

Alexander Osipov
International Centre for Ethnic and Linguistic Diversity Studies
aosipov1@gmail.com

**The Rehabilitation of the Formerly Deported Peoples in Russia -
Why a Commonly Acceptable Failure?**

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Alexander Osipov

The Rehabilitation of the Formerly Deported Peoples in Russia - Why a Commonly Acceptable Failure?

'Repressed peoples' are understood as ethnicities forcefully resettled under the Stalin rule in the 1930-50s; their 'rehabilitation' is interpreted as a policy aimed at the legal, political and social redress for the damage inflicted on the said ethnicities as such. Despite numerous movements acting on behalf of the 'repressed peoples' from the late 1980s, the general societal consensus on the need to provide redress and compensation, and welcoming gestures of the USSR government and then new national authorities of the successor states, most movements of the repressed peoples shortly became inactive without achieving their goals. The project aims at explaining this paradox through examining the narratives generated by the stakeholders and the societal factors affecting the movements for rehabilitation. The focus is placed the state action and on the ways of framing the issue of rehabilitation that have led to the production of consent between state and non-state actors.

Keyword: USSR, Russia, formerly deported peoples, frame alignment, systemic hypocrisy

The paper concerns the so-called 'rehabilitation of the repressed peoples' in the Russian Federation. These 'peoples' are understood as ethnicities forcefully resettled under Soviet rule in the 1930-50s, and their 'rehabilitation' is interpreted as a policy aimed at the legal, political and social redress for the damage inflicted on the said ethnicities as such (Pohl 1999; Polian 2001). Although repressions on ethnic grounds during the Soviet rule were diverse in targets, scope, and forms, in the late Soviet and post-Soviet realities, the issue was generally confined to the destiny of the formerly deported peoples (FDP).

The paper addresses a paradoxical development of the two-sided 'rehabilitation' process including the FDP movements and the state response. The FDP issue was at the forefront of public debates in the late 1980s – early 1990s; the FDP movements launched loud campaigns; the legitimacy of their claims was widely acknowledged; the public reaction was translated into the respective legislation; the FDP claims really destabilized the political situation in the North Caucasus. However, the FDP movements failed to set up a joint agenda

and retreated or in fact dissipated by the mid-1990s, and this happened without significant pressure or intimidation of the authorities. The state action resulted in some merely symbolic gestures and in fact meagre pecuniary compensations, that in turn did not give rise to any visible protests.

The issue addressed and theoretical approach

The term ‘failure’ in the headline is under a question mark and figures as a conditional one in this context. This word points out the discrepancy between the initial claims and the final outcomes or between the theoretically required and feasible redress, on the one hand, and what was achieved in practice, on the other. Most stakeholders would probably disagree with a negative assessment. In a formal sense, first the Soviet and then the Russian state did much to meet the expectations of the formerly deported peoples; second, many victims of the Soviet repressions have acquired something; third, the silent acceptance of the achieved state of the art might look like a mutual satisfaction. However, the reasons for the discrepancy between the expectations and the results deserve an investigation.

FDPs differed in many respects, and the goals of their movements were not uniform. They were acting in a complex and rapidly changing social and political environment, and it would not be prudent to attribute the reasons for the failure to one single factor. Below I will focus on how the state bodies and FDP movements were framing the very issue of ‘rehabilitation’, how it led to frame alignment and then to the manufacturing of content over the rehabilitation’s goals and the outcome’s measurement.

The study focuses on the developments of the 1980s; the research seeks to explain (1) why most FDP movements opted for loyalist stances even despite the lack of state pressure and in fact demobilized themselves; (2) why they switched from confrontational to neutral narratives; and (3) what was the role of state action in the institutionalization of ethnic diversity and the construction of commonly acceptable vision of ‘normality’.

The accommodation of multi-ethnicity in politics and the system of government shall be studied as a multi-dimensional process, which can be denoted as ‘manufacturing of consent’ (Burawoy 1979; Herman and Chomsky 1988). The study addresses the alignment of framing (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2004) by ethnic spokespersons and governmental agencies and thus the shaping and channelling of social activism through the ‘architecture of choice’ (Thaler and Sunstein 2008).

Such terms as ‘frame’ or ‘framing’ lack a clear and uniform meaning and still generate controversies (Entman 1993; Fisher 1997), although they have been employed in social sciences for about 40 years starting from the seminal work of Erving Goffman who defined frames as ‘schemata of interpretation’ which enable people to ‘locate, perceive, identify and label’ an ‘infinite number of concrete occurrences’ (Goffman 1974, 21). Basically, ‘frame’ is understood as a ‘scattered conceptualization’ (Entman 1993, 51) way to contextualize a certain social phenomenon and to define its primary characteristics in public communication (Pan and Kosicki 2001, 37-40). Sometimes ‘frame’ is defined as a ‘second level agenda setting’ (McCombs and Ghanem 2001) or ‘strategic communication’ – the imposition of a way to perceive, assess, and prioritize certain things (Desrosiers 2012, 4-10). Some authors argue that frame comprises four major elements which are (1) setting up the context; (2) formulating the problem; (3) pointing out the problem’s source; (4) putting forward a solution (Entman 1993, 55).

Most often the notion of framing serves for the purposes of analyzing mass media and activities of public movements (Benford and Snow 2000; Scheufele 1999). Nothing precludes us from an analogous approach to policymakers, activists, and experts as an environment, a ‘discursive community’ (Pan and Kosicki 2001, 43), that provides for the problematization and contextualization of ethnic policies, and this makes the notion of ‘framing’ relevant.

