generally perceived. Local researchers tend to think that Iakovlev contributed to development of the Chuvash nation and their national awareness. This work does not refute this opinion, but it discusses also contrary impact of his policies on the Chuvash, to be specific, his Christianization policy contributed to Russification in the region.

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<sup>35</sup> T. Martin, *The affirmative action empire. Nations and nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. Ithaca-Londres: Cornell University Press, 2001.

<sup>36</sup> E. Shiraev, *Russian Governments and Politics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

<sup>37</sup> J. M. Thompson, *A vision unfulfilled*. Lexington and Toronto: D. C. Heath and Company, 1996

<sup>38</sup> V. Tolz, "Orientalism, Nationalism, and Ethnic Diversity in Late Imperial Russia." *The Historical Journal*, 2005, vol. 48 (1): 127-150.

<sup>39</sup> O. Shevel, "Russian Nation-building from Yel'tsin to Medvedev: Ethnic, Civic or Purposefully Ambiguous?", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2011, vol. 63 (2): 179-202.

<sup>40</sup> T. V. Lankina, "Regional Developments in Russia: Territorial Fragmentation in a Consolidating Authoritarian State." *Social Research*, 2009: 225-251.



## 1. The Chuvash people: historical background

### 1.1. Origins of the Chuvash people (15<sup>th</sup> century).

To begin with, it should be noted, that there is still scientific disagreement about the origins of the Chuvash people. The main reasons for the disagreements among scientists are the relatively late appearance of the ethnonym “Chuvash” (Чăваш) in the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, blurred boundaries of the territory where the tribe dwelled in the medieval period, and also the language itself which incorporates elements of languages of different language families: namely, Turkic (Bulgar language), Finno-Ugric (Chuvash language has common characteristics with Mari language), Indo-European language (Proto-Iranian language).<sup>41</sup>

The main subject of the discussion is the Bulgar-Suvar theory of the Chuvash people's origins. Most contemporary researchers, as well local as the Russian ones, such as V. N. Tatischev, H. Feizhanov, N. H. Ashmarin, A.P. Smirnov, V. F. Kakhovski, M. P. Fedorov, V. D. Dimitriev, define the Chuvash as descendants of Bulgar and Suvar tribes that appeared in the middle Volga in the 7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>42</sup> In evidence, the scientists found direct parallels between the religion of these tribes and the old pagan Chuvash religion, also similarities in mode of life, clothes, language, folklore, etc.<sup>43</sup> This theory is widespread among activists of the Chuvash national movement who maintain that, in former times, Chuvash people were subservient to nobody when their ancestors ruled in Volga Bulgaria. In this paper, I will not take this theory into consideration and will not regard possible prehistoric developments as a factor that could have influenced the contemporary Chuvash national awareness. As, according to some researchers, about seventy five percent of the Volga-Bulgar population were destroyed, the historical homeland, statehood material and cultural heritage was lost more than eight centuries ago<sup>44</sup> and accordingly the nation was eradicated. The Chuvash had started to exist as a separate

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<sup>41</sup> V. P. Ivanov, *Etnicheskaya Istoriya Chuvashskogo Naroda. Nauchnii Ocherk*. Cheboksary: Chuvashskii Gosudarstvennii Institut Gumanitarnih Nauk, 2010, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> V. P. Ivanov, *Etnicheskaya Istoriya Chuvashskogo Naroda. Nauchnii Ocherk*, pp.4-5.

<sup>43</sup> A. B. Bulatov, V. D. Dimitriev, “Paralleli v Verovaniyakh Drevnikh Suvarov i Chuvashei.” *Uchenie Zap. ChNII*, 1962, <http://xn--80ad7bbk5c.xn--p1ai/ru/content/paralleli-v-verovaniyah-drevnih-suvarov-i-chuvashey> (accessed July 1, 2014).

<sup>44</sup> V. P. Ivanov, *Etnicheskaya Istoriya i Traditsionnaya Kultura*. Moscow: DIK, 2000, p. 33.

ethnic group by the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and had been formed from the remnants of the non-Islamized population of Volga Bulgaria after Tamerlane's pogroms and Russian attacks in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century, consolidation of the Chuvash ethnic community took place during the period of existence of Khanate of Kazan (1438-1552).<sup>45</sup>

## 1.2. Period of oppression (15<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries)

Social and national oppression of the Chuvash continued to exist in tsarist Russia as it was before, during the Kazan rule. The Soviet and then Russian scholars referred to the struggle of the Chuvash against the Tatar yoke: their numerous *yasaks* (tributes); forced Islamization; construction, military and other duties. Motivated by formation of a military base for operations against Kazan, Russians bribed Chuvash leaders and made generous promises to them; that led to pro-Moscovy sentiment among the Chuvash and eventually to request of unification with Muscovy in 1546. Thereby since 1551 the Chuvash land became a part of Russia as a result of military campaigns of Ivan the Terrible against Kazan.

From that period till the Soviet time the weakening of the Tatar-Muslim culture and strengthening of the Slavic-Christian influence and also of the Russian language happened in the region.<sup>46</sup> The Chuvash were subjected to forced mass Christianization. The government promised temporary relief on taxation to newly baptized and additional load to non-Christianized. Later in 18<sup>th</sup> century the special institution *Novokreschenskaia kontora* was organized after several decrees of Peter the Great about Christianization among the peoples of the Volga region in 1720-1722. Members of this organization visited the Chuvash villages threatening



**Picture 2. Monument in Cheboksary, “Road to Moscow”. The monument represents Chuvash ambassadors’ visit to Ivan IV in 1546 with a request of unification with Russia. Carver is F. Madurov.\***

<sup>45</sup> V. P. Ivanov, *Etnicheskaia Istoria i Traditsionnaia Kultura*, p. 13.

<sup>46</sup> V. P. Ivanov, 2010, p. 13.

the peasants and making them to crosshead. As a result, Chuvash became Christians mostly formally: they continued to practice paganism and the Christian dogmas and foundations remain extraneous for them.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, the Chuvash peasants were enrolled in a rank of backward and laboring people that is to say farmers and craftsmen; they had to pay tax and to perform heavy duties. The Chuvash as other ethnic minorities were not permitted to participate in the state government. Hereby, under the burden of national oppression during the centuries the Chuvash people lagged behind in economic, political and cultural development.<sup>48</sup>

On a later stage of tsarism cultural Russification together with conversion to Orthodoxy was seen by official policy makers as a solution to the problems of ethnic diversity within the Empire what was criticized by some scientific and philosophic thinkers, such as orientalists, who represented policies aimed at nation-building based on cultural and linguistic pluralism within a nation. Nevertheless, the imperial government feared that the rise of national consciousness among the ethnic minorities could lead to separatism, and so the policy-makers did not support the idea of nation building based on multi-ethnicity.<sup>49</sup> Education of the ethnic minorities was one of the main instruments in implementing policies of Russification and Orthodoxisation. It is important to note, that Russian identity in Tsarist Russia was closely interconnected with religion: religion was the main feature that distinguish Russians from Non-Russians (or *inorodtsi*). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century these two approaches Russification and Orthodoxisation were actively implied among the Chuvash through education.

Afterwards, scientists and public figures in the Chuvash Republic tended to think that it had a positive effect as it contributed to the general development of the Chuvash. For example, the educator and founder of the first Chuvash national schools and “the Chuvash enlightener” Ivan Iakovlevich Iakovlev (1848-1930) had the same opinion: orthodoxy was seen as a bridge to the further developed Russian

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<sup>47</sup> V. P. Ivanov, 2010, pp. 48-49.

<sup>48</sup> V. P. Ivanov, 2000, p. 41.

\* Picture 2. Monument in Cheboksary: “Road to Moscow”, photograph, from: V. P. Ivanov, 2000, p. 41.

<sup>49</sup> V. Tolz, "Orientalism, Nationalism, and Ethnic Diversity in Late Imperial Russia." *The Historical Journal*, 2005, vol. 48 (1), p. 128.

culture and as a tool for enlightenment. According to Iakovlev, the process of initiation of the Chuvash people into the Christian religion and culture, education and enlightenment would enhance the consciousness of the Chuvash people. However, it is arguable: the Chuvash people had been resisting the religion for a long time and at least till the first decade of the twentieth century a significant part of the population continued to practice pre-Christian traditions. That forced Christianization could have negatively influenced the people's national "pride" and to some extent had a traumatic effect on the nation, what I will discuss in details in the fourth chapter.

Thus, starting with the Mongol Yoke, then the Kazan Rule and later tsarist Russia, the Chuvash people, having been under oppression by other ethnic majorities for centuries, obtained some certain national characteristics which, to some extent, became a part of their mentality. According to Ivanov, they considered that other nations should dominate them.<sup>50</sup> Being treated as backward and oppressed people for a long time, could have impacted the consciousness of the Chuvash people perceiving themselves as inferior. The fact that they started to call themselves as "khura Khalakh" (black people) is also a justification to suppose so.

### **1.3. Process of emancipation of the Chuvash. I. Ia. Iakovlev's role in it (1890s – 1920s)**

The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought significant changes for the Chuvash ethnic minority. To a great extent thanks to the preferable political circumstances and national activist I. Ia. Iakovlev and his followers, progressive development of national awareness and 'awakening' among the Chuvash occurred.

To begin with, researchers of Iakovlev's pedagogical activities, such as G. N. Volkov and N. G. Krasnov noted that the central point of his educational enterprise was the Chuvash school in Simbirsk (presently Ulianovsk).<sup>51</sup> This institution was based on the following principles: first, enlightenment of the Chuvash people was

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<sup>50</sup> V. D. Dimitriev, "Istoria i Natsionalnie Problemi Chuvashskogo Naroda." *Mezhetnicheskie Otnoshenia, Natsionalnie Problemi i Dvizhenia v Srednem Povolzhie i Preurale v XVIII-XX vekakh*. Cheboksary, 1996. Cheboksary, 1996, May 27-28, p. 57.

<sup>51</sup> I. V. Pavlov and V. I. Pavlov, "Pedagogicheskoe Nasledie I. Ia. Iakovleva." *Nauchnii Potencial*, 2013, vol. 1(10), p.94.



supposed to be carried out through “the light of the Gospel.” Second, achieving spiritual fusion of the Chuvash and Russian people was one of the main aims. Third, the native language was seen as the basis for religious and moral education. Fourth, a teacher was supposed to be a representative of the Chuvash minority or at least speak the Chuvash language and know Chuvash traditions and culture.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, Iakovlev considered this educational system as a key to the cultural development of the Chuvash people and a rise of their national awareness.

Iakovlev’s initiatives and activities had a favorable influence on the emerging Chuvash intelligentsia, people with understanding of national tasks and opportunities for further cultural development. Thanks to his teachers’ training school in Simbirsk and the first college, the Institute of Public Education, about a thousand teachers graduated. Among those former students were Chuvash literature classics K. V. Ivanov, N. V. Shubossinni; the well-known mathematicians in Russia P. M. Mironov and N. M. Okhotnikov; a Chuvash state and political figure, the first Chairman of the Chuvash regional executive committee D. S. Elmen’ who played an important role in the formation of the Chuvash Republic; the founder of the Chuvash national theatre I. S. Maksimov-Koshkenskii,<sup>53</sup> and many other persons who contributed to economic and social developments in Chuvashia. The cultural figures continued



**Picture 3. The teachers and clergymen of the Chuvash school in Simbirsk. Iakovlev is in the middle. Simbirsk, 1911.\***

Iakovlev’s undertakings and further developed Chuvash national arts such as fiction, music, theater and fine arts. Besides them other graduated students became teachers, who were also ‘conductors’ of national cultural ideas in the life of the Chuvash

<sup>52</sup> I. V. Pavlov and V. I. Pavlov, "Pedagogicheskoe Nasledie I. Ia. Iakovleva.", p.94.

<sup>53</sup> N. I. Volodina, *Vidaiushiesia Ludi Chuvashii*. Cheboksary: Chuvashskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, 2002, p. 71

\* Picture 3. *The teachers and clergymen of the Chuvash Simbirsk Chuvash*, photograph, 1991 from: N. I. Volodina, *Vidaiushiesia Ludi Chuvashii*. Cheboksary: Chuvashskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, 2002, p.64.

people. Thereby the basis of national education and enlightenment of the Chuvash was made and the Chuvash intelligentsia appeared.

