

## ■ Summary

I have focussed in my Ph.D. dissertation on the role of nationalism and the question of nationalities regarding the state-building process of the Soviet Union and the Karelian Republic in the 1920s and 30s. It had two dimensions: central – periphery (territoriality) and Russian – minority nationalities (ethnicity). The territorial extent and the multinational society has always created particular conditions for the rulers of Russia. After the October Revolution the bolsheviks met the same unsolved problems as their predecessors. The federal state structure of the Soviet Union was an attempt to resolve the problem. However, it divided the state into multiple more or less autonomous national areas and republics. This caused a continuous tension between the central power and the periphery. The permanent endeavour of Moscow was to gain a firmer grip over the national autonomies, which clashed with their economic, political and cultural interests. At first the central power built a common all-Union superidentity on the basis of the political community and later on adopted the stronger features of Russianness, whereas the republics used the ethnicity and nationalism from the beginning. The old memories of, and the prejudices against, the Russian oppressors (the centre) steadily augmented among the minority nationalities. Nationalism acquired an important role in defending the interests of the centre (Russians) and the periphery (minorities) particularly from the first five-year plan onwards. In practice it represented a change in the ruling method and the aims of state building. I have focussed on the development of the Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic of Karelia in relation to the centre and Russianness, and on the other side to Finland and Finnishness. Comparing Karelia to the other Soviet republics (here especially to Ukraine) it has also been possible to indicate some new features of Soviet history and particularly of the *korenizatsiia* policy in the 1920s and 30s. This study indicates that one important dimension of the Soviet nationality policy has been pure *Realpolitik*.

Nationalism has played a crucial role in exercising power both in Soviet Union as well as in other nation-states in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Nation-states have always used nationalism to construct national identity. The precondition of developing nationalism is a nation-state. However, this does not mean that state nationalism has to be based on only one ethnic group. A solid nation is defined by nationalism in its construction of shared values and norms. Thus their acquisition becomes a criterion for belonging to the nation, which makes nationalism, from the perspective of those in power, an effective instrument for validating their own position and for integrating citizens into the state.

The base of the nation-state is constructed in a process in which the nation defines itself in relation to another. The conditions of the nation are the borders

of the nation-state, its institutions, values, norms, and people's comprehension of the common history of nationhood. The crucial issue is the process of self-consciousness, which is a social process. The self can be constructed only in relation to the other. In the case of the Soviet Union, however, it is not possible to talk about one single nationalism but many. Nationalism was a part of the political process produced by social realities. In many cases the nationalism of minority nationalities also expressed their own real interests, which can be seen particularly well in the conflicts of interest between the central authorities and the national republics.

After the revolution, the bolsheviks had to build the legitimation of their power on shaky and conflictual grounds. The majority of people were peasants; more than one half of the ethnicities were non-Russian. The peasants had rebelled over land, minority nationalities for liberation from czarist oppression, and the divided left to overturning the Czar. Because the supposed World Revolution was defeated in Germany and the people could not be changed, the decision had to be made that socialism would be built with illiterate peasants. Further, to gain at least the passive acceptance of the people, the bolsheviks had to pay attention to the demands of the minority nationalities and the peasants. Thus question of the peasants and of nationalities became two sides of the same coin.

When capitalism, i.e., farms run by individuals, was allowed to be continued in the countryside, it became possible to continue preparations for the transition to socialism in the cities. The view of the bolsheviks was that nationalism was a part of the capitalist phase of social development. The era of the New Economic Policy (*NEP*) started in 1921 and aimed at economic revitalization. It meant that the capitalist production relationship reproducing nationalism continued among the majority of the people. Thus, from the perspective of the bolsheviks, concessions required by nationalists were a form of *Realpolitik*.