The given study focuses on the framing of ‘rehabilitation’ as part of ethnic policies and activists’ reaction thereto. This concept of diversity policy or ‘nationalities policy’ in the meaning of a coherent strategy and its top-down implementation is highly contestable (see Smith 2019) but can be used as a container term for designating governmental action aimed at controlling and regulating ethnic mosaic of the subject population. The FDPs’ rehabilitation was and still is entrenched in the late Soviet and Russian legislation (as well as the legislation of some other post-Soviet countries); it was and formally is a matter of implementation policies carried out by governmental bodies and coordinative boards endowed with a special mandate. Therefore, the ways how the officialdom, experts, and FDP activists define ‘nationalities policies’ and the ‘rehabilitation’ as its part are crucial for understanding the institutionalization of multi-ethnicity and the elaboration of societal conventions about its rationales, design, and the acceptability of effects.

The cases in question

The so-called ‘formerly deported peoples’ are the groups subjected to forced resettlement on ethnic grounds in the 1930s – 1950s to remote areas, such as Siberia, Ural and Central Asia, and to special administrative regimes of exile (see Brandes, Sundhaussen, and Troebst 2010; Bougai 1997; Pohl 1999; Polian 2001). As mentioned, repressions on ethnic grounds under Soviet rule cannot be confined to the said population transfers, and there were many more compulsory relocations and repressive campaigns in some cases amounting to genocide. The FDPs issue is however of special importance because it was generating mass claims, political mobilization, respective public debates, and state response. The existing (primarily Russophone) literature routinely lists as FDPs 14 sizeable groups subjected as such to total or partial deportations. Among them are Armenians (deportation campaigns of 1944 and 1949), Balkars (1943), Chechens, including the Dagestani Akkins (1944), Crimean Tatars (1944), Germans (1941), Greeks (1942, 1944 and 1949), Ingrian Finns (1941-48), the Ingush (1944); Karachays (1943), Kalmyks (1943-44), Koreans (1937-38); Kurds (1937, 1944), Meskhetian Turks (1944), and Poles (1935-40). There were also smaller groups (Yakovlev 2005).

The geographic scope and configuration of the repressions and further resettlements differ significantly. There were groups resettled primarily within the Russian Federation (Kalmyks from the Lower Volga region, Finns from the Leningrad province in the North-West and a large part of Germans from all over Russia) and peoples removed from Russia to other union republics (Balkars, Chechens, Karachays and the Ingush from North Caucasus were sent to Central Asia; Crimean Tatars and a large part of Armenians and Greeks were exiled from Crimea to Central Asia; Koreans from the Far East were placed in Central Asia). There were also groups relocated from union republics other than Russia to Central Asia (Kurds and Meskhetian Turks from South Caucasus; Poles from Belarus and Ukraine; a large part of Armenians, Greeks, and Germans from numerous regions); many of these people afterwards migrated to Russia (Polian 2001).

All FDPs were released from administrative supervision in the mid-1950s; at the same time, most could return to their homelands. The Crimean Tatars, Meskhetian Turks, Germans, Kurds and Koreans were not allowed to return to their homelands or faced obstacles. While most autonomous units named after the FDPs were reinstated in the 1950s, their administrative boundaries had changed in varying degrees. The Crimean Autonomous Republic and the Autonomous Republic of the Volga Germans were not re-established, and not all earlier official accusations of disloyalty were rescinded. Therefore, there were

prerequisites for collective claims, and from the 1950s there were movements for the return to the homelands (as of Germans, the Crimean Tatars, and Meskhetians).

During the overall liberalization of the late 1980s, the issue of ethnic deportations became a core element of the public criticism targeting the Soviet 'nationalities policy' (Khazanov 1995). The oppositional movements on ethnonational and non-ethnic 'democratic' basis were striving to delegitimize the Soviet rule and its nationalities policies as flawed and inhuman; the deportations were the most salient argument of such an assessment. In turn, the FDP movements raised their own claims and were making statements partly coinciding with the utterances of the anti-communist democratic movement (Tsutsiev 1998, 144-145). The already existing movements of Germans, the Crimean Tatars, and Meskhetians reactivated in 1987-1988, and in 1989 new movements of Balkars, Karachays and the Ingush started claim-making and lobbying before the authorities (Dzidzoev 2000, 198-207; Golyshev 2005). The legitimacy of FDP demands was widely acknowledged, and the public reaction was later translated into the respective legislation.

However, the FDPs did not constitute a monolithic entity, and their claims were quite different. The peoples deported from the North Caucasus (Balkars, Chechens, Kalmyks, Karachays, and the Ingush) got rehabilitation in the late 1950s – most deportees returned home, and their ethnicity-based autonomous entities were restored. However, the redress was not full: the administrative borders partly changed, people did not get direct compensations, and some parts of the deportees were not able to return.

