

## Yakuts

### Profile

According to the 2002 national census, there are 443,852 Yakuts in the Russian Federation. Yakuts have developed from a Turkic-speaking people once resident around Lake Baikal. The majority of Yakuts live in the Republic of Yakutia-Sakha, formerly the Yakut ASSR (pop. 949,280: Yakuts 45.5 per cent, Russians 41.2 per cent, Ukrainians 3.7 per cent, Evenks 1.9 per cent, others 7.7 per cent) as well as Magadan, Sakhalin and Amur oblasts.

The Yakut religion is a mixture of shamanism-animism (Tengrianism) and Eastern Orthodoxy.

### Historical context

Russian penetration of the region began in the seventeenth century and a major revolt against Russian occupation occurred in 1642. In the early twentieth century a nationalist movement emerged in the area (the Yakut Union). In April 1922, the Bolshevik regime established the Yakut ASSR. In 1924, the discovery of gold in the south led to large scale Russian migration to the region. In 1926, Yakuts comprised 81.6 per cent of Yakutia's population, by 1989 this had fallen to 33.4 per cent.

Russian migration produced an intensification of inter-ethnic tension and led to clashes and mass demonstrations in the 1980s. In the autumn of 1990, the Yakutia Supreme Soviet renamed the republic Sakha-Yakutia. Sakha-Yakutia has been at the forefront of the movement demanding increased control over local resources. A new constitution for the republic has established Sakha-Yakut citizenship. In April 1995 the republican authorities concluded a bilateral treaty with Moscow.

Sakha-Yakutia currently forms the largest subnational territorial unit in the world, and is endowed with substantial natural resources in the form of diamonds, gold and mineral ores.

### Current issues

Yakut and Russian are co-official languages in Sakha-Yakutia; the Chukchi, Dolgan, Yukagir, Even and Evenk languages have localized official status in areas where their speakers predominate. The Yakuts are not considered to number among the small peoples of the north, and due to their numbers assimilatory pressures have less impact on Yakuts and Yakut identity exercises an assimilatory impact on some of the republic's smaller Turkic groups. The proportional share of Yakuts in the total population of Sakha-Yakutia has increased since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and according to reports, ethnic Yakuts are over-represented in the republic's political institutions. Nonetheless, ethnic Yakuts living in large Russian cities have been among the many ethnic groups targeted by racist violence in 2005-6.