This national education served as an impetus to the nationalist movement formed in summer 1917 in the period of political crisis, between the February Revolution, ended with abdication of the last Russian tsar Nicolas the Second, and the October Revolution, resulted in the Civil War. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century discontent among the people in Chuvashia was increasing for various reasons: the Chuvash peasants demonstrated against the agrarian policies as the promises of the Stolypin agrarian reforms<sup>54</sup> were not fulfilled; during the First World War 42,8% of able-bodied men were mobilized and thousands of them had never returned. Moreover, since 1907 till 1917 national oppression were intensified: the budgets for enlightenment were cut, production and distribution of literature in native language was prohibited. When the political climate had changed after the February revolution and national intelligentsia received more freedom, some proactive measurements were taken immediately by the Chuvash intellectuals. Several graduated students and teachers of the Simbirsk School organized “the First All-Chuvash Congress” and created the institution of the Chuvash National Society. Furthermore, Elmen’ and Maksimov-Koshkenskii managed to create the Chuvash National Commissariat (the Chuvash department) at *Narkomnats* (People’ Commissariat of Nationalities), which were set up in 1918 in order to deal with non-Russian nationalities in the Soviet Russia. This provided an opportunity to defend Chuvash national interests at the state level. In accordance with a document “the position of the Chuvash department” which was discussed at the All-Chuvash Workers Peasant Congress, “the department is established by the will of the Chuvash proletariat and working peasantry for strengthening of people’s authority among the Chuvash, implementing their cultural autonomy and rudiments of political self-determination, and defending their interests in front of the government.”<sup>55</sup> The Chuvash department at *Narkomnats* had six different subdivisions: general, inner and

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<sup>54</sup> The Stolypin reforms were a series of changes in agricultural sector elaborated by P. Stolypin, Chairman of the Council of Ministers. The aim of this reform was transformation of the traditional *obshchina* form what implied liberalization of serfs. However it did not work well on practice as the serfs lacked financial ability to leave their lords.

<sup>55</sup> E. K. Mineeva, "Sozдание Chuvashskogo Otdela Pri Narodnom Komissariate Po Delam Natsional'nostei RSFSR." *Vestnik Leningradskogo Universiteta*, 1988, vol. 4 (23): p. 76.

outer communication, culture and enlightenment, the press and political agitation, labor and economy, information and statistics.<sup>56</sup>

Activists of the Chuvash department at Narkomnats under the guidance of a left SR<sup>57</sup> D. Elmen' set themselves the task of creating the Chuvash Republic, uniting all regions of residence of the Chuvash.<sup>58</sup> Elmen' prepared and submitted to Narkomnats a report about providing the Chuvash people with a distinct administrative unit. At that time, when the Leninist concept of nation building (*korenizatsia*) was imposed, such ideas had prospects for realization. *Korenizatsia* or "indigenization" was the early Soviet nationalities policy promoted mostly in the 1920s. This policy consisted of promoting national language and national elite who were supposed to be trained and promoted into positions within the communist party, government, industry and schools. This program was designed to bridge the gap between the central authorities and the non-Russian population of the USSR and thereby achieve ethnic minorities' loyalty to the center.<sup>59</sup> Already at the beginning of 1920 D. S. this request about distinct administrative unite was discussed at the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party and in accordance with a resolution About the Chuvash Republic dated on June, 8, 1920, the Chuvash autonomy was created. Later in 1925 The Chuvash Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was formed.<sup>60</sup>

Speaking about the official Soviet policy named *korenizatsia* we can say that it had a positive effect in general on development of the Chuvash and accordingly on enhancing of national awareness of the Chuvash. Thanks to that, Iakovlev's undertakings could consolidate further. Within the framework of the nation-building of the Chuvash Autonomy in the 1920s, the policies of giving the Chuvash language equal status with Russian and indigenization of state apparatus were actively promoted. The policy of bilingualism in official communications was aimed at enhancing the role of the Chuvash language in public and political life and thereby

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<sup>56</sup> E. K. Mineeva, "Sozdanie Chuvashskogo Otdela Pri Narodnom Komissariate Po Delam Natsional'nostei RSFSR.", p. 75.

<sup>57</sup> The Socialist Revolutionary Party was a political party in the beginning of 20th century in Russia and a key player in the revolution. Its general ideology was revolutionary socialism of democratic socialist and agrarian socialist forms.

<sup>58</sup> V. R. Filippov, "Grezi o 'Bolshoi Chuvashii'." *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie*, 1995, vol. 6, p.111.

<sup>59</sup> R. G. Suny, *The Structure of Soviet History*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p.73-74.

<sup>60</sup> V. R. Filippov, "Grezi o 'Bolshoi Chuvashii'." p. 112.

giving it the same status as Russian. From March 1922 all official documents of government agencies, organizations, firms and individuals written in Chuvash obtained the same legal force as documents in Russian. Special training courses were opened for training of administrative workers. Furthermore, typewriters with the Chuvash alphabet were purchased and clerical terminology was created.<sup>61</sup> Liquidation of illiteracy took place on a large scale and campaigns were launched in the 1920s to train the Chuvash intelligentsia in pedagogical and educational careers. In the 1920s three teacher training colleges were opened in Chuvashia and, in the 1930s, a Teachers Training Institute in Cheboksary. Chuvash Departments were established not only in the schools of the republic but outside of it: In Ulianovsk, Ufa, Chistopol, Belebei.

Moreover, the Chuvash intelligentsia achieved in reopening of publication of the first national newspaper *Khibar* (the News). Originally it was initiated by the Chuvash intelligentsia edited by the Chuvash historian and ethnographer N. V. Nikolsky in 1905 as a weekly newspaper in the Chuvash language. However, the issue was shut down in 1907 by the Russian authorities on the grounds of contra-revolutionary measures. This newspaper had three main tasks: 1) to achieve national-cultural autonomy; 2) to change the borders of existing provinces and districts in the interests of ethnic groups; 3) to take into consideration the percentage of voters from each ethnic group in elections.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, the scientists actively studied the national question: history of the Chuvash and its culture, the language, etc. For example, a Soviet linguist, Turkologist and corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (1929) Nikolay Ivanovich Ashmarin wrote the following papers: Materials for the research of the Chuvash language (1898), Bolgars and Chuvash (1902), Dictionary of the Chuvash language in 17 volumes. Moreover, thanks to the Chuvash alphabet, created by Iakovlev, national fiction started to appear and later flourish.<sup>63</sup> In 1917 the Chuvash national community was organized in Simbirsk and this had an impact on the Chuvash population of the provinces of Kazan and Simbirsk. Subsequently, the Union of Chuvash women, the Union of Chuvash students and the Union of Chuvash teachers were formed within this

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<sup>61</sup> P. V. Kuznetsov, *Natsional'noe Samosoznanie Chuvashskogo Etnosa kak objekt sotsial'no filosofskogo Issledovania*, pp. 122-123.

<sup>62</sup> P. V. Kuznetsov, p. 118.

<sup>63</sup> V. P. Ivanov, 2000, p. 63.



organization.<sup>64</sup> During Lenin's implementing of *korenizatsia* policy, Iakovlev gained Lenin's support and interest as he was in line with it. In 1918 when the local Soviet authorities wanted to sack Iakovlev from his position of the director of the school, Lenin sent a telegram to Simbirsk in which he defended Iakovlev: "I am interested in the destiny of the Ivan Iakovlevich Iakovlev who has been working for 50 years on national revival of the Chuvash people and whose efforts were suppressed during tsarism. I think Iakovlev should be not disturbed in his life's work."<sup>65</sup>

Every nation retains a memory of those activities of its people that led to its prosperity and development. Thanks to Iakovlev's enlightenment campaign, national elite appeared who made national movement evolve and succeeded in forming the Chuvash state in a favorable political climate at the beginning of the Soviet period. He became not only famous among the Chuvash for his undertakings but he is also an integral part of the Chuvash culture: he is one of the attributes of the Chuvash identity.

Nowadays, the Chuvash people call him "the Chuvash enlightener" or even "the patriarch"<sup>66</sup> that is to say the father of the nation. The nation commemorates this enlightener: the Chuvash State Teachers' Training University was named after him, as well as five streets in different Chuvash cities and regions of the Chuvash republic. A statue of I. Ia. Iakovlev is situated in the center of the capital of Chuvashia, Cheboksary, in front of the Chuvash National Library. Pupils at school start very early to learn about Iakovlev's life and his activities; they also learn his fairytales and children's poems which were written by him for the first Chuvash ABC-book.<sup>67</sup> Thereby I. Ia. Iakovlev's legacy continues to influence national awareness of the Chuvash even nowadays.

However, it should be said that, in the framework of nation awareness, Iakovlev's campaign of Orthodoxisation had a double-sided effect. On the one hand, it contributed to the general enlightenment of the Chuvash population. On the other

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<sup>64</sup> V. P. Ivanov, 2000, p.63-64.

<sup>65</sup> G. N. Plechov, p. 93.

<sup>66</sup> The first president of the Chuvash Republic N. V. Fedorov called Iakovlev "Patriarch" at opening of Iakovlev's 150th anniversary celebration in 1998. From: N. I. Volodina, p. 62.

<sup>67</sup> M. I. Petrova and IU. V. Petrova, "Ispolzovanie Kul'turnogo Nasledia I. Ia. Iakovleva v Sovremennoi Shkole." *Kul'tura i Iskusstvo: Traditsii i Sovremennost'*. Cheboksary: Chuvashskii Gosudarstvennyi Institut Kul'turi i Iskusstv, 2013. 455-460, p. 455.

hand, it deprived the Chuvash of their original religion and accordingly a part of their identity. This aspect will be discussed in detail in the third chapter.

#### **1.4. Deprivation of opportunities (1930s – 1980s)**

Since 1930s, during the Soviet period, quite similar approach towards ethnic minorities was applied as in the Imperial Russia, only Orthodoxy was substituted by communist ideology. This historical period can be characterized as contradictory: in the period of “equality of the nations”, ethnic hierarchy continued to exist and gained legitimacy to some extent. *Inorodtsi* were renamed by a more friendly term: “brother nations”, “sister nations”, and in the postwar period the Russians were referred to again as “the leading people”, the most talented, the greatest and with the richest language.<sup>68</sup> It was expected that with “the victory of communism”, the Russian language would be the nationwide language of communication. The other contradiction of this period is that after the October revolution in 1917, ethnic groups that had been colonized by the tsarist autocracy received political freedom to some extent and started to create their own republics and constitutions; however colonization and imposition of ideology continued to take place, eventually leading to destruction of historical homelands of different ethnicities and expulsion of entire ethnic groups from their native places.

The enabling environment of the 1920s for national movements did not last long in the country. Already in the 1930s democratic processes regarding the relations between the central (Soviet) government and the regions began to diminish, and the movement towards unification of all ethnic diversities accelerated. In the official doctrine “national” became a synonym for “nationalistic”, which in turn was opposed to internationalism. Any attempts to take into account the needs and specifics of a titular ethnic group were proclaimed nationalist. In regard to the Chuvash question, *korenizatsia* was not welcomed anymore; moreover key positions in the governing bodies were occupied by Russians.

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<sup>68</sup> These are Stalin’s words about the Russian nation during his proposal “to drink for Russian people” at Kremlin reception on May 24, 1945. Thereby Stalin wanted to toast for the Russians for their contribution in the victory over the Nazis and distinguish them from other ethnic groups: “Especially, I would like to raise a glass for the health of the Russian people, because it is the most outstanding nation of all the nations of the Soviet Union...” from: V. Nevezhin, “Za russkii narod”, *Nauka i zhizn*, 2005, vol.6, p.43.

A local researcher of the Chuvash national questions at the Chuvash State University, Petr Vasil'evich Kuznetsov, supposes that economic, political and cultural development of Chuvashia in the 1930s experienced considerable difficulties. The relatively small layer of Chuvash intelligentsia was constrained within a rigid framework of unification and ideological schemes. People's rights to individual creative activity were infringed and this in turn retarded the qualitative growth of national culture.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, Stalin's repression of 1930s destroyed a significant part of national intelligentsia formed in the end of 19<sup>th</sup> and in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. According to rough estimates about 14 thousands of the Chuvash population became victims of the state terror during Stalin's rule.