Karelian Autonomy in Russia is an example of the interaction between nationalism, Bolshevik ideas of enlightenment, and particularly of *Realpolitik* in Soviet policy. We can approach Karelia from the centre/periphery dimension as well. From the perspective of Karelia two centres created economic, political and cultural conditions for its development: St. Petersburg and Finland. The Karelian language is closely related to Finnish, but the Karelian religion as in Russia at large is Orthodox. In the common understanding of history a similar dichotomy prevails. East and West have fought for Karelia since the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Sweden and Novgorod made the initial division of Karelia at the Pähkinäsaari Peace Treaty of 1323. Those Karelians who remained on the Western side of the line adopted the religion of Sweden. The majority of Karelians remained on the Eastern side under the power of Novgorod and adopted the Orthodox faith. Later on, particularly after the Stolbova Peace Treaty of 1617 the Swedish attempts to convert Orthodox Karelians to the Lutheran faith by force strengthened this East/West dichotomy. Trade routes divided Russia's Karelia as well. Southern Karelia was connected to St. Petersburg and Northern Karelia to Finland. The administrative and commercial centre of Karelia was almost completely Russian Petrozavodsk in the Olonets

*guberniia*, whereas Northern Karelia was a part of the Archangelsk *guberniia*. The Northern Karelians had closer relations to Finland than their Southern kinsfolk. Also the dialect spoken in Northern Karelia was closer to Finnish than in Southern Karelia. On the whole, there were a variety of crucial factors which maintained the diversity of Karelian identity: geography, language, religion, history, and institutions.

This historical background was a seedbed for the contradictions between the new Soviet Russia and Finland. Finland gained independence during the Russian Revolution, in December 1917, but the borders remained an open question. The essential issue was whether Karelia should be a part of Finland or remain in Russia. In this respect the opinion of the Karelians was mixed. The question concerned economic and mental values not to mention security policy. For the Red Army the significance of the Murmansk railway was strategic. Karelia had as well huge forest and other natural resources and since the National Romanticism Finns had proclaimed that Karelia was the historical homeland of the Finnish people. For these reasons Finland was eager to move the old Imperial borderline even by force during 1918–1920.

As a consequence of the above-mentioned background Moscow handled the Karelia question not only as an issue of nationality policy, but also to a noticeable degree as a military and foreign policy. These elements were closely connected. Therefore all that was carried out in Karelia in the name of *korenizatsiia* policy was not always the case. For example, it is not easy to say how much the formation of the Karelian Labour Commune in 1920 was the result of *korenizatsiia*, foreign or military policy, not to mention the later stages of its development. It is justified to question the narrow ideological definitions of the fundamental base of the *korenizatsiia* policy. If we compare Karelia to the other Soviet republics and autonomies, we realize that Realpolitik was a decisive factor in carrying out the *korenizatsiia* policy. By this I do not mean that the bolshevik's trust in the ideas of enlightenment, education, equality, etc. played no part. Indeed they did, but they were still hazy ideas and the realities of an underdeveloped society were strongly present.

Although the formation of Karelian autonomy was part of an early stage of Soviet nationality policy, it could not have been realized without the Finnish dimension. Usually the Soviet nationality policy was based on the national culture and mother tongue of the titular nation of the republic. However, in Karelia the base was Finnish rather than the Karelian language and culture. Moscow sent Red Finnish emigrants to Karelia as representatives of Soviet Power. This was Moscow's response to the annexationist endeavours of Finland. Moscow was eager to pacify its western borders in order to stabilise the political situation. Chicherin, the Commissar for Foreign Affairs, estimated in the spring of 1920, that the peace treaty with Finland was a key factor in the attempts to stabilise the political situation in the Baltic Sea. Narkomindel knew that if the Soviet Russia did not give in on the Karelia issue, they would not find anyone on the Finnish side who would be willing and politically able to make the peace treaty. The conciliatory policy with Finnish nationalism was the cost Moscow had to pay to Finland for the Tartu Peace Treaty of 1920. The Karelian

Labour Commune was installed as a national autonomy and its content was in fact outlined during the peace negotiations. The parties in the process were Soviet-Russia, Finland and Red Finnish emigrants. The contribution of the Red Finnish emigrant Edward Gylling, the future Chairman of Karelia's SNK, was particularly important throughout. In Stockholm at the turn of 1919–20 he outlined for the leadership of Soviet Russia a proposal for Karelian national autonomy. On 27.3.1920 it was translated and sent to Narkomindel, Trotsky and probably to other leaders as well. As a result of this Gylling was invited to Moscow, where he met Lenin and the chairman of the Communist Party of Finland, Yrjö Sirola, in May 1920. The decision on Karelian autonomy was made during April and the beginning of May. Poland's attack on Ukraine and Narkomindel's groundless fear that Finland had a secret military agreement with Poland boosted Narkomindel's willingness to restart negotiations with Finland.