Chechnya and Chechens were not the losers in this respect. The Chechens had basically few concrete claims, and the very issue of deportation sank into broader rhetoric concerning the Chechen sufferings from imperial rule. A special issue was of the Chechens-Akkins resident in Dagestan. They wanted the reinstatement of the Aukhov district (near Khasaviurt) where they had constituted the majority before the deportation; besides, they were unhappy about the partition of their administrative district and the transfer of their lands to the settlers from other parts of Dagestan (Kul'chik 1993). The Balkars found themselves in a new grid of administrative division where they constituted a minority in all of Kabardino-Balkaria's districts (Akkieva 1997, 133-135; 2002, 270-279). The Karachays had been deprived of their 'own' autonomous province and after the return found themselves in a bi-national Karachay-Cherkessia which was also a part of Stavropol Krai. Respectively, their movements wanted a separate Karachay republic independent of other regional entities (Botashev 2000; Vasil'eva 2008). Kalmykia lost some of its lands in the Volga delta ceded to the Astrakhan province; respectively, the claims concerned the restoration of the pre-deportation boundaries.

Ingushetia was restored as part of bi-national Checheno-Ingushetia where Ingush played a subordinate role in all respects. A large and economically developed chunk of the land that the Ingush occupied before the resettlement – the Prigorodny district adjacent to Vladikavkaz – became part of North Ossetia (Dzidzoev 2000; Tsutsiev 1998). Respectively, the Ingush movements that emerged and gained mass support in 1989 first and foremost demanded the return of the Prigorodny district while the Ossetian authorities strongly opposed this claim.

The Crimean Tatars were not officially and in practice allowed to resettle back to Crimea, and exceptions were few. Besides the right to return, the Crimean Tatar movement claimed the restoration of the Crimean Autonomous Republic (abolished in 1945) which it regarded as a national autonomy (Ueling 2004, 137-141; Williams 2016, 57-88). The movement of the Germans (beyond those who claimed the right to emigration to Germany) demanded the restoration of the German Autonomous Republic in the Middle Volga region abolished in 1941 (Mitrokhin and Rondo 2011). Meskhetians, or Meskhetian Turks were not allowed to resettle to Southern Georgia and claimed the right to return (Osipov 2007). The other ethnicities' movements were barely visible in the political landscape of that time. Among the common claims were the official refutation of earlier accusations of collaboration with the Nazis (if such had taken place) and the official commemoration of the victims. The issues of material compensations and the facilitation of return to homeland were basically neglected.

A part of FDP movements demonstrated high mobilizational capacities and the ability to generate and disseminate their own narratives, raise claims, and lobby before public bodies. The major operational modes included mass rallies, media publications, petitions, and lobbying through legislative bodies. Despite all differences in goals and capacities, in 1990 the major movements united and established the Confederation of the Repressed People which comprised the movements of Balkars, Karachays, the Ingush, Germans, and Meskhetian Turks.

From 1989, the response of the USSR government was increasingly positive. While in June-July 1987, the police dissolved the rallies of the Crimean Tatars in Moscow, the movement leaders were invited to a meeting with high-ranked officials, and the CPSU Politburo set up a special governmental commission on the Crimean Tatars issue (Uehling 2004, 163). From the end of 1988 the local authorities in Crimea stopped obstructing individual resettlements, and later, the Soviet authorities changed their stance (Williams 2016, 139). In May-June 1989 the issue of the deported peoples was widely debated at the newly established supreme legislative organ of the USSR – the 1st Congress of Deputies. The

permanently functioning legislative body – the Supreme Soviet – established special commissions on the Meskhetians, Germans, and the Crimean Tatars. A governmental commission on the Crimean Tatars established in June 1989 finally put forward a repatriation plan (Uehling 2004, 164).

On 14 November 1989, the USSR Supreme Soviet adopted the Declaration “About the recognition as unlawful and criminal of the repressive acts against the people subjected to violent resettlement and the securing of their rights”; the document declared the repressive acts, concerning the deported peoples, void. However, the identification and rescindment of concrete acts required further work, and the Soviet government adopted several related resolutions.

The Soviet Union was in a state of collapse, and the central authorities were not able to do much, particularly, to make pressure on regional authorities that resisted the resettlement. The union republic claiming more sovereignty shortly took over, and mostly proactive was the government of Russia (at that time, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic – RSFSR) opposing the USSR central authorities. The Russian ‘democratic’ opposition led by Boris Yeltsin and later his government needed support from ethnic movements. Therefore, the FDP organizations got generous promises and in turn contributed to the drafting and adoption of the 1991 Russian law on the rehabilitation of the repressed peoples (Tsutsiev 1998, 144-145).

To sum up the central authorities of the USSR and then the governments of most constituent republics (which in 1991 became independent states) established a special legal framework for the support to the victims of repressions; Russia has adopted a special law on the FDPs.¹ Moreover, most post-Soviet countries in 1992 signed and ratified the first fully-fledged international treaty (the Bishkek Agreement) on the rehabilitation of victims of ethnicity-based population transfers.

The Russian developments

In Russia, the rehabilitation of the ‘repressed peoples’ is subject to two major laws of the federal level. The RSFSR Law “On the Rehabilitation of the Repressed Peoples” of 26 April 1991 is aimed at the formerly deported ethnic groups as such and seeks to provide legal and

¹ The other successor state that has enacted a separate law on FDPs is Ukraine (2014); in most other former Soviet republics, people resettled on ethnic grounds can enjoy rehabilitation on equal footing with other victims of political repressions.

moral redress as well as compensation for the damage inflicted on those groups by the deportations from the 1920s to 1950s. The ‘rehabilitation’ involves the restoration of the former administrative borders and ‘national-territorial units’ as well as the development of ‘national’ cultures. In all respects, the law is purely declarative; it is aimed at territorial and administrative revenge but not at overcoming the social consequences of deportations, and it basically omits the issue of compensations for the damage to individual victims.