The feats of the Chuvash people in the battles and in the rear during the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945) were examples of devotions of non-Russian nations to their common motherland. The Chuvash people took part in all battles on all fronts and in all kinds of troops; 226 thousand Chuvash natives participated in hostilities, 102 thousand perished in battles; 51 of Chuvash soldiers were awarded with the title of Hero of the Soviet Union, nine became Full Cavalier of the Order of Glory.

In the postwar period until the early 1990s the crisis in the development of national awareness among the Chuvash continued thanks to growing urbanization and central policy. Thanks to Khrushchev's enormous construction campaign in 1960s, urbanization and also growing of the cities and towns of the Chuvash Republic took place; also new towns and factories were built, accordingly more professional and education opportunities appeared. Thereby, the social structure in the republic became more complex. Under intensive migration and urbanization processes, significant territorial redistribution of the Chuvash happened within the whole country. Accordingly, it had an impact on ethno-psychology of the Chuvash people and their traditional mentality. The Chuvash urban population tended to Russianize and, as local researchers and journalists claim, national nihilism took place widely, in other words underestimation of their own ethnic group, lack of confidence in the prospects of their development and orientation on other nation.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, massive Russification campaign began in the 1960s in Chuvashia on the basis of the decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet

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<sup>69</sup> P. V. Kuznetsov, p. 127.

<sup>70</sup> V. P. Ivanov, 2010, p. 14.

Union about education at Soviet schools in the Russian language, wherein native languages became an optional subject, resulting in significant reductions of ethnic language speakers and the loss of parity with the Russian language. According to the statistic data, 99, 7% (90% in urban area) of the indigenous population spoke Chuvash in 1926, but by 1989 this percentage had declined significantly: 85 % in villages and 69, 4% in the cities.<sup>71</sup> During the Soviet time the Chuvash language in the cities became of secondary and to some extent unimportant status. Meanwhile, the Russian language was perceived as a key to education and career opportunities in the villages as well as in the urban areas.

In short, the Chuvash continued to be Russified, thanks to different factors: orientation to the more developed Russian culture, underflow of the Chuvash language, dominant in the country and the centralist policy of nation building as it was in Tsarist Russia. All these factors obviously have influenced national awareness of the Chuvash because the status of the Chuvash culture and language was undermined. In this way the Chuvash were deprived of possibilities for further developing of their ethnic awareness after the period of *korenizatsiya*, during new official doctrine of centralization; when a movement towards unification of all ethnic diversities orientation, promotion of Russian language, undermining of individual rights and Stalin's repression took place. All these factors strictly limited the national intelligentsia and national movement in the republic respectively. Instead of this, a feeling of belonging to the Soviet nation was propagandized all over the country and in Chuvashia respectively. The Soviet people were regarded at the 24<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union as "new historical, social, and international community of people having a common territory, economy, and socialist content; a culture that reflected the particularities of multiple nationalities; a federal state; and a common ultimate goal: the construction of communism." Russians and their language took the central position ("first among equals")<sup>72</sup> in this Soviet nation what was started with Stalin's pro-Russians sentiments and lasted afterwards in the form of Russification campaigns. However, the situation starts to look differently when political and economic changes of big scale take place in the country.

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<sup>71</sup> V. P. Ivanov, 2000, p. 71.

<sup>72</sup> R. G. Suny, *The Structure of Soviet History*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p.81.

## 2. Post-Communist period. Rebirth of the Chuvash nation or “ethnic nihilism”? (1991 – 2000)

### 2.1. “Take as much sovereignty as you can” resulting in national awakening of the national elite

During the disintegration of the Soviet Union, when Russia became an independent state in 1991, Yeltsin faced a challenging task to hold the Russian Republic together. Russia became the largest country in the world with many ethnic minorities who inherited from the Bolsheviks the territorial organization in the form of republics or autonomies. “Parade of sovereignty” became a trend not only in former Soviet states but within the republics too. The Russian republics started to adopt the symbols and rituals of sovereign nations and to demand greater powers from the central government in Moscow. For instance, resource-rich Tatars and Bashkirs declared sovereignty of their states, elected presidents and parliaments, and adopted their own constitutions. The other republics followed their example. Yeltsin’s position on the question was uncomplicated: “take as much sovereignty as you can”. The republics received rights to form their political institutions, to manage their resources and their revenues. The richer the region, the more autonomy it received.<sup>73</sup>

During the period of the great changes in the country the Chuvash intelligentsia took initiatives on the national question, what will be discussed further in the chapter, and they also tended to support the same ideas as of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan but in a moderate way:<sup>74</sup> The Chuvash leaders never claimed



**Picture 4. Flag of the Chuvash Republic since 1992. It is charged with tree of life, symbolizing rebirth. Red stands for the land, yellow – for prosperity. It was created on the basis of competition of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Chuvash Republic.\***

<sup>73</sup> T. V. Lankina, “Regional Developments in Russia: Territorial Fragmentation in a Consolidating Authoritarian State.” *Social Research*, 2009, pp. 26-27.

<sup>74</sup> D. Gorenburg, “Regional Separatism in Russia: Ethnic Mobilisation or Power Grab?” *Europe-Asia Studies*, 1999, vol.51 (2), p. 255.

\* Picture 4. *Flag of the Chuvash Republic*, illustration, [tps://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag\\_of\\_the\\_Chuvash\\_Republic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_the_Chuvash_Republic), (accessed February 12, 2015).



that they would leave the Russian Federation or boycotted the election or the signing of the Federation Treaty.<sup>75</sup> They also recognized the supremacy of the Russian law. Despite the numerical majority of the Chuvash population, the national activists tried to avoid confrontation with the center. Nevertheless, the Chuvash national elite started to pay great attention to the ethnic revival. They took some measures to enforce the Chuvash law, to develop the national culture and enhance the national awareness of the Chuvash.<sup>76</sup>

To begin with, in the late 1980s the Cultural center and the Chuvash community were organized.<sup>77</sup> Their members supported not only cultural and educational activities but some of them adhered to more radical ideas, especially state sovereignty of the Chuvash republic. Because of the different priorities a split between activists of the national movement took place, followers of different ideas became competitors. The first block was represented by *the Chuvash socio-cultural center* (ChSCC/ЧОКЦ) including the Chuvash writer and honorary academician of the National Academy of Sciences and Arts of the Chuvash Republic M. Yukhma; the Chuvash writer, journalist and translator Kh. Agiver; the Chuvash poetess R. Sarbi and others. The other block of “radicals” was represented by *the Chuvash National Congress* (ChNC/ЧНК), including the Chuvash politician and nationalist A. Khuzangay; the sociologists, journalist and politician P. Krasnov; the chairman of the National Revival Party N. Lukianov; the deputy of the Supreme Court of the Chuvash Republic Iu. Koshelev.

One of the ChSCC’s priorities was to support ethno-cultural education of the Chuvash who lived outside the republic. It also initiated a campaign “going to the people” [хождение в народ]<sup>78</sup> M. Yukhma and his colleagues made several trips to Chuvash villages located outside the republic. According to Filippov, doctor of historical science at Moscow State University, who studies ethnical aspects of federalism and regional policy and who has studied in detail the case of Chuvashia in

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<sup>75</sup> D. Gorenburg, “Regional Separatism in Russia: Ethnic Mobilisation or Power Grab?”, p. 256.

<sup>76</sup> D. Gorenburg, p. 256.

<sup>77</sup> I. I. Boiko, Iu. K. Markov, V. G. Kharitonova, *Perepis 2002 Goda v Chuvashskoi Respublike: Organizatsia, Etnicheskaia Identichnost, Rodnoi Iazik*. Cheboksary, 2006, p. 46.

<sup>78</sup> Originally the phrase *Вхождение в народ* appeared in 1870s in Russia and meant democratic mass movement of young people with an aim of revolutionary propaganda in rural area. Yukhma used a similar strategy in order to promote his ideas.

1990s,<sup>79</sup> these visits had a twofold purpose: first, the political activists aimed to unite the nation and to promote the national traditional and professional culture of the Chuvash; secondly, Yukhma wanted to create an image of the national leader.<sup>80</sup> The ChSCC developed rigorous activity: thanks to its initiatives the newspaper *Vuchah* (addressed mainly to the Chuvash diaspora in Russia), the regional magazine *Samana*, a women's magazine *Pique* and *Putene* (a magazine for children) started to be published in the Chuvash language. Amateur theater clubs *Theremin* and *Pyurneskea* and a number of folklore groups were organized. Filial agencies of the National Centre were soon opened in Moscow, in the regions of Samara, Ulyanovsk, Kemerovo, Tomsk, also in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, and outside the country in Estonia.

Speaking about the other national block, activists of ChNC, under the guidance of chairman of the National Revival Party A. Khuzangay, played an important role in the Chuvash parliament. Actions of lobbying, rallies, pickets, hunger-strikes of the representatives of the creative national intelligentsia (inter alia mentioned above P. Krasnov, N. Lukianov, Iu. Koshelev) predetermined the



**Picture 5. Speech of the first president of ChNC A. P. Khuzangay. October 9, 1992.\***

acceptance of two important bills by the Chuvashia legislature in October, 1990: the Declaration of the State Sovereignty of the Chuvash SSR and the Law on Languages in the Chuvash SSR.<sup>81</sup> The local government did not hesitate to implement the law and formed a commission for this purpose. The language program was

aimed at expanding the function of the Chuvash as a tongue of the titular population: a list of professions which would require knowledge of the language was drawn up,

<sup>79</sup> For more information see: V. R. Filippov, *Chuvashia v Devianostikh: Etnopoliticheskii Otcherk*. Moscow: Rossiiskaia Akademia Nauk, Tsentri Tsivilizatsionnikh i Regionalnikh Nauk, 2001.

<sup>80</sup> V. R. Filippov, *Chuvashia v Devianostikh: Etnopoliticheskii Otcherk*, p. 18.

<sup>81</sup> V. R. Filippov, 2001, p. 21.

Chuvash radio programs were produced, publishing in the Chuvash language was promoted, libraries were supposed to obtain more Chuvash language sources, the Chuvash language would be taught in all schools and universities, etc. These initiatives were implemented and, in practice, improved the situation of the Chuvash language to some extent.<sup>82</sup>

Of course, the decentralization and political instability within the whole country had led to these developments in the provinces. The “parade of sovereignty” served as an incentive for the intelligentsia to act. The above mentioned bills marked the beginning of the national movement in Chuvashia. According to Filippov, they legitimized fundamental elements of nationalism as a political doctrine: ethnic statehood and dividing the population into two groups: indigenous and non-indigenous. Implementation of this ethnic paradigm into political practice was an apparent success of the Chuvash nationalists and certainly made the process of politicization of ethnicity even more dynamic.<sup>83</sup>

Dynamics of ethno-political situation in the Chuvash Republic in the last decade of the 20th century is described by Filippov as a gradual degradation of the Chuvash national idea and the adherents of this idea. In the years of *perestroika* the movement was characterized as ethno-romantic when democracy was seen as a romantic idea too. The national activists believed that their actions would lead to the growth of the national awareness and flourishing of the nation inside their own state. In the mid-1990s most of these activists became disappointed with the ideas of clean’ democracy and abandoned their participation in ethnic rebirth. According to Filippov, ‘ethno-romanticists’ evolved into ‘ethno-careerists’ who began to exploit the national idea in order to satisfy their political ambitions and to penetrate into the power structure. By the end of the 1990s the enthusiasm was replaced by skepticism and disappointment; and ‘ethno-careerist’ turned the national idea into a source of enrichment. Not only was the center ready to support the national initiatives financially but also “well-wishers” from abroad, as Filippov named them.<sup>84</sup> What also aggravated the situation was the heterogeneity of the movement, which had

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<sup>82</sup> D. Gorenburg, p. 266.

\* Picture 5. *Speech of the first president of ChNC A. P. Khuzangay*, n.d. photograph, <http://enc.cap.ru/?t=publ&lnk=258>, (accessed February 12, 2015).

<sup>83</sup> V. R. Filippov, 2001, p.

<sup>84</sup> V. R. Filippov, 2001, p. 119.

started on the basis of ideology and ended with a fierce struggle for supremacy. They differed a lot in the level of their professionalism and in the degree of radicalism of their views and political beliefs. However, they shared the same basic ideas which Vasilii Filippov describes as nationalistic doctrine of the Chuvash national elite and defines these ideas as eight myths in his article “nationalism as ethno-political doctrine”<sup>85</sup> and in a monograph *Chuvashia in the 1990s*.

