

## Tuvans

### Profile

According to the 2002 national census, there are 243,442 Tuvans in the Russian Federation. Tuvans live primarily in the Tuvan Republic (pop. 305,510: Tuvans 77.0 per cent, Russians 20.1 per cent and others 2.9 per cent) and are primarily pastoralists. Most belong to the Buddhist Lamaist faith. Tuvans are mainly descendants of nomadic groups of Turkified Mongols and speak a Turkic language. Their literary language was converted to a Cyrillic script in 1943.

### Historical context

The area was conquered by Russians in the early nineteenth century. Although it retained some degree of autonomy for 23 years after the civil war (as the Tuvan People's Republic) and was a de jure independent state between the wars, it was effectively a client-state of the Soviet Union from 1921. In October 1944, the area was annexed by the Soviet Union. Initially it became the Tuvan Oblast but was subsequently upgraded to an ASSR in October 1961. After incorporation into the Soviet Union, Tuva experienced a large influx of Russian settlers, although Tuvans remained in the majority.

Nationalist aspirations were first openly voiced in the area in 1989 when the Tuvan Popular Front was set up and demanded secession from the RF. Other pro-independence parties, including the Peoples' Party of Sovereign Tuva (1992), have been established. In 1993 Tuva's parliament adopted a new constitution and the right of secession from the RF; the republic's official name was also changed from Tuva to Tyva. However, nationalist tendencies were tempered by poverty in the republic, which received most of its finance from Moscow. After 1990 Tuva became the site for a number of inter-ethnic conflicts sparked by the higher standard of living enjoyed by Russians living in the republic compared to the Tuvans. Significant numbers of Russians left the republic as a result of these conflicts.

Since the collapse of Soviet power the Tuvan ethnic majority has consolidated its demographic share from two-thirds to three-quarters of the republic's population. Tuva nonetheless remains one of the poorest regions of Russia and is heavily dependent on federal subsidies.

### Current issues

In March 2006 the Supreme Shaman of the Tuvan Republic, Mongush Kenin-Lopsan, demanded that the Russian Defence Minister Ivanov apologize after allegedly making disparaging comments about shamanistic practices.

Research suggests that the Tuvan language enjoys better prospects than many other minority languages in the Russian Federation. According to a survey conducted in 2002 and published in 2005 by the Khakass State University, Tuvan is the language of instruction in 80 per cent of elementary and high schools in Tuva, and Tuva is the only language spoken in a majority of ethnic Tuvan homes.