The Karelian Labour Commune established on 8.6.1920 and the Tartu peace negotiations began on 12.6.1920. The crucial question was whether Karelian autonomy should be mentioned in the peace treaty or not. The position of the Russian delegation was that the status of Karelia was an internal matter, and it was consequently not among the questions of the negotiations. The demand of the Finnish delegation was that Karelian autonomy should be precisely defined in the peace treaty. The way out from the deadlock was that the Soviet delegation gave "a declaration on the Autonomy of East Karelia" – not on the Karelian Labour Commune – although this declaration had no juridic weight. However, the declaration was still stipulated in the peace treaty as an appendix. The formation of the Karelian Commune was a rather successful attempt by the bolshevik government to keep Russia intact. The second purpose was to make Karelia an attractive example to Finnish and Scandinavian people, a kind of Piedmont of Scandinavia. The purposes and reasons for establishing Karelian autonomy in many ways resembled the Moldova – Bessarabia – Rumania and the Ukraine – Western Ukraine – Poland cases.

The later history of Karelia also provide strong evidences of Finnish and European influence. As long as the Tartu Peace Treaty was under dispute and the League of Nations was processing it, Narkomindel made sure that Finland had no reason to protest the way that national autonomy was carried out. This was a significant matter for Red Finns, who were opposed by the strong Russian – Karelian opposition. In fact, the opposition had a majority in the party and in most of the Soviet organisations. The opposition's resistance was based on the fact that especially at the turn of the 20s and 30s the essence of the *korenizatsiia* policy was rather a Finnicisation than a Karelianisation policy. The main problem was that the written language of the majority of the Karelians was Russian and they did not fully understand Finnish. The resistance to the Finnish *korenizatsiia* policy consequently had its roots in the society and history, and the division of Karelians followed the above-mentioned geographical line. The Northern Karelians were more Finnish-minded than Southern Karelians.

The 1920s and especially the turn of the decade were the heydays of Finnicisation policy. The leadership of the republic replaced the three spoken

Karelian dialects with Finnish in schools. The intention was to promote Finnish as the first official language of the republic. Finnish was taught as an obligatory subject in Russian schools as well. Finnish was to become an understandable language for the younger generation of Russians, too, which would make it easier to integrate them culturally into Finnish Soviet Karelia. In 1927, in the assembly of the Council of the Nationalities, Edward Gylling even compared the policy and situation of Soviet Karelia to the position of the Finnish Grand Duchy during the era of Russian power. For Gylling, the *korenizatsiia* policy provided an opportunity to strengthen the national Finnish culture and the autonomy of the republic.

Although the Soviet Union was a centrally run society that became totalitarian during Stalin's era, this does not mean that everything happened as planned by Stalin and his henchmen. Stalin was unable to rule without an extensive and entangled bureaucratic machinery. Inter-institutional conflicts occurred and the administrative personnel was not always highly professional. In addition, the economic and social reality of Soviet society preconditioned what was possible to implement and what was not. The size of the state, the self-rule of independent and autonomous national republics, as well as the federal all-union institutions limited the likelihood of the centre implementing its decisions. Furthermore, if the orders of the centre conflicted with the interests of areas or republics, it was always possible to complain to the institution that had made the decision or to a competing institution. As was the case until the early 1930s, decisions could also be ignored or they could be interpreted to suit the interpreter. Institutional conflicts between the centre and the peripheries, Moscow and the republics, emerged. In the national republics this was seen as the juxtaposition between the Russian-minded, who preferred a strong central government and the nationalists defending autonomy. The centre – periphery conflict was institutionalised by the nationality policy and the federal state structure. This conflict often managed to hamper the aspirations of the centre.