First, The Chuvash national activists supported the idea of the “Great Chuvashia”, the territory of the Volga Bulgars, that is to say the original land of the direct ancestors of the Chuvash according to the theory in which the Chuvash nationalists prefer to believe. Even in the declaration of the national rebirth of the Chuvash accepted by the ChNC it was assumed that the Chuvash people had its own independent state from IX century till the beginning of the XIII century that is to say during the existence of Volga Bulgaria. Second, they followed chauvinistic ideas such as attempting to make Chuvash the only official language. Third, the activists disputed the state’s view of the poor economic situation of Chuvashia: it was considered to be in the top six of the most economically depressed regions of the Russian Federation. Still they declared that the republic “could freely manage the land, its natural resources and other sources of income; and own the property.” However, they overlooked the fact that the republic has no strategic natural resources and remains subsidized by the central budget region. Fourth, all nationalistic doctrines aim to justify privileges for its people in the social space. Fifth, the ethno-politicians name the language situation as asymmetric bilingualism: the majority of the Chuvash speak both languages and the Russians – only Russian and wanted to promote Chuvash within the republic. Seventh, Filippov supposes that the Chuvash intelligentsia struggles for “hearts and minds” of the Chuvash: one promotes the official religion of the republic and Russia – Orthodoxy, another sees Islam as the alternative to Orthodoxy and an instrument for opposing Moscow, a third calls for restoration of ancient Chuvash religion; for example, an organized group “Chuvash National religion” in the Chuvash State Institute of the Humanities. Eighth, Cheboksary intellectuals became obsessed with ideas of messianism and increasingly interested in vaguely existentialist writings, essays about the Chuvash national

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<sup>85</sup> V. R. Filippov, “Chuvashskii Natsionalizm Kak Etnopoliticheskaia Doktrina.” *Respublika*, 16-22 October 1997: 14-15.

character, the spirit of the nation and its path. Such works contribute to awakening of national awareness, ethnic pride and willingness to act. Moreover, they lead to nationalistic ideas; according to Filippov, the nationalists started to blame the Russians for suppressions of the Chuvash and their Russification. It is manifested in statements such as the following: “Bulgar-Chuvash, wake up from the sleep of ages. You have endured enough painful bullying by the Russians: the native land-mother that feeds you is calling you to get rid of the Russian fetters.”<sup>86</sup>

Filippov’s explanation of the visions of the Chuvash nationalists is compelling. The national activists use in their doctrine utopian impracticable ideas and questionable theories. Thus their actions become ineffective and irrational, as for instance “dreams about the Great Chuvashia” or dreams about state sovereignty. The value of Filippov’s work is that he looks at Chuvash nationalism from the perspective of an outside observer; nevertheless we should not forget that he represents Moscow interests, supports centralistic ideas and criticizes any manifestation of nationalism. What he does not mention is that the Chuvash people has not developed a high level of national awareness and actually needs national programs. The attention of the activists to the language problems, the social position of the Chuvash, orientation on the Russian culture and “losing of the roots” are actual problems especially in the urban areas (what is detailed discussed in the third chapter) and not myths as Filippov claims. By paying more attention to the actual problems and not searching for their inspiration in the past, activists could be more effective in their achievements than they actually are.

Hereby weakening of the central power opened opportunities for the national elite to act. Thanks to organized national institution, the Chuvash laws were enforced, improvement of the status of the Chuvash language took place and national culture was developing.

## **2.2. “Ethnic nihilism” among the general population**

The situation among the general population in Chuvashia in the 1990s did not reflect the same tendency as “at the top”. There was no prevailing nationalistic

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<sup>86</sup> V. R. Filippov, 1997, p.15.

mood; quite the opposite in fact. From the social surveys of that period made by the Chuvash State Institute of Humanities<sup>87</sup> it is clear that the Chuvash people were not interested in declaration of sovereignty, only 21, 9% supported it. The majority of the Chuvash people (56, 8%) considered themselves as representatives of the Chuvash Republic and citizens of the Russian Federation at the same time. Moreover, according to the local social scientists, a substantial number of the population considered themselves a “second-rate” nation even though the republic bore the title “Chuvash.”<sup>88</sup> There was even a tendency to deny their ethnicity. Although indication of nationality was not obligatory anymore, about eighty percent of the Chuvash, who chose to indicate it, stated in their new internal passports that they were Russians in the column about the nationality.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, different local newspapers such as *Sovetskaia Chuashia* (Soviet Chuvashia), *Stolitsa Ch.* (The Capital CH.), *Respublika* (the Republic), *Khipar* /Хыпар (News) in the early 1990s discussed national problems such as the unpopularity of the Chuvash language, songs, traditions, newspapers and magazines in the native language. They also criticized those Chuvash who looked at things from the point of view of the Russian population, speaking about youth indifference towards their nationality, about absence of national culture in urban areas, dismissive attitudes to the “tribesmen”, etc.<sup>90</sup>

Furthermore, there was an opinion among the townspeople that the Chuvash population hesitated to speak their language in public places; indeed it was hardly heard on streets of the cities. If we look at the statistics, we see that the majority of the Chuvash supported the idea that two languages (Russian and Chuvash) should have official status and only one-fifth of the Chuvash responded that Chuvash should be the sole official language. Here again we see that the nationalistic fervor of the politicians was not shared by the masses. Furthermore, according to an ethno-social survey of 1993, conducted by Chuvash researchers together with Moscow scientists, a significant amount of the Chuvash people (17, 6%) were against compulsory teaching of their own native language in the schools of the republic, and more than a

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<sup>87</sup> For more information see: I. I. Boiko, Iu. K. Markov, V. G. Kharitonova, *Perepis 2002 Goda v Chuvashskoi Respublike: Organizatsia, Etnicheskaia Identichnost, Rodnoi Iazik*.

<sup>88</sup> I. I. Boiko, Iu. K. Markov, V. G. Kharitonova, p. 46.

<sup>89</sup> I. I. Boiko, Iu. K. Markov, V. G. Kharitonova, p. 46.

<sup>90</sup> For more information see: V. R. Filippov, “Chuvashskii Natsionalizm Kak Etnopoliticheskaia Doktrina.” *Respublika*, 16-22 October 1997, pp. 14-15; V. D. Dimitriev, “Tstoshchaet Natsiiu Nigilism.” *Sovetskaia Chuashia*, 8 October 1992, pp. 2-3; A. Kibech, “Velikii Samoobman.” *Chavash En*, 10 July 1993, pp. 4-5; A. Kibech, “Ne gozhe Vistupat Protiv Interesov Korennogo Naselenia.” *Stolitsa Ch.*, 27 September 2000, p. 6.



third of the Chuvash respondents believed that knowledge of the Chuvash language by residents of the republic should be optional.

It should be added that, due to the economic hardship of that period, the ethnic issues were not a priority for the masses. The economic crisis drove the majority into poverty; surviving in such circumstances became the most urgent problem for them, and the nationality question was sidelined. For example, an absolute majority (91, 6%) of the Chuvash respondents did not even know about the existence of a national organization, thereby indicating the general ignorance and disinterest of the majority in the national question.<sup>91</sup>

Summarizing, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and during the time of national revival of different nationalities in the post-Soviet space, Chuvashia also went through modifications on the national level. "Declaration about the state sovereignty of the Chuvash Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic" was adopted by the Supreme Council of the Chuvash Republic; it should be noted that it remained a subject of the Russian Federation. During this period liberalization of socio-political, cultural and national life of the people in Chuvashia took place. According to Ivanov, this period was characterized by the rise of national awareness among the Chuvash. If we speak about the national elite he is right, because they started to mobilize, encouraged by the favorable political climate. For example, in 1992 Chuvash National Congress was organized, the Chuvash socio-cultural center was opened and the Chuvash National Revival Party was formed. Notwithstanding these facts, if we speak about general population, the situation is contrasted, as national awareness at that moment was at a low level especially in the urban areas. This is evidenced by mentioned above public surveys and data made by The Chuvash Humanities Institute and great attention by journalists to the national "nihilism" in the local newspapers such as *Republic*, *Khibar*, *Soviet Chuvashia*<sup>92</sup>.

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<sup>91</sup> I. E. Ilin, "Mezhnatsionalnie Otnoshenia v Chuvashii: Etnosotsialnie Problemi Perekhodnogo Perioda." In *Problemi Natsionalnogo v Razviti Chuvashskogo Naroda*, by V. A. Prokhorova. Cheboksary: Chuvashskii Gosudarstvennii Institut Gumanitarnih Nauk, 1999, pp.132-133.

<sup>92</sup> Dimitriev, V. D. "Istoshchaet Natsiiu Nihilism." *Sovetskaiia Chuvashia*, 8 October 1992, pp. 2-3.

### **3. Current situation (2000 – till now)**

#### **3.1. Recentralization in the country and liquidation of nationalistic elements in the Chuvash Republic**

When Yeltsin's epoch was over the policy "take as much sovereignty as you can swallow" was also ended. As soon as V. V. Putin became the president, he started to pursue a policy of recentralization. A significant step in this process was the formation of the seven federal districts, which monitor developments in regions under their jurisdiction; and thereby regional lawmaking considered to be anti-constitutional came to an end. The regional head lost the status of president and fell under the influence of the Governor General of the district.<sup>93</sup> Accordingly, this has undermined "omnipotence" of the republican national elites. Reforming within the Federal Council took place: the elites representing their region or nation were excluded from the "Moscow big policy" and thereby lost the opportunity to influence directly the process of lawmaking in the country. The officials who serve now at the Federal Council do not have to come from the region or have any connections with it.

Furthermore, thanks to electoral reforms at the regional level, the formation of local parties and their participation in elections became illegal. Thenceforth a considerable number of regional parties ceased to exist; an example of it in the Chuvash Republic is the party "ChAP". Fiscal reforms also weakened the nationalistic movements: Putin canceled the bilateral treaties of Yeltsin and since 2000 the national budget receives up to 70 percent of regional tax revenues; the result was that the leading economic regions were limited in their political power and ethnocrats were restricted in their economic leverage.<sup>94</sup> Finally, the "power vertical" with executive agencies represented by FSB agencies serves as a mechanism for reining in any manifestation of "parade of sovereignties".<sup>95</sup> Thus Putin re-established the centralized system where federal preferences are "head and shoulders above" the

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<sup>93</sup> T. V. Lankina, "Regional Developments in Russia: Territorial Fragmentation in a Consolidating Authoritarian State." *Social Research*, 2009, p. 231.

<sup>94</sup> V. R. Filippov, 2001, pp. 171-173.

<sup>95</sup> T. V. Lankina, "Regional Developments in Russia: Territorial Fragmentation in a Consolidating Authoritarian State." p. 231.

regional interests. On the one hand, it contributes to unify such a big country; on the other hand, democracy is undermined and some problems such as regional disparities and interethnic relations in some regions are still not solved.

In the beginning of 2000 on the basis of new legislation, elimination of different national organization in Chuvashia began. It started after an independent news agency *Interkhibar* published “A Protest from the Assembly of the Peoples of the Volga and the Urals, and a number of Chuvash public organizations about the continuing military aggression of the Russian Federation in the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria”. They claimed that *United Russia*, “party of war” as they called it, usurped power in the Russian Federation and continues criminal war against the elected government of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria which is striving for independence”. A. Khuzangay – the head of the Assembly of Peoples of the Volga and Urals, N. Lukianov – the chairman of the National Revival Party, O. Ciplenkov – the leader of the Chuvash Youth Union *Suvar*, V. Iakovlev – Co-President of the Fund of Vasilii Mitta, V. Dvornikov – the Vice-Chairman of the Union of Youth Chuvash and I. Ivanov the head of the center *Tyurkel*, announced their solidarity with the national movement in Chechnya and demanded from the Government cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of troops from there. The local Ministry of Justice found this statement as “aimed at undermining the integrity and security of the Russian Federation” and sent the case to the Prosecutor's Office of the Chuvash Republic. As a result, the Youth Union Chuvashia and the party of the Chuvash national rebirth were banned by decision of the local court in 2000. Then it was stated that the Assembly of the Peoples of the Volga and Urals, the Fund of Vasilii Mitta and the Cultural Center of the Turkic world were not registered in the Ministry of Justice of the Chuvash Republic. The dissolution of these organizations was justified by the court, citing paragraph five of Article number thirteen of the Russian Constitution: “Russian Constitution prohibits the establishment and operation of public associations whose goals and activities are aimed at forcible change of the constitutional order and the violation of the integrity of the Russian Federation, undermining the security of the state”. This was the signal for commencing delegitimization of the Chuvash “radical” national organizations. Such “radical” elements were also dismissed from The Chuvash National Congress.<sup>96</sup> The era of the

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<sup>96</sup> V. R. Filippov, 2001, pp. 175-177.

liberal Chuvash national elite had ended. Finally, the new constitution of the Chuvash Republic, adopted in 2000, excluded almost all provisions that contradicted the Federal constitution, recognized the sovereignty of the Russian Federation on the whole territory of Russia and also the priority of the federal law with respect to the legislation of the republic.

