

## Bashkirs

### Profile

According to the 2002 national census, there are 1,673,389 Bashkirs in the Russian Federation. Bashkirs are the product of an intermingling of Finno-Ugric and Turkic tribes. The majority of Bashkirs live in Bashkortostan (pop. 4,104,336: Bashkirs 29.8 per cent, Russians 36.3 per cent, Tatars 24.1 per cent, Chuvash 2.9 per cent, Maris 2.6 per cent, others 4.3 per cent) and they are also found in significant numbers in Chelyabinsk and Orenburg Oblasts. The Bashkir language is part of the Turkic branch of the Uralo-Altai language family. The Tatar and the Bashkir peoples are closely related, their languages being similar, but relations between them are often tense. Tatars have traditionally been better educated.

### Historical context

With the fall of Kazan in the sixteenth century, Bashkirs also fell under Russian control. Like Tatars, Bashkirs were involved in revolts against Russian rule.

At the time of the Russian Revolution there was a strong Muslim-led nationalist movement among Bashkirs. On 23 March 1918, a Tatar-Bashkir SSR was declared but Bashkirs pressed for their own republic. The Bashkir ASSR was established on 23 March 1919. During the Soviet period, Bashkortostan (then Bashkiria) was industrialized but remained closely ruled by Moscow. In the late 1980s fear of assimilation by Tatars - up to a third of Bashkirs speak Tatar as their native language - helped generate a Bashkir national movement (1988). The first all-Union congress of the Bashkir people was convened in December 1989. However, overall political and economic issues rather than ethno-nationalism have driven politics in the region. The Bashkir authorities declared sovereignty on 11 October 1990 and changed the name from the Russified Bashkiria to Bashkortostan on 25 February 1992.

Tension over the issue of the numerical dominance of Tatars continued to influence Bashkir demands. A significant number of Bashkirs remained outside the borders of Bashkortostan and Bashkirs made up only the third largest group in the republic. In June 1992, the Tatar National Movement of Bashkortostan demanded that the Tatar language should be given official status, like Bashkir and Russian. The Bashkortostan constitution did not, however, include the right to Tatar, although there are Tatar-language schools in Bashkortostan. Fear of the growing anti-Tatar sentiment among Bashkirs led to calls for the Tatar-populated areas to secede if Bashkortostan became independent. In December 1993 the republic's parliament adopted a constitution that declared the republic a 'sovereign state' and all of its natural resources the property of the multiethnic people of Bashkortostan. Bashkortostan signed the Union treaty and in August 1994 negotiated a bilateral treaty with Moscow that gave the republic even more powers than Tatarstan had obtained in its agreement.

### Current issues

In November 2005 the Moscow Human Rights Bureau reported that ethnic Bashkirs in Bashkortostan

have an exclusive right to upgrade scientific degrees in the republic, while members of other ethnic groups have to go outside of Bashkortostan to do so.

Tensions between Bashkirs and Tatars have been a recurrent issue in the post-Soviet period, with each group claiming that its members are discriminated against in the other's republic. Tatar academics challenged the rise in numbers of ethnic Bashkirs and decline in numbers of Tatars reported in Bashkortostan's 2002 census results, while Bashkir activists accused Tatarstan in 2004 of trying to 'take over' Bashkortostan. In 2006 debates resurfaced concerning the status of the Tatar language in Bashkortostan. Tatar activists demanded that the Tatar language have official status in the republic alongside Russian and Bashkir. Although President Murtaza Rakhimov has in the past stated he would look favourably on this proposal, no change has been made. Tatar activists threatened to promote the idea of unifying Bashkortostan with Chelyabinsk oblast or another federal entity if their demands were not met.