The circumstances of the law’s adoption have not been sufficiently studied, but most commentators agree that the approval was primarily the result of bargaining between Yeltsin's supporters and deputies of the Supreme Soviet of Russia from the North Caucasus autonomous republics (Golyshev 2005; Dzidzoev 2000, 198-207). The drafting of the law in the Russian Supreme Soviet was entirely delegated to the working group composed of FDP activists. Notably, many formulations of the law reproduced the provisions of the Declaration on the Rehabilitation and Revival of Repressed Peoples, adopted at the Constituent Congress of the Confederation of Repressed Peoples in November 1990 (Polian 2001, 182).

The RSFSR Law "On the Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repressions" of 18 October 1991 (with subsequent amendments) concerns individuals who suffered from repressions after 25 October 1917. The law applies to all persons subjected to coercive and punitive measures of the state on social, political, ideological, religious, and ethnic grounds. All these types of state violence, including deportation, are defined as “political repression”. Decisions on the rehabilitation of those who have undergone extrajudicial expulsion or deportation are made by the bodies of internal affairs based on individual applications and evidence confirming the fact of repression. In the absence of documentary evidence, the fact of repression can be proven in court.

In practice, ‘rehabilitation’ (as the concept borrowed from the criminal law) includes first and foremost the redress of rights and the lifting of formal restrictions; it also envisages the return of titles and awards and the restoration of illegally revoked Russian citizenship. The other social benefits are spelled out less clearly; the victims may claim social housing, healthcare services, allowances for public transportation, and some others. Initially, the law provided only compensation for damage to those who were imprisoned in places of deprivation of liberty or psychiatric hospitals. In 1993, the law was amended with Art. 16.1 about pecuniary compensations which applied to those who were evicted as well. The possibility of redress or compensation was limited by several reservations and restrictions: property should have been lost only on the territory of Russia, confiscated housing can be returned if it had been nationalized in violation of that time’s official procedures and if the

victim really needed this immovable. The amount in monetary terms was strictly limited: since August 2000, the amounts for the property without a dwelling and with a dwelling are 4,000 and 10,000 RUR respectively.² Needless to say, the envisaged compensation is symbolic. The mechanism for assessing and returning lost property or paying compensation was established by a Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation only in 1994. Special commissions from representatives of regional and local authorities were supposed to study the applications of the already rehabilitated persons and make decisions.

According to the 1992 and 1993 amendment to Art. 11 and 12 of the Law on the victims of repressions, the Russian authorities could recognize the decisions on rehabilitation made in other post-Soviet states if they were in line with the Russian legislation and extend the domestic benefits and support measures onto these persons. Art.9 of the Law “On the Rehabilitation of the Repressed Peoples” links the collective and individual rehabilitation: it acknowledges the right to individual compensations and refers to other respective legislation and particularly (since 1993) the Law "On the Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repressions".

How were these two laws implemented? In a formal sense, the Russian authorities were adopting normative acts envisaged by the Law on the rehabilitation of the repressed people; the Russian regions also engaged in the respective law-making. This has had little substantive outcome if compared with the initial declarations. This issue rather concerns the way of framing and interpreting collective rehabilitation, and I will address it below.

As for the rehabilitation of individuals, the respective law really applied to persons belonging to FDPs. Almost all eligible people had to apply to the organs of internal affairs since they had been subjected to administrative compulsion. There are no accurate statistics disaggregated along ethnic lines and the categories of state repression; the exact number of persons belonging to FDPs remains unclear. Reportedly, from 1993 to 2003, 1,408,543 people repressed on ethnic grounds applied to the bodies of internal affairs; of them 858,924 have been recognized as victims and 90,875 as persons who had suffered from the repressions (as family members) (Petrov 2013, 143). According to the Commission for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repressions under the President of the Russian Federation, 2,679,522 were rehabilitated from 1992 to December 2012 as victims of

² In 2000, these sums were equivalent to 112 and 278 USD respectively; before the limits were defined as 40 and 100 minimal wages that were approximately at the same level.

administrative repressions; of them, approximately 55 percent are estimated to have been repressed on ethnic grounds (Ivanov 2016, 398).

In Kabardino-Balkaria, 54,467 people were registered as repressed persons (most Balkars); 51,663 got rehabilitation; from 1994 to 2007, the government paid 12,455 pecuniary compensations (Orazaeva 2007). Chechnya declared its independence in 1991; ordinary Chechens were seeking rehabilitation on their own initiative; in 1994 - the first half of 1997, 17,803 Chechens applied for rehabilitation outside of the republic, and 14,951 people got certificates of rehabilitation (Bougai 2000: 92-93). The pro-Russian government of Chechnya became concerned with the rehabilitation of former deportees only after the wars at the beginning of 2004 (Tsutsulaeva and Osmaev 2012, 44-45). So far, there is no data on the number of persons who have undergone the rehabilitation process. It is also known that people reported from outside of Russia (individual Meskhetian Turks) got rehabilitation and the respective social benefits in Russia (Osipov 2007, 465). A specific issue is the Crimean Tatars resident on the Russian territory, who are eligible for the rehabilitation given that in 1944 Crimea was a part of the RSFSR. Ukraine became independent, and the Russian government paid no attention to the related developments in Crimea which had been part of Ukraine. In fact, most Crimean Tatars residing in Russia were unable to get rehabilitation without a court decision.³

Political developments and the FDP movements' strategies were independent of individual rehabilitation. In 1991 – 1992, during a political turmoil in Russia most active FDR movements discovered that the Russian government after grabbing the power became resistant to ethnic lobbying and was reluctant to sanction any territorial changes. The German movement faced a straightforward rejection of its claim of territorial autonomy in the Volga region and retreated (Mitrokhin and Rondo 2011). On the contrary, three Northern Caucasian movements resorted to direct action.