What does it mean for the republic and the Chuvash people in general? The Chuvash national elite, deprived of opportunities to act in accordance with their own interests, became unable to provide impetus to Chuvash national awareness. The assimilation of the Chuvash people will continue, especially in the urban areas. The position of the language will remain the same or become worse: for example, as long as the Kremlin doesn't change its opinion about national schools and exclusive use of the Russian language in the state examination (it is not possible at the moment to take the state exam in any other language), the Chuvash language will continue to be unattractive to parents in choosing the native language of their children.

### **3.2 Downhill situation. Results of interviews**

As I have mentioned before, in the conducted research, interviewees consisted of twenty four representatives of the Chuvash ethnicity, half of whom were born and raised in urban areas and the other half in rural districts: that was the most important criteria as there is a noticeable difference between these groups. In order to understand the situation with national awareness, the questionnaire was made with attention to the following criteria: the role of the Chuvash language in the interviewees' life, as it plays a key factor in ethnic identification and respectively in national awareness; their identification, as it takes a significant part of national awareness, their perception of the Chuvash cultural heritage and culture at all, self-perception, involvement in the social-cultural life of the Chuvash. The interviews were made in conditions of informal conversation and afterwards analyzed; similar opinions were added together, that allowed creating tables.

It should be noted that while interviewing differences in understanding of identity were present among the interviewees: some of the respondents identified themselves only as Chuvash, some of them as Chuvash and Russian at the same time.

It is the question of ethnic belonging to one group or to two at the same time. For some interviews it was easy to answer to the following question, while the others were puzzled: С какой этнической общностью вы себя больше отождествляете (чувашской и/или русской). Почему? [With which ethnic group do you identify yourself mostly: with Chuvash and/or Russian. Why?]. I suppose, the accustomed in the Russian reality terms ethnicity [национальность] and citizenship [гражданство] were the reasons for this puzzlement. These terms were also used and discussed in the interview, however if a person said that he/she was Chuvash according to ethnicity and Russian according to citizenship for clarification a question about their identification/relation with Russia was asked. The results are discussed further in the text. For broader understanding of the topics, additional information from other sources is added in subchapters as brief introduction. Furthermore possible reasons for the current situation are discussed.

### **3.2.1. The role of the Chuvash Language**

In Chuvashia there is a high degree of linguistic Russification. That in turn reflects Russification in general, as we know that a language is very often perceived as one of the fundamental parts of ethnic identity. As the first president of the Chuvash Republic Nikolai Fedorov (1993–2010) commented, language is “the basis not just of culture, but also of thought and development”.<sup>97</sup> Unfortunately, the recent censuses of 2002 and 2010 do not describe the whole picture of the situation concerning the native language in the republic: there is no data about the language proficiency of different social groups such as urban and rural population, young and old generations, or diversities between different localities. Nevertheless, according to the census of 1989, it is obvious that the Chuvash urban population speaks noticeably less of their own language than the rural population and that the Russian population of the Republic barely knows Chuvash at all. The social surveys in the Chuvash State Institute demonstrate the same tendency: 35, 6 % of the respondents claim that their native language is Chuvash and 20,3% that they have two native languages Chuvash and Russian (see table 1). It should be noted that native language (*родной*) is a

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<sup>97</sup> K. L. Marquardt, “Stabilization and symbolism: language.” *Nationalities Papers*, 2012, vol. 40 (1), p. 129.

synonym for national language in Russia, so some of the respondents may have called the Chuvash their native tongue even if they spoke it poorly or not all. It means that actual figures can differ from the statistics and it is likely that the number of people who speak the language fluently is lower.

<b>Table 1. Which language do you consider as your native language? (Survey 2011)</b>			
Language	Total	Urban population	Rural population
Chuvash	35,6	23,8	53,1
Russian	37	46,5	23
Chuvash and Russian	20,3	23,5	15,5
Tatar	4,1	2	7,1
Moksha	0,3	0,6	0
Other	2,7	3,7	1,3

The official statistics indicate the tendency that the Chuvash language is gradually losing its position because people are not motivated enough to learn the language and to pass it to the following generation. To the question “Which language do you speak at work/school?” 76, 8% of urban respondents (556 in total) speak Russian, 19, 8% both languages and only 2, 3% speak Chuvash at work or school. The situation is slightly different in the rural areas: Russian is spoken by 32, 6%, both languages are used by 40, 3%, and Chuvash is used as the only language by 19, 9 % (see table 2). All these indicate a tendency of to regard the Chuvash language as unpopular and unnecessary, especially in the urban areas. What is dangerous about it

<b>Table 2. Which language do you speak at work/school? (Survey 2011).<sup>98</sup></b>			
Language	Total	Urban population	Rural population
Chuvash	9,3	2,3	19,9
Russian	59,1	76,8	32,6
Chuvash and Russian	28	19,8	40,3
Tatar	1	0	2,5
Moksha	0	0	0
Other	2,5	1,1	4,7 <sup>99</sup>

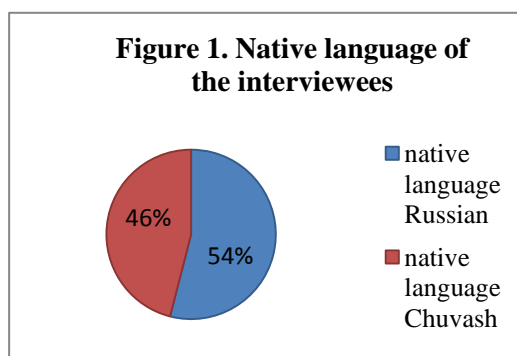
<sup>98</sup> IU. N. Isaev, *Etnokulturnoe Razvitiye i Mezhetnicheskie Otnosheniya v Chuvashskoi Respublike*, 2012, p. 33.



is that the majority of the republic's population lives in cities and towns. Moreover, the townspeople in most of the cases serve as an example for the rural population as they tend to form the social norms and values.

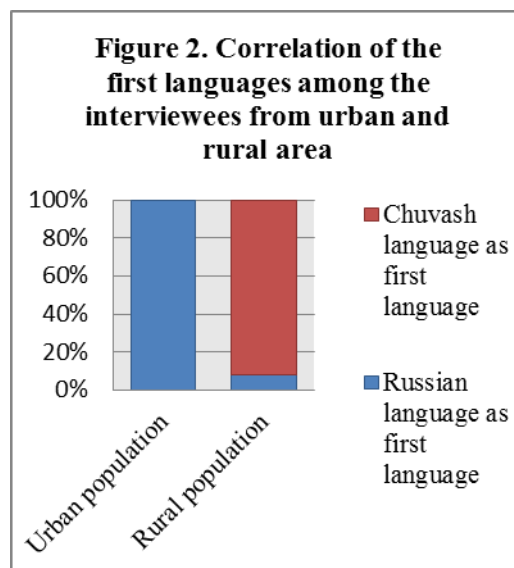
Interviews conducted during the research also indicate the same tendency. Considering this issue, the questions to the interviewees were asked in order to define the importance and status of the Chuvash language for them: What is their native language? Do they speak Chuvash? If yes, do they use it in everyday life? If yes, in which circumstances? Do they read or watch TV in Chuvash? Do they hesitate speaking Chuvash? If yes, why, and in which circumstances? Will/Do they pass the language to the next generation?, etc.

According to the data of the interview, more than the half of interviewees (thirteen out of twenty four) claimed that their first language was Russian (see figure 1). Interesting is the fact that in all cases when a person grew up in the city the first language is Russian, and in the most cases the respondents do not master the Chuvash well or at all (ten out eleven). Out of all the respondents from the urban areas, only one claimed that she communicates with her mother in Chuvash sometimes as the latter has some difficulties in speaking Russian; and only one finds it a shame that he does not speak the Chuvash, while three demonstrated their absolute indifference towards the Chuvash language. All Chuvash respondents from rural areas living in the cities said that they mostly use Russian in their social life, and use Chuvash only when they communicate with their family and sometimes with friends. It is Interesting to note that two of the respondents had negative views of the Chuvash language; one found it rude and called it a “language of swearing”, the other associated it with the “language of a village”. Only three respondents (one of them a teacher of Chuvash) claimed that they use Chuvash more than Russian; it should be noted that all of them live in villages.

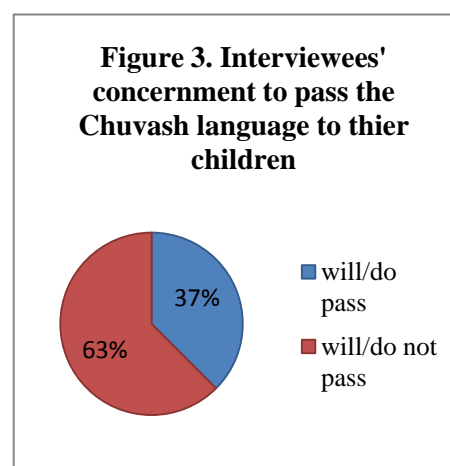


The Chuvash from the rural area claim in most cases (eleven respondents) that their first language is Chuvash but that they think and speak Russian at school,

thanks to communication with their peers and parents. Two of the respondents who grew up in a village and nine of the urban population say that their parents preferred to speak with the children in Russian on purpose while the parents themselves spoke Chuvash to each other. One of the respondents explains why her parents chose to teach her Russian first: they did not want their child to have a Chuvash accent and were afraid that she would make grammar mistakes in Russia. Furthermore, some respondents claim that their parents do not speak Chuvash even if they grew up in a rural area. The teacher of the Chuvash language in a village claims that “Russian is a prestigious language that is why children give their preference to Russian at school”. Russian becomes a first preference not only at school but also in children’s communication with their peers. An interesting observation was made while the interviews were conducting in a village: young people speak Chuvash at home, but when they go out in the village Russian becomes their language of communication. Questioned why they didn’t use Chuvash, nobody was aware of that and could not give a good explanation.



On the issue of transmitting the Chuvash language to the next generation, the majority (fifteen) expressed their preference for the Russian, accordingly they did not teach and will not teach their children the native language. Nevertheless, they are not against their children learning it at school. Two correspondents from the rural area said they will speak with their children in Russian on purpose as it is more important than the Chuvash and that they will learn Chuvash without problems while living in a village. Three respondents expressed their preference for foreign languages above the Chuvash one: they would rather teach their children the international languages then the Chuvash, as it seems to be less useful. Only four people told



me they would take an active part (or already did so) in teaching their children the Chuvash. Thus, we can say that most of the respondents were not actively interested in passing the language to their children, especially those who didn't master it, and those who master it give priority to teaching Russian (see figure 3). It's logical for parents to think this way, given the established situation in the cities: in nine cities of the Chuvash Republic there is no kindergarten or school where the language of education is Chuvash, no extra activities where Chuvash is the language of natural communication; and the whole educational system is founded on education in Russian.<sup>100</sup> The Chuvash language has the status of the less prestigious language in Chuvashia and people lose motivation to learn it. Thanks to that the young urban population becomes subjected to large-scale language assimilation and accordingly national assimilation too.

Furthermore, a couple of the respondents stated that some of the Chuvash prefer not to speak the Chuvash in the cities (but they did not detect this bashfulness in themselves.) For example, they told me that “the young generation are ashamed to speak Chuvash”, or “my sister is ashamed of being Chuvash and says that is not her native language”, or “the young people are ashamed of being Chuvash”, “People are ashamed to speak Chuvash, whereas the Tatars are not (ashamed to speak Tatar)”, “Now all the Chuvash teach their children Russian”, “The Chuvash population from the villages come to the city and immediately start to speak Russian”. Nevertheless, three respondents experienced the opposite tendency in usage of the Chuvash by claiming that Chuvash is spoken nowadays more than before “Earlier, many people were ashamed to speak Chuvash but now the number of such people is fewer”, “Earlier they were ashamed and now they are not”. According to the recent research of a Spanish scientist at the Chuvash State Institute of the Humanities, the negative position of the Chuvash language can be explained by association of the Chuvash language with the rural life, that is to say with the less developed level of social-economic and social-cultural life. De facto, the Chuvash language is correlated with

<sup>100</sup> H. Alòs i Font, *Etnoiazikovaia Situatsia v Gorodakh Chuvashskoi Respubliki: Sotsiologichskii Aspekt*. 2013.