The way that Karelia defended its economic autonomy and language policy in the 1920s is a good illustration of these contradictory circumstances. As long as the Soviet use of power was based on politics rather than terror, political institutions and conflicts had an essential influence on its development. When the state began the first five-year plan, the transition had far-reaching effects in Karelia too. The need to raise the labour productivity generated a further and more severe conflict between the strivings of the Karelian leaders and the rural way of life with its dominant religious village culture. During this time the scope for continuing politics based on economic reforms benefiting the whole population and on the reconstruction of national culture diminished significantly. The resources of Karelia were harnessed to fulfil Moscow's wishes: the annually increasing and unrealistically large felling and log floating targets were to be met. As a result, the republic's economy became one-sided and other fields of production, e.g. agriculture, fishing and house building, declined because of a lack of financial resources and labour. Karelia was to be a colony producing raw materials for the centre.

Right from the beginning, the party's national policy had been based on the idea of a union between the peasants (national minorities) and the workers (the Russian proletariat). Now there was a crack, if not a serious fracture, in this union. The *korenizatsiia* policy had not unified Soviet peoples but had given birth to a great number of peoples, each with their own identity. The original aim had been to favour the construction of ethnic identity within the framework of a multi national Soviet Union, not to create ethnic nationalism. However, the founding of national republics and regions, when combined with the centre-periphery conflict, had led to this undesired outcome. A higher form of identity or a sort of "pan nationality", that of the Soviet Union, seems to have developed only weakly.

After the termination of economic and administrative autonomy it was no longer possible for the republics to continue reform politics that would take "national benefits" into account. From the perspective of the centre, this had meant the privileging of local benefits over general all-Union benefits, an action which in the worst cases had culminated in local nationalism. The conflict of interests between the centre and the peripheries had come to a head and had both institutional and ethnic implications.

Forced industrialization and the liquidation of the kulaks also destroyed the basis of the politics of Red Finns. Nothing new was found to compensate for the loss of support by the peasants who had lost their position, unless the short-term help generated by American Finns at the beginning of the 1930s is taken into account. The attempt to implement the production targets and the attempts to lower production expenses by tightening up the work pace and discipline led to the weakening of the position of workers. A classic conflict emerged between the group in charge of the forces of production, the Soviet nomenclature, and the working class selling its work. While the ruling elite lost the support of the majority of the peasants, and at least also partially of the workers, it was unable to gain any other similar new source of support.

Thus the integration strategy that the Soviet leaders had promoted throughout the 1920s was suddenly in a blind alley. Reform policy gradually started to transform into a rule by force. The sector of politics narrowed down and ruling methods became harsher from the beginning of the 1930s. The idea of the party was that forced collectivization meant both the end of capitalism in rural areas and a transition to modern industrial mass production. The end of private (small-scale) farming created, according to the bolsheviks, the basis for abolishing national differences and constructing a new, unified Soviet State. A cultural revolution was one tool to advance the aim: the targets of the attack included the traditional peasant and Christian values, which were considered backward. Its other side was the strengthening of the *korenizatsiia* policy of favouring the languages and cultures of minority nationalities. After the shift of the economic policy the remaining instrument of political integration was nationalism.

In the mid-1930s the task was taken to replace the multiplicity of national identities with the unified superidentity of the Soviet citizen. The *korenizatsiia* of the 1920s became the Soviet patriotism of the 1930s. Soviet patriotism, based on Russian language and culture, meant the construction of shared symbols,

culture, and political values, as well as shared myths telling of the past of the nation. Unlike in the historiography of the 1920s, where Russia was described as a colonialist empire, Russia became the predecessor of the Soviet Union. Both of them carried out the historical task of Moscow in strengthening its power. The image of the past of the nation changed just as did the aims of nation building. This did not mean that the cultures of other peoples were denied and belittled, but that Russian culture and language were defined as more developed and thus also particularly suitable for unifying the Soviet Union. The peoples of the Soviet Union were put in a hierarchical order by using Russianness as the measuring tape.

The building of the federation of nationalities ended in the mid-1930s. It was understood that the construction of national republics was a factor which weakened the Soviet Union as a whole. Instead the centrally-led state now preparing for war was strengthened. As the centre considered Russians as the nation closest to itself, Russian nationalism was given a key role. At the same time action was taken to fight against local nationalism defending the advantages of national republics.