The Karachay movement unilaterally repeatedly declared an independent republic from November 1990, but the ruling nomenclature of Karachay-Cherkessia in March 1992 arranged a local referendum and the majority voted for the republic's territorial integrity (Akkieva and Temmoev 2014, 149-150; Botashev 2000, 144-146). The Balkar movement tried to do the same in November 1991; after the unofficial referendum where most Balkars

³ As acknowledged the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation in its Conclusion [*opredeleniye*] of 19 February 2009 No. 135-O-P "On the complaint of the Human Rights Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation on the violation of constitutional rights of the citizen Baramykov Rustam Akhmetzhanovich by the provision of Article 2 of the Law of the Russian Federation 'On the rehabilitation of the victims of political repressions'".

voted for their own republic independent of Kabardino-Balkaria, the republican government initiated long-lasting negotiations which ended in 1994 after a new referendum where most Balkars voted for the united and indivisible Kabardino-Balkaria (Tetuev 2017, 61). Later on, the republican authorities made some changes in the administrative division of the republic and reinstated one predominantly Balkar district while the Balkar movement had previously demanded the five pre-war territorial units (Tabaksoev 2019; Tetuev 2017, 61-62). The Ingush movement achieved independence from Chechnya, formed its own paramilitary units and tried to capture the contested Prigorodny district in October 1992 by use of force. The Ingush were defeated, and all Ingush civilians from North Ossetia had to seek refuge in Ingushetia (Osetino-ingushskii 2005; Tsutsiev 1998, 159-161).

Even before the clash between North Ossetia and Ingushetia and because of the tensions in the region, the Russian leadership adopted the Law of 3 July 1992 on the establishment of a transitional period for territorial delimitation and moratorium on territorial changes up until July 1995. In a legal sense, the issue of internal boundaries was closed by the adoption of the 1992 Federal Treaty and the 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation which stipulate that the boundaries of the federation units can be changed only by their mutual consent.

The claims of other FDP movements were even less productive. The government of Dagestan in early 1991 in principle agreed to the reinstatement of the Aukhov district and the voluntary return resettlement of the Laks who had been placed in this territory in the 1940s, to other parts of the republic. Chechen-Akkins refrained from the use of force in Dagestan, but the situation has not changed to date and is still stalled (Avtulhanova 2018; Glavnoe 2021). The Korean movement as well as the Greeks, Kurds, and Poles had no structured claims addressing the Russian authorities. The Ingrian Finnish society wanted the extension of the rehabilitation law on all their co-ethnic since not all the circumstances of forceful relocation in the 1940s fell within the definition of the law (Birin et al. 2006; Gil'di 2003). The Meskhetian society "Vatan" wanted the Russian government to make pressure on Georgia for lifting the formal and informal obstacles to repatriation. The Russian government in fact did very little in this regard, but the authorities used the future resettlement to Georgia as a pretext for denying the civil rights of Meskhetians from Central Asia who had sought refuge in the Russian South in 1989-1990 (Osipov 2007).

To wrap up, the FDP movements have not been basically achieved their goals. At best, they received some minor pecuniary benefits, infrastructural projects in the places of FDPs' current residence (as in Karachay-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria), commemoration

sites, and friendly gestures from the authorities that was far below the initial claims. The leaders of the FDPs in many respects took conformist stances and aligned their interpretations of history and demands with official agendas. By the mid-1990s the FDP movements failed to set up a joint strategy. The Confederation of the Repressed Peoples although it formally exists to date, has been inactive over the last 20 years. The new umbrella organization of the North Caucasus FDPs restricts its activities to few petitions (Soiuz 2021). The same can be said about most other FDP movements; they have either disappeared from political life by the mid-1990s or significantly reformatted their work.⁴ Partial exceptions are the Chechen-Akkins (Adiev 2021) and the Karachays (Alpaut 2017; Kapaeva 2020) whose activists are still making the same claims but along with other issues; sporadic and isolated protest actions take place (Sadovskaia 2020; Zav'ialova 2012), but at best they remain local news. This marginalization happened without a significant pressure or intimidation of the authorities in the 1990s, before the authoritarian turn of the 2000s. Moreover, the administrative, legislative, and judicial developments in Russia have been in many respects friendly to the FDPs.

The social landscape

The decline and extinction of the FDP movements in the 1990s depended on and resulted from numerous factors; what happened to FDPs was generally in line with broader trends in Russian political life and societal engagement. In this article, I am not able to describe the broad societal developments in detail. Besides, the FDP movements themselves were too diverse for confining the analysis to a single model and a common pattern; moreover, these movements are studied unevenly, and some evolutions as well as the reason behind need further examination. Here I will briefly list the major circumstances that formed the societal background of the Russian ethnopolitical evolutions.