[https://www.academia.edu/3758281/%D0%AD%D1%82%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%8F%D0%B7%D1%8B%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%8F\\_%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%82%D1%83%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F\\_%D0%B2\\_%D0%B3%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B0%D1%85\\_%D0%A7%D1%83%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%88%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D](https://www.academia.edu/3758281/%D0%AD%D1%82%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%8F%D0%B7%D1%8B%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%8F_%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%82%D1%83%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F_%D0%B2_%D0%B3%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B0%D1%85_%D0%A7%D1%83%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%88%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D) (accessed July 1, 2014), p. 276

low social stratum and education of below average standard.<sup>101</sup> As a result, the Chuvash-speaking population is not that interested or sufficiently motivated to transfer the language to the next generation, the Russian language is of the first priority for the majority of the families. This tendency takes place because Russian is seen as a prestigious language, it is a language which allows communicating with the other ethnic groups of the Russian Federation and expanding access to achievements of the other nations of the Russian Federation and to World culture.

At first sight it seems that unpopularity of the native language and assimilation of the urban non-Russian population is a tendency not only in Chuvashia but also in the other Russian republics. For example, in the neighboring republics such as Mari-El or Mordovia since 1989 the number of native speakers has dramatically decreased: in Mari-El from 90% to 69% and in Mordovia from 91% to 59%. This process can be connected with globalization and with growing unimportance of ethnic attributes and accordingly a decrease of motivation among the ethnic groups in learning the language, culture, etc. In the conditions of globalization, the world is developing into a single space which is based on laws common to all and activities that transcend barriers of distance and time. Shortly, globalization can be described as the process of global economic, political, cultural and religious integration and unification. Adherents of alter-globalism, which opposes anti-globalism and supports the alternative path of globalization, indicate some negative consequences of globalization. Among them is economic and financial rationalism. In the Russian Federation it is reflected in further regional divergence: only regions that benefited from direct investments, such as big cities, continue to develop; while many other districts have largely been bypassed by global capital.<sup>102</sup> Next to that, new social and cultural polarization, eradicating ethno-cultural interests and the freedom of the will of national minorities is the other negative aspect of globalization. All that can have an unfavourable effect on national awareness of ethnic minorities; as it promotes cosmopolitanism, it can also diminish significance of ethnic culture and languages, eventually undermining the feeling of

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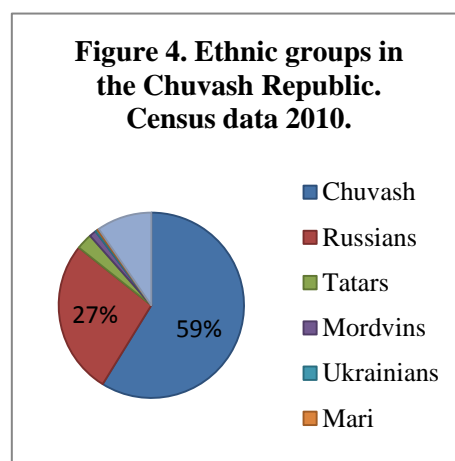
<sup>101</sup> H. Alòs i Font, *Etnoiazikovaia Situatsia v Gorodakh Chuvashskoi Respubliki: Sotsiologichskii Aspekt*. 2013, p. 290.

<sup>102</sup> T. V. Lankina, "Regional Developments in Russia: Territorial Fragmentation in a Consolidating Authoritarian State." *Social Research*, 2009, p. 246.

national pride. As a result, a process of acculturation of ethnic minorities and their assimilation in the dominant language and culture can take place.

### 3.2.2. Identification. Ethno relations

According to the recent census of 2010, there are 1.251,600 people in the Chuvash republic, about two thirds of them are ethnically Chuvash, and the percentage of Chuvash among the urban population is more than a half - 58, 8 %; more than a quarter of population is Russian – 26,9%, 2,8% - Tatars and insignificant amount of other nationalities (see figure 4.)<sup>103</sup> The Chuvash cities are mostly Russified and that in turn has an impact on the ethnic identification of the majority of population. While answering the questions of the census, the young generation often expressed doubt about their national identity: even in ethnically homogenous families, parents were uncertain about their children's nationality. The majority opted for their native ethnicity, but in some cases the parents said that their children were Russians because they do not speak the native language.



There is also a tendency among adolescents from Cheboksary to define themselves as Russian even if their parents are Chuvash. Boiko and Kharitonova who analyzed results of the census claimed that noted earlier the tendency towards rejection of their ethnic identity among the Chuvash continues to take place.<sup>104</sup> A complicating factor has been noticed among the young generation in the cities: they tend to claim a composite ethnic identity and they identify themselves as Russian and Chuvash at the same time.

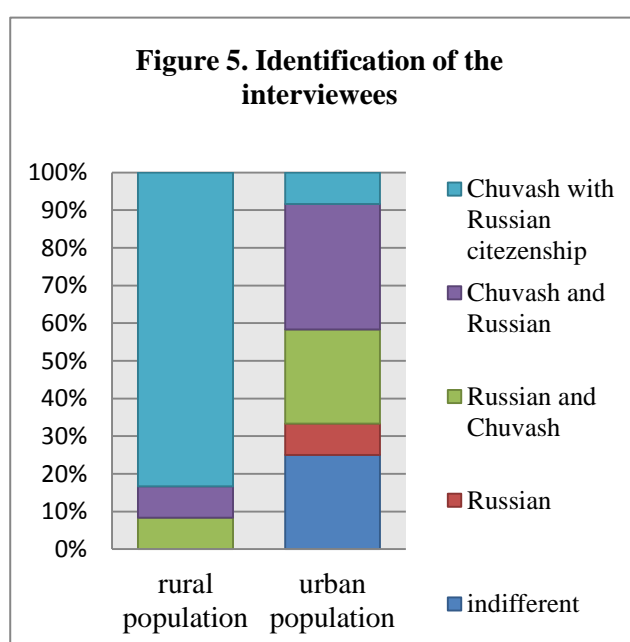
<sup>103</sup> I. I. Boiko, V. G. Kharitonova, *Obshegrazhdanskaia i Etnicheskaia Identichnosti Naselenia Chuvashii*. Cheboksary: Chuvashskii Gosudarstvennii Institut Gumanitarnih Nauk, 2013, p. 21.

<sup>104</sup> I. I. Boiko, V. G. Kharitonova, *Obshegrazhdanskaia i Etnicheskaia Identichnosti Naselenia Chuvashii*, p. 24.

In order to deeper into ethnic problems, such as perceiving the Chuvash culture by the interviewees, identifying themselves with Chuvash and/or Russians and ethno relations between Chuvash and Russians the following questions were asked: “What kinds of characteristics the Chuvash people obtain, if we speak about social norms and values? What are the stereotypes about the Chuvash? Do they agree with it or not? How Russians perceive the Chuvash, according to them? With which ethnic group do they identify themselves: with Chuvash or/and Russian. Why? Are they proud to be a representative of the Chuvash people?, etc.”

Analyzing results of the interviews, difference in ethnic identity of the urban and rural group have been noticed: the majority of the respondents who grew up in a village identify themselves as Chuvash according to their ethnicity and Russian according to their citizenship (ten out of twelve). One of them, the teacher of Chuvash, identifies herself only as a Chuvash. Two of them who moved to the city identify themselves as Russian and Chuvash at the same time and one of the rural respondents identifies herself more Russian than Chuvash. The urban population whose first language is Russian claim composite identity as both Chuvash and Russian: four respondents described themselves as 50% Russian and 50% Chuvash, three of the respondents identified themselves as more Russian than Chuvash (60% Russian and 40 % Chuvash), 3 respondents were indifferent to their ethnicity and said that they did not differentiate between people according to their ethnicity (see figure 5). What is interesting about these last respondents is that they speak about the Chuvash only negatively. The

question which was posed during the interview was the following: “With which ethnic community do you associate yourself?”; an interesting fact was that the people chose to answer according to the patterns already noted. To be more specific, I suppose that they answered according to the established norms of their environment (urban and rural) as



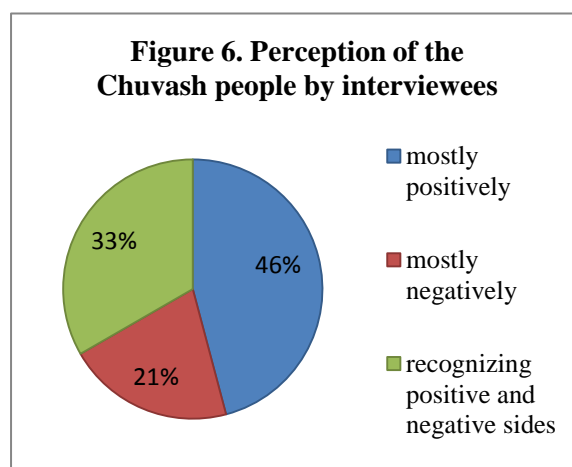


they gave almost unanimously the same answer: the urban population identify themselves as Chuvash and Russian or Russian and Chuvash and do not differentiate between ethnic and civil identity (only one of the respondents did that); whereas the rural population define themselves as Chuvash with Russian citizenship. For example, the first group expressed the following: “All my family and my roots are connected with the Chuvash culture, but my social life with the Russian one”, or “We are the Russian Chuvash, we grew up in the city”. The respondents of the second group said “I do not feel myself Russian (*russkii*)”, or “I say that I am Russian only when I am abroad and only because there is no difference in English between *Russkii* (ethnically Russian) and *Rossianin* (a citizen of the Russian Federation)”.

Besides that, a direct connection between the native language and ethnic identification is found: people who master the language do identify themselves as Chuvash in most cases and do not define themselves as *Russkii* but as *Rossianin*. People whose first language is Russian do identify themselves as Chuvash and *Russkii* at the same time. One of the interviewees even said: “If I live in Russia I feel myself as *russkii*”. People who do not speak and also do not understand the language demonstrated more distance from the Chuvash ethnicity: “I cannot say that Chuvash is something native/close to me, but at the same time it is not alien to me”, or “I feel myself more Russians as I do not speak Chuvash”. Nevertheless, people whose parents are both Chuvash do not deny their roots in most of the cases and say that they are Chuvash too. However, one respondent whose father is Chuvash and mother is Russian says that she feels herself only as Russian and does not have anything common with the Chuvash ethnicity. This person can be described as *ethnonihilist*: orientated on one ethnicity with awareness of belonging to it. She is orientated only on one ethnicity (Russian) and denies belonging to the other ethnicity (Chuvash).