In the 1930s, during the rise of fascism, the political atmosphere and finally the policy of the Soviet Union shifted. Although it is reasonable to take into consideration different reasons why this happened, the outward, European influence seems to be one explainable factor. The development of discussions in party meetings as well as in newspapers and the argumentation of resolutions and memorandums indicate this explicitly. Particularly illuminating was the behaviour of the GPU in Karelia and in the other border republics and areas. The suspicions of security organisations were directed particularly towards the population living in the border areas. In Karelia the targets were Finnish illegal immigrants (who had fled the depression of the 30s and political oppression), and Karelian and other people who had fought Soviet power and had received amnesty in 1924–26. On the whole, all those who had contacts across the border were distrusted by the security organisations.

The centre took action against Karelia's Finnish party secretary Kustaa Rovio in May 1933, only a month after an attack by the Karelian party opposition. This operation was not a singular one, nor targeted against Karelia alone. At the same time Ukraine, the most important Soviet Republic, was blamed for not fulfilling the target set for its grain production – the expressed reasons were faulty national policy and kulak resistance. Karelia's problem was that it had not fulfilled Moscow's target for forestry work. The reasons were known beforehand: faulty national policy and kulak action. Because Karelia was only an autonomous area under the Leningrad Provincial Committee, there was no need to waste Moscow's ammunition in the attack. The task was given to Sergei M. Kirov, the first secretary of the Leningrad Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). His own position was also problematic. In May 1933, Kirov dictated a resolution in the session of the Leningrad Provincial Committee, in which he harshly criticised the leaders of Karelia and Rovio in particular.

The main message of Kirov's resolution dealt with the national policy. He blamed Karelia for deviating from the line of Lenin and Stalin. This was the first time when someone authorised by Moscow criticised the leaders of Karelia for being directed towards the West, i.e. Finland. Although OGPU had made similar suspicions clear earlier, this was the first time when a person from the higher ranks of the CPSU did so. From here it was not a long way to accusations of bourgeois nationalism. A month later hints were not given any more. It was time for explicit action.

The role of Kirov in the anti-Karelian campaign was similar to that of Postyshev, whom Moscow had sent to Ukraine. The anti-nationalist campaign progressed similarly, phase by phase, in both regions. Postyshev had condemned Skrypnik, the Ukraine's commissar of enlightenment, for mistakes in his speech of 10 June. This happened just two weeks before Kirov pronounced his sentence on Karelia. This was no coincidence but a sign of the fact that the times of the *korenizatsiia* policy had passed in the Soviet Union.

1933–34 were the years of Great Retreat. Certainly the turn happened in an evolutionary rather than an abrupt fashion. The regime began to exploit Russian nationalism in order to strengthen central power. Internationalism was gradually replaced by Russian nationalism. The aim of Soviet leaders was no longer to spread the gospel of revolution and internationalism – this was replaced with the idea of the “Mother Russia” to be built around the core of Russianness. Consequently, Red Finns, Estonians, Latvians, Poles etc. all fell under the suspicious of the GPU and the party. For the population at large no other objects of loyalty than the Soviet Union were allowed. This is, indeed, a method typical for a government preparing for war: to use nationalism to cement the loyalty of its people.

In Karelia the ground had been ready for anti-Finnish feeling for a long time. Immediately after Moscow stopped backing the Finnish leadership of the republic, the Russian – Karelian opposition launched its operation. It was led by the Leningrad party organisations. In 1933–35 almost all Finns were forced aside. The Finnicisation policy was condemned and the *korenizatsiia* policy of Karelia acquired a new emphasis. In a way it was a shift to the policy of divide and rule. The Eastern identity of the republic of Karelia was strengthened. Instead of the old Karelian – Finnish identity, the new Karelian – Russian identity was installed. After the turn of 1933–35 the purges began which can be defined as an ethnic cleansing of Finns in 1937–39.

The next stage was to change the language policy of the republic. The first question was how to raise the status and appreciation of the Russian language. Russian became the most important symbol of the Soviet citizen, and much more. It was given the status of the language of the revolution and also that of “the foremost cultural language of the world.” This was explicit Russian linguistic nationalism.