First, the peak of mass ethnopolitical mobilization was before and immediately after the Soviet Union's breakdown; afterward, the significance of ethnicity as a factor of political activity was in a steady decline (Giuliano and Gorenburg 2012; Greene 2018). Definitely, this phenomenon requires examination. Two explanations may serve as the major hypothesis. The downfall of the Soviet system meant a deep change of the conditions for grass-root activities

⁴ In the post-Soviet space at large, the only exception is probably the largest movement of the Crimean Tatars (associated with the Mejlis – the publicly elected governing body) which still strives to pursue its goals in Crimea and mainland Ukraine (Wilson 2017).

and mobilization; people rapidly lost such a resource as free time previously unconditionally paid by salaries from the state budget. Most regional polities (including the North Caucasian republics) shortly became authoritarian and/or based on clientelism and patronage.

Respectively, a part of activists was co-opted into the governments which hijacked the agenda of ‘rehabilitation’ in their bargaining with Moscow, and a part was intimidated and marginalized. The most emblematic cases are the Balkar, Kalmyk, and Ingush activists.

Secondly, the very agenda of Soviet repressions, commemoration, and redress has become unpopular in the Russian society at large. The reasons are manifold and are generally dependent on the public demand for a comfortable past devoid of traumatic memories (Epple 2020; Ferreti 2002; Khazanov 2008). The result was a rapid shift to another mnemonic regime (Bernhard and Kubik 2014); the spontaneous solution was the agonistic (Bull and Hansen 2016) coexistence of conflicting historical narratives, or a ‘neutral history’ (Khlevniuk 2017) composed of discursively reconciled components.

Having used anti-totalitarian and anti-colonial rhetoric in the late 1980s, all the FDP movements in Russia shortly switched to the mainstream state-centric approach and demonstrated loyalty to official agendas. Having once elaborated their own narratives of victimhood and resistance, most movements transformed them in a way allowing for a reconciliation with the official interpretations which deny or mute the guilt and responsibility of the state even if the latter positioned itself as a direct heir of the Soviet repressive machinery. This development was common for almost all FDPs despite the constituency’s size, residence, and the availability of kin-statehoods, and cannot be explained by the backsliding to authoritarianism. The dominant discourse does not include the figure of the state as a collective culprit; the history of the Soviet repressions was interpreted as a temporary deviation in the performance of the generally legitimate statehood. ‘Rehabilitation’ appears in this context as exculpation, or the recognition that the same state has no more claims against the victims; redress is regarded thus as conditional, negotiable, and ultimately granted by the same state.

Thirdly, the FDP movements were diverse in many respects and were pursuing increasingly divergent goals. The German movement had to abandon the demand of territorial autonomy as unrealistic (Mitrokhin and Rondo 2011); up until the end of the 1990s, it was repeatedly putting forward the propositions of a sophisticated arrangement based on a web of territorial and non-territorial self-governing units, but little progress followed. Most Germans were interested in emigration to Germany; the remaining activists and their constituencies have demonstrated interest in joint German-Russian international projects and

in the opportunities of business and cultural cooperation with Germany. The movements speaking on behalf of ethnicities having kinstates (Koreans, Finns, Poles, and Greeks) were also interested in emigration, transborder cooperation, and funding from abroad rather than confrontation with the Russian government.

The issue of 'rehabilitation' turned out insignificant against the background of the fight for independence and two wars in Chechnya. The initial agenda of the Ingush movement was overshadowed by the problem of the Ingush internally displaced persons and Ingushetia's official policy concerning territorial claims. The Karachay movement became an ally of the local strongmen in the fight over the political and economic control over the entire Karachay-Cherkessia (Chervonnaia 2002; Vasil'eva 2008). The Balkars were splintered: in 1996, a part of the leader was co-opted into the officialdom, and a part fighting for the rights of the Balkar minority was marginalized (Akkieva 2002, 281-285).

Rehabilitation as a model of nationalities policy

The policy of rehabilitation mirrors and embodies some major features of Russian ethnopolitics in general. First, the 1991 law on the repressed peoples set up the vocabulary and the major concepts of the later ethnic policy. This act is the first 'ethnic' law in Russia adopted after the beginning of perestroika (except for the constitutional amendments and some provisions of the 1990 RSFSR Declaration of Sovereignty). The law introduced several terms that were later used in subsequent legislation and formed a model for framing multi-ethnicity and for the following implementation. The law concerns ethnic groups as collective entities and social actors, and its main idea is to recognize the belonging of a territory to a certain ethnic community. Notably, the ethnicization of territory and the institution of ethnic statehood in Soviet and post-Soviet societies is doxa. It is a sort of common and taken for granted knowledge; the meaning and content of this linkage between ethnicity and territory are defined neither in law nor in practice (Osipov 2015). More specifically, the law on the repressed peoples requires the unconditional restoration of those territorial entities and borders that existed before the "repressions". The question of why the addressee of the 'rehabilitation' measures should be ethnic groups as such, including people who were not personally affected by the repressions, was not discussed at all. Actually, ethnic activists framed the issues in the same way, shared this worldview, and subscribed to the same goals.

The main terminology corresponds to the lawmakers' stance: "national-state formations", "national-territorial boundaries", "places of traditional residence [of groups]",

"the right to free national development", and "legislation on interethnic relations." The law is purely declarative and eclectic, combining contradictory positions, for example, the requirement of unconditional "territorial rehabilitation", the inadmissibility of violating the rights of people who live "in the territories of repressed peoples" (Art. 3 (3)), and the ban on propaganda and agitation against the rehabilitation of repressed peoples (Art. 4). The law is performative in nature - it symbolically launches collective "rehabilitation" but ignores the social consequences of deportations, the issues of compensation to individual victims, and the prevention and resolution of possible conflicts and collisions. Accordingly, many necessary definitions are absent, for example, there is no definition of repression (only a list of specific manifestations). There is no list of affected ethnic communities, and no definition of a "repressed people" either. Art. 1 contains the formulation "the peoples of the RSFSR", but nowhere in the law is it disclosed; it remains unclear whether it was about groups subjected to repressions on the territory of the RSFSR, and/or exiled to Russia, or all groups subjected to repressive measures during the Soviet period.