The respondents had a more favorable attitude towards their Chuvash culture than to their language. Questioned about the Chuvash mentality, eleven (seven from rural areas and four from urban areas) had positive associations. They described the Chuvash as hard-working, hospitable, modest, communal, and humble people who respect animals and nature. Almost all of them (eight out of nine) identified themselves with the characteristics they described. Eight respondents (four from the city, four from the villages) said the Chuvash have positive and negative sides, and

all of them claimed to find those characteristics in themselves. About twenty percent of the respondents (five out twenty four) cited only negative characteristics, such as envy, ignorance, rudeness, cruelty, alcoholism (see figure 6). One of the interviewees expressed her thoughts with a total lack of political correctness: “Considering the social norms, the Chuvash are very uneducated and uncultured people, it seems that they all come from the villages. They hold themselves in low esteem but have high opinions of others. Besides they are ignorant, very envious and unfriendly”. These respondents have negative ethnic identification: two of them appear to be *ethnonegative* (i.e. orientated towards an ethnicity they have a negative image of). This can be explained by unevenness in development of ethnic groups and by different levels of economic and cultural progress.<sup>105</sup> In other words, these respondents have a negative view of the Chuvash nation because of historically verifiable inequality in development of the Chuvash and Russian civilizations. Nevertheless, at the same time, they identify themselves with that ethnicity. Three



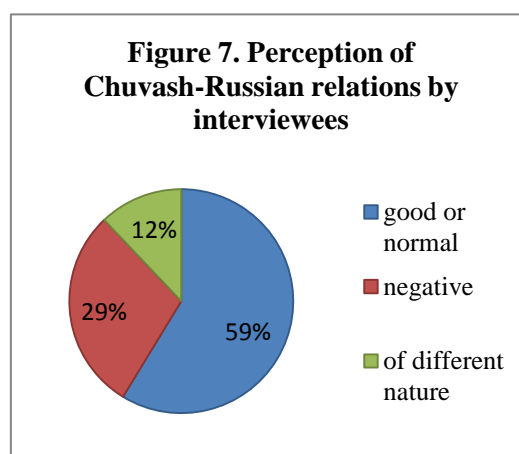
respondents fall under the heading of *ethnoelimination*: orientation mostly to one ethnic group but aware of belonging to the other one. They do not deny that they obtain Chuvash roots but orient themselves towards Russian nation and the Russian language as it seems to be of a greater importance to them. It differs from *ethnonegativisme* that orientation towards another ethnicity is motivated not by rejection of their ethnicity but by aspiration of belonging to a higher in ethnic hierarchy nation.

An important part of national awareness is relationship with other ethnicities. Within the framework of the Chuvash Republic, the relations between the Chuvash and Russian are determinative, as their combined numbers form 94, 5% of the population. At the moment interethnic relations between Chuvash and Russians are quite good according to official data. The situation was different in the 1990s: there was a certain amount of tension between the different ethnic groups, as was also the

<sup>105</sup> V. Khotinets, *Etnicheskoe Samosoznanie*. Moscow: Aleteiia, 2000, p. 110.

case in other areas of mixed population in Russia and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. It's generally believed that the reasons for this interethnic tension were a decline in living standards, weakening of the legal and social protection, uneven economic development of the different regions, and the raise of national movements. However, when the economic and situation started to stabilize, a significant reduction of interethnic tensions was noticed. Already in 2002 more than 95 % of respondents described interethnic relations as good or satisfactory, and less than 5% described it as bad; whereas in 1995 the picture was quite different, more than the half described the situation as bad (58,3%), 34, 2% as satisfactory and only 7.5 % as good.

Results of the conducted interviews differ from those of the quantitative researches. It's heartening that the majority (fourteen) claims that the Russian-Chuvash relations can be described as good or normal, but the rest (ten) define it differently: four say that Russians treat the Chuvash haughtily, three claim that the Russians perceive the Chuvash negatively and two say that the relations are of a different nature (see table 7). Moreover, more than half (fifteen) say that they were witnesses when a word *Chuvash* or word with the same roots (*Chuvashin*,<sup>106</sup> *Chuvashliandia*<sup>107</sup>) were used by Russians



and by Chuvash as an insult. The respondents from the villages say that the words are used in a demeaning sense only in urban areas and if it happens in areas it is a joke than rather an insult. When the words are used as an insult it is often a synonym for ignorance, stupidity, lack of culture and also for uneducated rural population.

Finally, a question about ethnic pride was posed: the half responding positively, and the other half giving neutral answers or stating they had no ethnic pride at all. Moreover, some respondents were not enthusiastic even if they answered

<sup>106</sup> *Chuvashin* is not grammatically correct word, the correct one is *Chuvash*. By using not correct morphological construction of the word, people emphasize on ignorance of the person, who is called as *Chuvashin*.

<sup>107</sup> *Chuvashliandia* has also negative connotation (ignorance, uneducatedness, etc.). Can be used as for a person as for a group of people.

positively: “If I were of another ethnic group I would be also proud of it” or “yes, I am proud to some extent” or “when there are achievements made in the republic, than I feel proud”. It indicates that actually the majority of the interviewees seem not to have a strong feeling of national pride, if at all. Taking into account those other results of the interviews that I’ve already outlined, it should not come as a surprise that the rural group tended to answer positively on the question (eight of twelve) and only four urban representatives answered that they are proud of being Chuvash; most of the urban respondents were at best neutral, and some had negative feelings about their ethnicity.

More or less neutral national pride and orientation towards a more prestigious language and accordingly culture (Russian) in the Republic, especially in the urban area can be explained by different reasons. One of them is economic factor: the poor economic performance of Chuvashia since its existence has also contributed to the understated level of national pride of its population. First of all, the republic is a subsidized by the center region. The gross regional product was 0.4 % of country’s one; payment of taxes, fees and other mandatory payments comprised 0.3 % of the federal budget. It does not have strategically important mineral resources; the export-oriented industrial production is not high. Traditional industrial-agrarian economic specialization of the region does bring high profits but does not contribute to increase of investments. Accordingly it has an impact on social-economic indicators and standards of living in the republic. In 2007 the republic was in the bottom 50 in the ranking among 88 regions of the Russian Federation. For example, it took 58<sup>th</sup> position in GDP per capita, 75<sup>th</sup> in monthly income per capita, 68<sup>th</sup> in unemployment index, 52<sup>nd</sup> in the employment rate, 47<sup>th</sup> in the investment in fixed capital per capita. In mining the republic was 75<sup>th</sup>, in manufacturing activities – 39<sup>th</sup>, production and distribution of electricity, gas and water – 53<sup>rd</sup>. The republic is under the average in GRP per capita and in literacy too. However, Chuvashia is above the average in the human development index (33rd): it is better than in such neighbor regions as Mari-El, Mordovia, and Ulyanovsk region but worse than in its more developed neighbors the Tatarstan Republic and Nizhny Novgorod region. Hereby poor economic performance of the region is one of the factors undermining the national awareness of the Chuvash.

Second, the Chuvash do not resist assimilation in general. Nowadays there is no confessional difference among the Russians and the Chuvash, they both follow Orthodoxy. Throughout historical development under the influence of the Russian church and Russian way of life, the Chuvash formed mostly positive attitude about Russians. Their culture, mode of life, traditions were seen as role models. Returning to Iakovlev's doctrine, "the great Russian people"<sup>108</sup> was seen as a path to enlightenment. In a letter to the Minister of National Education, L. A. Kasso, Iakovlev wrote "I made it my life goal to follow the idea of rapprochement between the Russian people and the Chuvash people." Iakovlev understood the importance of the Russian people in the economic and spiritual developments in the region. In the "Testament addressed to the Chuvash people" written in the Chuvash and the Russian languages on August, 4, 1921, he advised his people "to respect and love the great kind and clever Russian people who contain inexhaustible strengths of mind, heart and will. This nation accepted you as brothers in its family; they did not offend and humiliate you... this nation will be the mastermind for your development: follow them and believe in them... Share its joys and afflictions and you will join its bright and future greatness... On each field there is ryegrass"<sup>109</sup> but, based on my own experience, I can say that you can always meet kind and clever Russians who will support your good deeds. The Russian folk found its truth through suffering and it will share the truth with you. Believe in Russia, love 'her'<sup>110</sup> and 'she' will become mother to you."<sup>111</sup> Based on his own experience, Iakovlev assures the Chuvash people that the Russians are the right nation to be friends with as they could help the Chuvash to progress further. He asks the Chuvash to perceive the Russians as experienced senior mentors. He called upon the Chuvash people to have such patriotic feelings as love and respect for Russia. I would not call his statements as a direct call for assimilation with Russians, but in practice it has this effect. He admitted the Russian superiority and urged the Chuvash people to follow them. In my opinion, Iakovlev's doctrine did have a double-sided effect on the Chuvash nation: on one hand, it led to progressive cultural development and forming of the

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<sup>108</sup> G. N. Plechov, G.N. «165 So Dnia Rozhdenia Chuvashskogo Pedagoga i Prosvetitelia Ivana Iakovlevicha Iakovleva. » *Nauchnii potencial*, 2013, vol. 1(10), p. 92.

<sup>109</sup> By using this old Russian set expression, Iakovlev probably wanted to indicate that in each nation there can be useless people.

<sup>110</sup> By "her" and "she" Iakovlev refers to Russia.

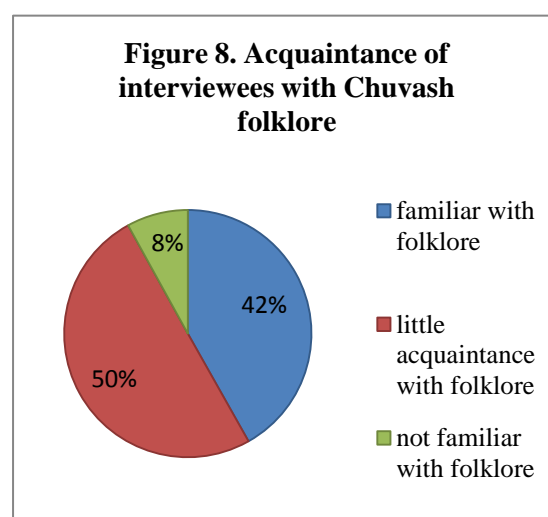
<sup>111</sup> Iakovlev's testament from: I. V. Pavlov and V. I. Pavlov, "Pedagogicheskoe Nasledie I. Ia. Iakovleva.", pp. 96-98.

national intelligentsia, but on the other hand, it approved and encouraged assimilation with Russians, something that continues to this day. Even nowadays, the Russians are perceived as higher in the national hierarchy of the republic.

### 3.2.3. Involvement in the national cultural life

Involvement in the cultural life and traditions is also an indicator of national awareness. There is direct relationship between involvement of nation in its cultural life and the level of national identity and awareness respectively. In order to find out the involvement of the interviewees in the national social-cultural life the interviewees were asked about their knowledge of folklore, interest in the national art, knowledge of the outstanding people of the Chuvash republic, acquaintance with Chuvash traditions and present day practice of them, interest in regional news and television.

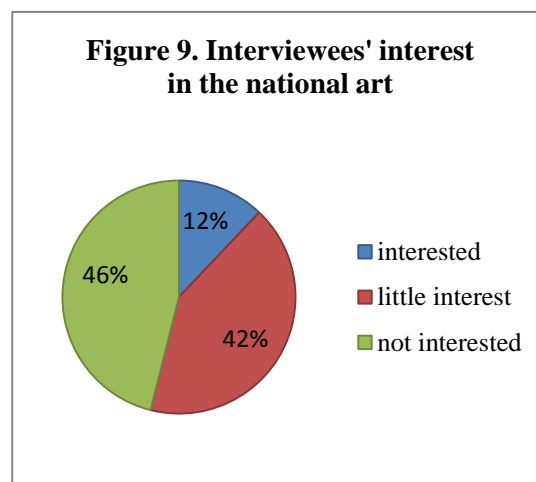
Half the respondents answered that they have little acquaintance with Chuvash folklore, ten claimed that they are familiar with it and only two said they don't know anything about it at all (see figure 8). Again the same difference between the rural and urban group is observed: the majority (ten) of rural respondents is well acquainted with the folklore, and only



two claimed that they know little about it. None of the urban interviewees said that they quite familiar with it: ten know but little, two are not familiar with it at all. Some of the respondents from the villages said that they attended national schools where they studied in Chuvash the first years and where they learnt about the folklore. Moreover, they also tend to listen to the Chuvash music and some of them still sing at feasts. Little interest was observed among the urban respondents: only one said that she read Chuvash children's tales translated into Russian when she was little; and some middle aged female respondents sometimes sing Chuvash songs.

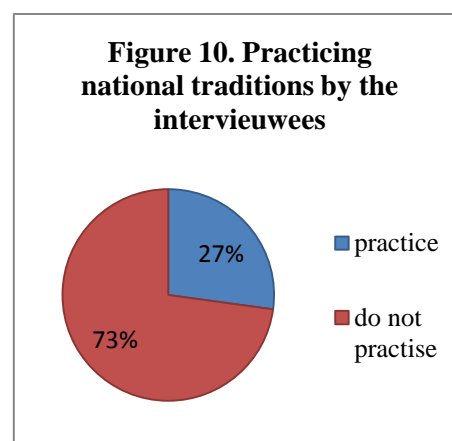
What considers interviewees' interests in the national art only three rural respondents claim that they are interested in Chuvash art, eleven (five urban, five

rural) say that they do not take any interest in it and ten have little interest (seven urban, four rural) (see figure 9). If people are interested in something it is usually Chuvash pop songs or the national theatre. The young urban generation claim that they went to the National Drama Theater when they were pupils, but do not visit it now. However, some respondents of middle age said that they sometimes or rarely go to the national theater. One respondent claimed that she lost her interest when she moved to the capital; that sounds illogical, as there are more venues for cultural activities in the city: theaters, educational institutions, museums, libraries. Probably, it is connected with Russified characteristics of the city; furthermore, involvement in Chuvash social-cultural activities is not popular among the young generation. Besides that, the republic suffers from insufficient financial support for the cultural institutions, also lack of motivation among the people working in this field, and low potential of the management in the cultural institutions.<sup>112</sup>



The situation is different when speaking about acquaintance of the respondents with the outstanding people of Chuvashia. The vast majority claim that they know the famous people of Chuvashia and are proud of their activities. However, five of them say that they know such people but do not have any feeling about it.