The transformation of the Karelian language policy occurred in 1936–38. The basic issue was whether the former status of Finnish should be preserved or whether it should be replaced with a new Karelian language. The need to take a stand on this issue was made urgent by the new constitutions of the Soviet

Union (1936) and Karelia (1937). The language article of the Karelian constitution became a compromise, as it mentioned three different languages: Finnish, Karelian, and Russian. The preservation of Finnish was, once again, dictated by the realities of foreign policy. The Provincial Committee of Karelia paid attention to the problematic language situation in the Northern parts of Karelia, where the Finnish-speaking (as the Provincial Committee defined it) population was considered liable to propaganda originating from Finland. The topics mentioned in this debate included historical experiences, the founding of the Uhtua government in 1919, and the 1918–1922 rebellions in Karelia. Thus, there was a large consensus in Karelia that the use of Finnish had to be continued in the Northern parts of the republic.

The constitutional recognition of the status of Finnish was a symbolic solution which emphasised a particular line. Formally Finnishness was still recognised as an equal to Russianness and Karelianness. The decision can also be interpreted as a defence victory of the moderates over the hardliners. The argumentation of the latter had for some time included a view that defined Finnish as an “objectively” fascist language. Had this claim been accepted, it would have been only a short step to the definition of the Finns as themselves fascist. Yet the raising of Karelian to the status of an official language also expressed the general Soviet attempt to restrict the cross-border contacts of the minority peoples through the means of language policy. In practice, Karelian was to become the first national language instead of Finnish. For the Finns this was a bitter defeat. They had steadily opposed all intentions to develop the Karelian written language.

The language article in the 1937 Karelian constitution is a unique solution in the whole of the Soviet Union. Only the Soviet Republics of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan defined a national language as an official state language. For example, even though the autonomous area of Komi was given the status of an autonomous Soviet Republic in the Russian Federation, the status of its language was not mentioned in the constitution. The language of Komi has, however, been equal to Russian ever since the founding of the autonomous area. This also speaks of the influence of Finland on the position of Karelia in the Soviet Union.

In spite of this, the fundamental shift in Karelia’s language policy occurred immediately after the Finns were overthrown in 1935. In 1936–37 it was decided to create the Karelian literary language. Although this was the principal solution of the long-running dispute over the Karelian language it was still not the end point. As early as in 1931 the Council of Nationalities had had a heated discussion on the political consequences of the Finnish language in Karelia. The general conclusion put forward by several prominent members of the Council was that the Finnish language was a political threat to the Karelian people. Finnish was defined as a border-crossing bridge facilitating the political influence of the Finnish bourgeoisie. The Council decided that Finnish must be replaced by the Karelian language. However, Finnish leadership furiously resisted the decision and succeeded in reversing it. The Politburo of CPSU backed the line of the Provincial Committee of Karelia and forced the Council

of Nationalities to correct the “improper decision”. In this regard the shift of language policy was drastic. As a whole it reflects the new political atmosphere of the years 1935–36.

The language and school reform of 1938 did not change very much in Karelia in any major way. However, the practical consequences were notable. All Finnish literature was prohibited, but new Karelian textbooks or literature did not exist in any large numbers. There was not even the common understanding of the basis of the Karelian written language and the alphabets. At last the decision in favour of Cyrillic was made in Moscow and Professor D.V. Bubrih was obligated to create the Karelian written language. It was not possible to estimate whether the language would be largely successful. The time given for adopting the new language was too short, only two years. In addition to this the Karelians did not have a consensus on which dialect the written language should be based. The language was a kind of compromise and satisfied nobody. The circulation of new newspapers and other publications in Karelian remained lower than that in Finnish.

World War II was a new turning point. In December 1939 the Soviet Union attacked Finland and the Winter War began. The Kremlin installed the government of the People’s Temporary Democratic Government, the Terijoki Government. The Finn O.V. Kuusinen from the secretariat of the Comintern was nominated as prime minister. The Finns were needed again as a veil for the Kremlin’s policy. Finnish language and literature were restored in Karelia and people were released from prisons and the gulag camps. In March 1940, in the course of the “Interim Peace“, Moscow proclaimed the Karelian-Finnish Socialist Soviet Republic. This was the first time Finland was mentioned in the context of the Republic. The motives of the Kremlin are still shrouded in mystery and we need more evidence to make final conclusions about the purpose of the new republic.