The law is composed mainly of blanket norms, that is, refers to future decisions of the legislator or the executive, or to non-existent legislation. In particular, the mechanisms for "territorial rehabilitation" and "voluntary return" were not envisaged at all; Art. 12 stipulates that all past acts and decisions directed against the repressed peoples are recognized as void, but it was not established how this provision could be implemented in practice.

The law is also important because it has actually established the implementation scheme used in other "ethnic" legislation. This pattern can be called a "tapering funnel"; it assumes a long way from general declarations to practical implementation through a series of bylaws with a gradual narrowing of guarantees and the reduction of state obligations (Malakhov and Osipov 2006). Art. 13 of the law on repressed peoples stipulates that the application of the law "is regulated by separate legislative acts of the RSFSR adopted in relation to each repressed people". In a formal sense, the Russian authorities have generally complied with this provision. Russian authorities have adopted legal and regulatory acts on rehabilitation for each large group repressed on the territory of Russia (except for the Chechens). However, among these acts were no laws in the literal sense. The draft federal laws on the rehabilitation of Germans and Greeks, which the initiative groups of deputies had submitted to the State Duma in 1999-2000, were rejected on formal pretexts.

The by-laws on the rehabilitation adopted in the 1990s had two tiers. The upper tier is a decision of a higher authority (as a rule, a Decree of the President of the Russian Federation or a Resolution of the Supreme Soviet – the legislature of the Russian Federation) regarding

the rehabilitation of a particular people. The resolutions of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation concerned Finns, Koreans, and Cossacks;⁵ the decrees of the President of the Russian Federation - the Germans, Karachays, Kalmyks, and Balkars. The government of the Russian Federation adopted a resolution concerning Chechens-Akkins and several decrees related to the Ingush. Acts of this level were partly symbolic, partly informative, and partly referencing. They symbolically proclaimed the process of rehabilitating a particular group; reminded of the general possibilities associated with the current legislation; and made references to further executive orders.

Of practical importance were these references to acts of the lower level, which were supposed to determine specific target programs and individual measures for rehabilitation. Such acts were supposed to be decrees of the Government of the Russian Federation or the governments of the regions, and many acts of the first level contained relevant instructions. However, not all the acts of the higher tier level were accompanied by decisions of the lower instances on practical actions. After the decisions of the Supreme Soviet on Finns and Koreans, no corresponding support programs were adopted. On the contrary, the Russian Government approved programs for the Germans and Balkars; there were also three governmental programs concerning support for ethnic groups and territory (Ingush and Ingushetia, Kalmyks and the Republic of Kalmykia). Funds were allocated for the development of infrastructure in the territories of FDP residence and for the activities related to commemoration and culture (such as the construction of monuments), but in general, the programs were insufficiently funded. Also, in accordance with some programs, monetary allowances provided to individuals who were recognized as victims of repressions; it is difficult to assess their effectiveness due to high inflation rates and differences between regions. In any case, the issue in question is one-off payments that were assumingly in between 100 and 700 USD.

In all cases, the authorities have not done what the repressed and their descendants needed most of all: there was no support to organized resettlement or return and no services that would help the victims of repression overcome numerous complex red tape formalities during the rehabilitation and the pecuniary compensation.

In making key political decisions, especially in situations of conflicts and crises, the Supreme Soviet and the Presidential Administration were competing until September 1993,

⁵ Referred to in the Law on the rehabilitation of the repressed peoples as a 'cultural-ethnic community' and thus equated with 'peoples'.

later the decision on all strategic issues passed to the Presidency. Within the executive, the Ministry of Internal Affairs was in charge of the actual rehabilitation of the repressed, and the social security bodies were responsible for further social support. The decisive word in the implementation of specific projects and programs was of the Ministry of Finance. In fact, the policy was developed in complex bargaining between, on the one hand, federal and regional authorities, on the other, between different departments in the structure of the executive branch. For the purposes of coordinating the decision-making and implementation, the government in the early 1990s established several inter-departmental boards (Daduev and Nunuev 2015; Petrov 2013). Nominally, all routine activities related to the repressed peoples were to be coordinated by the Ministry (until 1994 - the State Committee) for Nationalities Affairs. Until its liquidation in 2001, it always had a structural unit dealing with the repressed people (Bougai and Gonov, 2004: 169). The ministry nevertheless did not have the authority, funds, and informal apparatus 'weight' to become an influential player in the system of decision-making and execution. For this reason, it is difficult to say anything definite about his work, except that various projects and plans related to the repressed were developed there, which subsequently remained mostly on paper (Bougai and Gonov, 2004: 179-199).