Furthermore, the vast majority state that do not practice national traditions, only seven claim that they do practice some national traditions. Three girls who grew up in a village say that their mothers prepare a Chuvash wedding dress, one of them cooks a special meal for a Chuvash feast. Nevertheless almost all respondents, except two, have heard

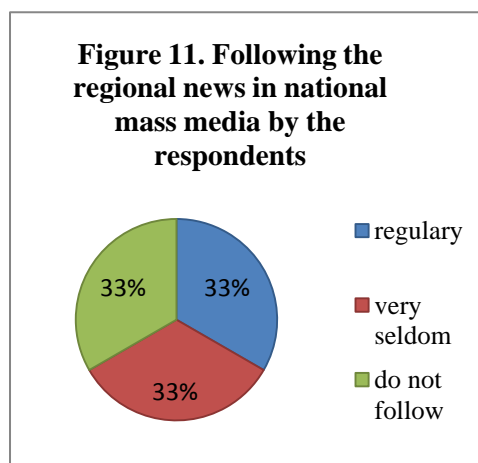


<sup>112</sup> I. I. Boiko, V. G. Kharitonova, D. M. Shabunina, *Chuvashskaia Respublika. Sotsiokulturnii Portret*. Cheboksary: Chuvashskii Gosudarstvennii Institut Gumanitarnih Nauk, 2011.



or know something about Chuvash traditions. On the whole, it seems that old national traditions are not of current interest (see figure 10).

With regard to regional news in the Chuvash language, most of the people prefer to watch the Russian news programs because they are of better quality and because not all of the population understands Chuvash. The respondents reflect the same tendency: eight of the respondents do not follow the Chuvash news at all, eight – very seldom, and the other eight sometimes watch regional channels or



read the newspapers or listen to the radio (see figure 11). However, twenty two of the respondents say that they follow regional news and twenty one are interested in the fate of the nation. Three representatives of the Chuvash claim that they are not interested at all or that they are indifferent to this question. On being asked the question “Do you think that there is a threat of extinction of the language and the culture?”, ten responded affirmatively, stressing that the greater threat is to the language. However, except for the teacher of the Chuvash language, nobody is active in changing the situation: very few respondents use the language actively in their life, almost all of them (even those from rural regions) think in Russian.

National culture and traditions are directly connected with ideological believes of the nation, such as religion for example. Considering the Chuvash, the old religion (paganism) was eliminated completely in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and new efforts to restore it nowadays are not successful,<sup>113</sup>



**Picture 6. Chuvash praying at tree Keremet', what was a shrine for Chuvash. Painted by A. I. Mittov.\***

<sup>113</sup> O. P. Vovina, “Building the Road to the Temple Religion and National Revival in the Chuvash Republic.” *Nationalities Papers*, 2000: 695-702.

as it seems irrelevant to the needs of modern society. The Christian religion component is actually weak or, at least, not as strong as for example Islam among the Tatars and people of Bashkortostan or Tuva with their Buddhism and Shamanism, who have an inclination to segregate themselves from the ethnic Russians and thereby resist Russification and sustain their own culture, traditions and language.

The “injected” religion has not helped to develop the Chuvash people’s sense of identification and certainly has not had much influence on the development of their national awareness: the original religion is lost and the new one has not yet become a national spiritual religion that could play a proper unifying role as it does for example among the Russians or Tatars. It should be also noted that with the loss of the old religion, a lot of ethnic traditions and values disappeared or were adapted to the new religion. The majority of the interviews indicate this tendency: they do not actually see difference between the Russian and the Chuvash traditions: to the question if they know the Chuvash traditions they answered positively but gave examples of the Russian orthodox traditions and rites.

Summarizing, one of the basis foundation for ethnic identity – national language is not of a great importance for Chuvash especially for the urban population. Orientation on more prestigious tongue, Russian, takes place; for the significant amount of rural population the Russian is native language and young Chuvash generation is not motivated to learn it. All this has impact on identification of the Chuvash people: Russification, especially in the capital, Cheboksary. Obviously, there is direct connection between the native language and ethnic identification is found: people who master the Chuvash language tend to identify themselves as Chuvash with Russian citizenship; people whose first language is Russian identify themselves as Chuvash and *Russkii* at the same time and experience feeling of belonging to two ethnic groups at the same time. Cases of ethnoelimination take also place among the Chuvash, that is to say orientation to other “more prestigious” ethnic group with awareness of belonging to the other one. Furthermore, nations with high level of national awareness tend to maintain their national traditions and pass them to the following generation, celebrate national

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\* Picture 6. *Chuvash praying at tree Keremet*, painting by A. I. Mittov, <https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%9A%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%BC%D0%B5%D1%82%D1%8C>, (accessed February 12, 2015).

holidays and to be involved in national cultural life. The majority of respondents represent little or no involvement and interests in these kinds of activities. Obviously, all these tendencies have impact on national awareness of the Chuvash.

There are different explanations for this current situation: such as globalization effect, relatively poor economic performance of the region, eradication of original religion and Orthodoxizing resulting in assimilation with Russians, Iakovlev's doctrine resulting in orientation on the Russians culture and language. Thanks to these factors the fusion with the Russians is not seen as undesirable among the majority of the population. I do not want to claim that Chuvash people seek to be Russians, but they tend not to resist the process of Russification and to some extent even accelerate it; for example, by a desire to teach their children only the Russian language or the Russian language first and Chuvash as a second language.

## Conclusion

Having studied the relevant sources and surveys of internal and external observers and having conducted interviews with the local population, I would like to indicate certain characteristics which take place nowadays in the Chuvash reality and have impact on the national awareness of the Chuvash. First, the Chuvash language is losing its position and significance: it's becoming unpopular and there's a tendency, especially in the urban areas, to consider it to be unnecessary. People are not motivated enough to learn it or to pass it on to the following generation in case they speak the language. That in turn contributes greatly to further Russification of the ethnic minority; this linguistic assimilation is directly interconnected with the cultural assimilation. Second, the Chuvash urban population tend to identify themselves as Chuvash and Russian [*russkii*] at the same time. The Russian culture and Russian ethnicity is considered to be more prestigious in the republic that in turn influences ethnic identity of the Chuvash. Third, the urban population do not have great patriotic feelings about their nation or republic: they tend to be neutral or apathetic to this question. Fourth, the urban population tend to have little or no interest in national art and traditions. However, it should be noted that respondents from the rural areas are inclined to have a relatively higher level of national awareness than the urban population: almost all of them speak the Chuvash, they tend to identify themselves as Chuvash according to their ethnicity and as Russian [*Rossianin*] according to their civil status; moreover they know more about national traditions and art and tend to be more proud of being Chuvash than the urban respondents. Taking into consideration the above mentioned issues, the following conclusion can be made: the urban population tend to have relatively understated level of national awareness, but the situation among the rural population differs: they tend to have higher levels of national awareness. Nonetheless, it should not be forgotten that the majority of the republic's population lives in the urban areas and it's the townspeople who tend to form the social norms and values.

Speaking about the majority of the Chuvash Republic, the urban population, what are the possible reasons for the Chuvash people's relatively understated perception of themselves? In order to find those reasons, socio-cultural, political and economic factors were taken into consideration. First, relatively late cultural

developments in the region are reflected in the stereotype about the Chuvash and their own visions about themselves. Associations of the Chuvash with uneducated and uncultured people still exist to some extent, not only among the Russians but among some of the Chuvash as well. Second, in general, assimilation with the Russians is not resisted by the Chuvash for different reasons. The Russian culture, throughout history, has been more developed and has had a much greater impact. Moreover, the Chuvash enlightener Iakovlev's doctrine in the form of Christianization and promotion of the Russians as "the senior nation" among the Chuvash contributed to the fusion of the Chuvash with the Russians; that, in turn, resulted in wide-spread Russification of the Chuvash. Third, poor economic performance of Chuvashia throughout its history and its status as a subsidized region has obviously had negative impact on the national pride of the Chuvash. Fourth, the religious component of the Chuvash society overcame identification crisis in its development and certainly had an influence on the national awareness: the original religion is lost and the new one has not yet become a national spiritual religion. Fifth, having studied the historical background, it becomes obvious that, when centralization policy dominates central (Moscow) government thinking, national activists in the republic are oppressed and their capacity to make changes is limited.

Nevertheless, there is an interesting phenomenon is observed which provides evidence that the situation regarding national awareness is not that desperate. A rise of national awareness in Chuvashia happens when there is a suitable political climate for that. A change of political regime and weakening of the central power are impetuses for the national elite to awake. First, the national intelligentsia, educated by Iakovlev, achieved success in providing the Chuvash people with a distinct administrative unit, The Chuvash Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, and in creating the Chuvash National Commissariat (the Chuvash department) at Narkomnats which provided an opportunity to defend Chuvash national interests at the center. Second, during the unstable time of perestroika and after the collapse of the Soviet Union the same tendency was observed. "Parade of sovereignty" allowed the Chuvash intelligentsia to take the initiative and follow the same ideas as those of the leaders of Tatarstan and Bashkortastan. The National Congress and the Chuvash Socio-Cultural Center were founded and Chuvash national leaders emerged, who took measures to enforce the Chuvash law, to develop the national culture, to

improve the situation of the Chuvash language and enhance the national awareness of the Chuvash. Moreover they even succeeded in legitimizing fundamental elements of nationalism as their political doctrine. It follows that we can assume that the Chuvash ethnic group includes a potentially capable national intelligentsia which is ready to act when it is permissible. However, history shows that the bulk of the population doesn't sympathize with the nationalistic ideas of the intellectuals when the political situation is stable and more or less centralized.

Finally, the thesis suggests that globalization is not necessarily the most important reason for the growing unpopularity or vanishing of ethnic minorities' cultures and languages. Ethnic minorities, characterized by understated level of national awareness or by negative ethnic self-identification (ethnonegativism, ethno-elimination, ethnonihilism) what is caused by internal weakness and external oppression, are predisposed to follow this path of development.

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## Attachment

### Questionnaire of the conducted interview

1. Your gender, age, nationality, place of birth, place of living, education, profession.
2. Do you speak Chuvash? If yes, what is your level of mastering the language? Is the Chuvash language your native language?
3. Are you familiar with the Chuvash folklore? If yes, to what extent? (for example: Do you know Chuvash folk songs? Are you familiar with Chuvash fairy tales or legends?)
4. Are you interested in Chuvash art?
5. Are you familiar with Chuvash traditions? If yes, do you practice it?
6. Do you know famous/honored Chuvash representatives? Do you feel proud because of their activities?
7. According to you, what kinds of characteristics the Chuvash people obtain, if we speak about social norms and values?
8. If we speak about national stereotypes, how would you describe the Chuvash? Do you agree with these stereotypes?
9. Do you follow the regional news?
10. Do you read newspapers and/or do you watch TV programs in Chuvash?
11. Do you have concerns about the fate of the Chuvash people? What do you think are the Chuvash language and Chuvash culture threatened with extinction? If yes, do you undertake any actions in order to change the situation?
12. Do/will you pass the language to your children? Why would you want/do not want to do that?
13. What do you think, how Russians perceive Chuvash?
14. Have you ever used word “Chuvash” as an insult? Have you ever been called by word “Chuvash” with an aim of insulting? If yes, were the people who called you of other nationality of Chuvash as well.
15. With which ethnic group do you identify yourself mostly: with Chuvash or Russian. Why?
16. Are you proud to be a representative of the Chuvash people? If yes, explain your feelings? If not, what do you feel about the fact that you have Chuvash nationality?