## Conclusions

Nationalism played a central role in the state building process of the Soviet Union. In the early years of Soviet power the bolsheviks encouraged minority nationalities’ nationalism in order to adapt them to the Soviet system. The federal structure of the state was a kind of compromise between the demands of the minority nationalities and the original idea of a strong, united state. National autonomies and republics formed a hierarchal structure of the state, which enabled the central authorities to gain a stricter grip on the border areas. In this respect the foundation of the national autonomies and republic was also an attempt to build a modern administration in the vast, economically, politically and culturally diverse state. The formation of the Soviet Union in the 1920s was a result of multiple and contradictory processes and interactions. From the beginning the essential idea of the bolsheviks had been a society without social classes and nationalities. It was a kind of dream of the modern world. However, the realities of Russian society set other kind of demands on the bolsheviks

when they gained power. Their conciliatory policy was intended as a short-term compromise. The indisputable development to modern society would be to dissolve the old class and national barriers. But as a consequence of the role of the federal state structure in strengthening national consciousness, and the ultimate aim of rulers, Soviet society was prone to ethnic crises.

Particularly in the first five-year plan the contradictory economic and political interests of central power and the Soviet republics and autonomies created tension between the centre and the periphery. The discontent of minority nationalities took on nationalistic and occasionally anti-Russian expressions. Thanks to the federal state structure nationalism acquired institutional forms which again made it stronger and more troublesome for the centre. The contradictions of centre and periphery appeared as well in inter-institutional struggles in Moscow as well as between Moscow and other areas. At this stage from the perspective of the centre the nationalism of minority nationalities changed from being a constructive to a destructive force. It created localist attitudes and hindered the carrying out of All-Union tasks.

Consequently, conflicts often come down to those between Russians (the centre) and national minorities (the periphery). Dissatisfaction and criticism from areas motivated by purely economic and administrative interests, was seen in Moscow as evidence of anti-Russian sentiments. As a result of this Russians were seen as the closest and most reliable nationality to the centre. They had no other motherland than the Soviet Union, and they did not have cross-border contacts as the minority nationalities had. After the first five-year plan it became impossible to continue the former conciliatory and reform policy. The Russian state nationalism of the past was adopted. Although it was covered by a veil of the Soviet patriotism, it had a lot in common with the traditional policy of Russification.

In Karelia the issue was whether the Karelians would orientate themselves to the Russians or to the Finns. This was a decisive factor in defining the identity of the republic. Would it be Karelian-Russian or Karelian-Finnish? Therefore the struggle for the souls of the Karelians was occasionally politically heated. The Finns represented for Moscow an external western influence in Karelia. For Moscow the question was of the reliability of the Karelians. The security organisations still had a fresh image of the rebellious Karelians who had been supported by Finland in the early years of Soviet power. In the 1920's the Red Finns had established Soviet power in Karelia, but in the mid-1930s the situation had reversed. The Finns were a potential bridge to the hostile capitalist Western world. Therefore the identity of the Karelians was a matter of some importance to Moscow. Immediately after the Finns were dismissed from the leadership of the republic, the new Eastern identity of the Karelians was adopted and they became isolated from the Finns. The new rulers could also utilise the anti-Finnish sentiments of the Southern Karelians. Quite a number of them were Russian-minded, and preferred e.g. to use Russian rather than Finnish. Many of them, and particularly those who were dismissed from their office in the heydays of the *korenizatsiia* policy, were bitter about the Finnish period in Karelia.

All in all, particularly in the 1920s, the Soviet Union seems to have been a less totalitarian society than strict totalitarian interpretations have suggested. The Soviet Union before the years of terror encompassed a certain plurality of views. No doubt, Stalin was a central figure of that society, but he was not the only one, and not always the most important. Even the most totalitarian rulers have to justify, at least rhetorically, their power, and power always concerns the relationship of the people to the rulers. Consequently, rulers must always appeal to the people, and even the worst dictator has to make policy. Although power implies a monopoly of force, the central issue is to what extent rulers need to use force. This is *the* question of politics. In Karelia the issue was whether Russia should pacify the area by means of the Red Army or by means of the Red Finns. The national policy and the role of nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s also explicitly points to the importance of politics, and the diversity of ways in which the policy was carried out in the Soviet Union. In general, Karelia was a typical Soviet autonomy, but its common features and particular uniqueness – it had the largest autonomous in economy and was as much a Finnish culture as a Karelian – connected it immediately as a part of European and Soviet Union’s foreign policy.