Laws and other acts on the rehabilitation of repressed peoples (more than 50 in total) were also adopted in some Russian republics and other regions (Akkieva 2011; Bougai and Gonov, 2004, 175; Daduev and Nunuev 2015). Certain regions carried out their own limited-scale support programs for the repressed. Since 1991, the impulse given by the law on the rehabilitation of repressed peoples has weakened and by now has practically disappeared; the annexation of Crimea and extension of the law on repressed people on the Crimean ethnicities have resurrected the system.⁶

The FDP movements played different roles in the implementation process. They were greeting the law as a signal that all territorial claims are legitimate and supported by the central government. The issues support to individual people and targeted social programs aroused less interest. The flawed or incomplete implementation of bylaws and executive programs did not provoke effective protests. This can be partly explained by the symbolic framework itself: at the level of general principles, there were no disagreements between the state and ethnic movements, and the movements themselves delegated the authority to determine the content and direction of specific measures to the state. The movements

⁶ After the annexation of Crimea by Russia, on 21 April 2014, President Putin signed Decree No. 268 "On the Measures for the Rehabilitation of Armenian, Bulgarian, Greek, Crimean Tatar and German Peoples and the State Support of Their Revival and Development"), amended by Decree No. 458 of 12 September 2015.

fundamentally recognized themselves as the clientele of the state, and at all levels of implementation of the law no longer had effective leverage for influencing the situation. In particular, neither general declarative norms nor the execution of targeted programs are justiciable. The state also neutralized objections over details of the implementation before the general public by referring to the need for conflict prevention and to economic hardship.

To wrap up, the general formula of justice in connection with the "rehabilitation" looked like follows: "the indigenous people shall be the master in its ancestral land". The state, in essence and by default, agreed with this formulation, although it objected to specific ways of implementing it. The main discussions and conflicts were revolving around the issues of symbolic 'possession' of the territory and political domination on it. The ideas about this domination and its forms differed and included the requirements for control over a 'bi-national' republic (Karachay-Cherkessia), 'parity' between the main 'nations' in Kabardino-Balkaria, changes in administrative boundaries (Kabardino-Balkaria, Ingushetia), and the restoration of the abolished autonomy (the Volga Germans). Where territorial claims did not arise, mass movements, demands and conflicts did not appear. The initially single rehabilitation agenda was replaced by local claims. Instead of the rights and interests of individual people, the parties were preferring to discuss non-binding issues of remembrance and 'national-cultural development'. The view of both sides on symbolic issues and access to regional power allowed the state in most cases not only to manipulate the FDP movements but also to avoid material costs and decisions that require substantive actions.

The law and related pieces of legislation demonstrated a high degree of uncertainty; that allowed a flexible interpretation, a 'systemic hypocrisy' (Brunsson 1989), and in the process of implementation the FDP activists were incorporated into mainstream institutions or marginalized. Therefore, the 'rehabilitation policy' can serve as a model of the Russian or post-Soviet diversity policy which turns out to effectively tame ethnic claims.

Conclusion

One can consider the policy of rehabilitation over the last 30 years and its results as a failure only conditionally, in the meaning of a gulf between the original plans and claims, on the one hand, and the results, on the other. It would be incorrect that the Russian state did nothing and that it has discontinued the rehabilitation policy. The authorities did acknowledge the problem itself and have not declined their obligations although had many reasons and pretexts to do so. They have done significantly less than they had promised, but they had to

act under difficult circumstances objectively unfavorable for the repressed people. Indeed, one can talk about a discrepancy between ‘talks’ and ‘actions’, or about a “systemic hypocrisy” (Brunsson 1989), but the state has employed a system of excuses (resting on economic hardships and the need to avoid conflicts) that, in principle, are acceptable for the target audiences.

On the other hand, the FDP movements and their constituencies have generally acknowledged the very principles of rehabilitation, the course of state action and by default the outcomes. One can until recent witness some manifestations of dissatisfaction and critical statements, but they are marginal and do not negate the general conclusion. Ethnic movements approved the very ideology of rehabilitation, agreed with the leading role of the state, and abandoned their proactive role.

One can even describe the policy of rehabilitation as a ‘win-win’ situation and a success story. Objectively, we can say that most actors involved in the process have benefited in terms of gaining access to new resources and, conversely, avoiding losses, including casualties. The central government did not face effective and large-scale pressure and successfully resolved most of the crises associated with territorial claims. The so-called common people got some extra funding from the budget and for the most part avoided being drawn into violent conflicts. The losers were those who took the rehabilitation literally, as a real attempt to return the situation to the state of half a century ago and tried to go beyond symbolic actions.

The taming of claims and the prevention of violent confrontation depended on an array of social and political circumstances, including the transformation of a part of FDP movements into clienteles of regional authorities and the co-optation of some of their leaders into regional governments. One shall note that the repressive pressure of the federal government did not play a role throughout the 1990s and early 2000s.

A special factor among the reasons for the weakening and marginalization of FDP movements is state action aimed at framing and organizing ethnic diversity. In this regard, one can talk about a certain form of symbolic production of multiethnicity, resting on assumingly eclectic and inconsistent but socially acceptable narratives. This discursive fundamental brings about the alignment of frames, that produces a consensus between the rulers and the ruled. Rehabilitation is based on a common agreement about the agency of ethnic groups and the symbolic recognition of their title to the territory. Such recognition turns out to be a value in itself, while practically effective actions that can cause conflicts are regarded as an insignificant task. The consequence of this is the unconditional delegation of

powers to the state and the self-marginalization of FDP movements. In some way, the FDP issue can serve as a model of diversity policies in a post-Soviet semi-authoritarian (or fully authoritarian) environment and as an explanation of its efficacy.

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