

Mike Dravis, 5/15/96

Update:

Michelle C. Boomgaard, 5/31/00

Yakut in Russia

Overview

Although the exact origins of the **Yakut** people (who call themselves Sakha) are not known, they are believed to be descended from Turkic, Mongol, and native Siberian tribes. **Yakutia** is one of the pivotal territories of the Russian Federation for three reasons: first, numbering 382,000 (1998 estimate of **Yakuts** in Russia), **Yakuts** are the most numerous native ethnic group of Siberia; second, at twice the size of Alaska the republic is the largest administrative sub-division of Russia; and third, the region's mines are the country's chief source of gold and diamonds, and also furnish vast quantities of coal and other strategic materials. Although in the post-Soviet era **Yakuts** have not engaged in high levels of ethnic conflict with Russians or with other groups, the **Yakut** drive for sovereignty at least carries the potential to disrupt both Russia's territorial integrity and its economy.

Historically and today, **Yakut**-Russian relations have been comparatively lacking in violence. Anti-Russian rebellions did occur in 1634-1642, and in the late 1920s and 1930s Stalin's policies met with fierce resistance. However, the **Yakut** people have generally not reacted harshly to Russia's influence. By the early 1800s, most **Yakuts** were at least nominally members of the Russian Orthodox Church. At present, only traces of the old shamanist faith are extant. Interestingly, at a time when other ethnic traditions were under assault by the Communist Party, in the 1920s certain **Yakut** intellectuals propagated a Pan-Turkish ideology without interference by Soviet authorities. While in previous generations **Yakuts** did not consider themselves to be an indigenous people, some **Yakut** leaders now favor such a designation as a means of promoting a **Yakut** renaissance and protecting **Yakut** identity.

Yakuts are now acutely concerned with resisting undue Russian influence on their political, economic, and cultural affairs. As a result of Stalin's emphasis on developing heavy industry, large-scale immigration of Slavs into **Yakutia** occurred. Thus, Soviet industrialization led to demographic trends under which the local Russian population is now twice as large as the **Yakut** community. Like other ethnic republics, **Yakutia** has opted

to increase its independence by declaring sovereignty within Russia and by strictly delimiting the powers of the republican and federal governments. In August 1991, amid the confusion and disruption caused by the attempted hardline coup against Gorbachev, **Yakutia**'s parliament issued a law transferring control of all state enterprises from the USSR central government to the republican government.

Yakut sensibilities are particularly inflamed by the fact that, although their region is rich in natural resources, the republic's non-Slav population is notably poor. Therefore, republican authorities have moved to gain exclusive control of the republic's natural resources with the right to dispose of them as they, not Moscow, see fit. In particular, **Yakutia** has declared its intention to sell raw materials on the world market and

establish cash reserves outside of central bank control. Although press reports do not confirm that such measures have in fact been undertaken, Russian officials in **Yakutia** and Russia proper have criticized and opposed such policies, calling them secessionist and needlessly provocative.

-

Chronology

1300s: Of partial Turkic origin, **Yakuts** emerge as a distinct ethnic group.

1620s: Ethnic Russians begin to settle in **Yakut** areas. Russia formally annexes the region and imposes a burdensome system of taxation, paid by the **Yakuts** in furs.

1634-1642: In a series of rebellions, **Yakuts** resist Russian domination.

Late 1600s: Russian Orthodox missionaries begin efforts to convert **Yakuts**.

1700s: **Yakuts** migrate from their traditional areas under Russian political pressure and the depletion of the natural environment.

Russia proceeds to annex newly settled **Yakut** areas.

1773: The Imperial mail system is extended to **Yakut** areas. Prison camps are established which house political opponents of the Tsarist regime.

Early 1800s: Most **Yakuts** are officially members of the Russian Orthodox Church.

1800s: **Yakuts** take up sedentary farming.

1846: Gold deposits are found in **Yakutia**, bringing a new influx of Russian immigration.

1880s-1890s: Construction of the Siberian railroad through **Yakutia**.

Late 1800s-early 1900s: The **Yakut** written language emerges.

1906: The **Yakut** Union, composed of **Yakut** nationalists, is formed and calls for a complete rejuvenation of the **Yakutia** and return of all Russian-confiscated wealth.

1918-1921: During the Russian Civil War, **Yakuts** fight with both the Red and White armies.

1920s: Some **Yakut** intellectuals propagate a Pan-Turkish ideology without interference by Soviet authorities.

1922: Following the upheaval of the World War I, the Russian Revolution, and the Russian Civil War,

Soviet authorities establish the **Yakut** Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.

Late 1920s-1950s: **Yakut** agriculture is collectivized. Amid resistance to such measures, thousands of **Yakuts** are arrested and killed, seriously affecting **Yakut** demographics for several decades. **Yakut** organizations, schools, and publications are banned. Stalin's emphasis on developing heavy industry results in large-scale immigration of Slavs into **Yakutia**.

1960s-1970s: As perhaps the only form of protest possible under Soviet rule, **Yakuts** fiercely resist giving up their language.

Mid-1980s and after: Gorbachev's reform policies allow **Yakut** nationalism to reemerge.

March 1990: An Association of Peoples of the North is formed, of which **Yakutia** is a key member. The Association's purpose is to protect the interests of 26 ethnic groups and increase their bargaining position with Moscow in economic and political negotiations. **Yakutia** is particularly concerned with the control of its natural resources: the region's mines furnish a majority of the USSR's gold and diamonds, yet **Yakutia's** people are among the poorest in the country.

August 1990: **Yakutia** issues a draft declaration of sovereignty which enhances its autonomous status as a sovereign state within the Russian Federation. By the end of the month, disagreements within the **Yakut** parliament regarding the questions of sovereignty leads to a postponement of the legislative session.

September 1990: **Yakutia** proclaims its sovereignty within the Russian Federation. The formal name of the region is amended to **Yakut-Sakha** Soviet Socialist Republic (Sakha is the traditional self-designation of the **Yakut** people, the majority ethnic group of the region).

August 1991: The parliament of **Yakutia** issues a law which transfers control of all state enterprises from the USSR central government to the republican government.

December 1991: Mikhail Nikolayev is elected as the first president of **Yakutia** with over 70 percent of the vote. The USSR is dissolved. Nikolayev states that his republic will remain a constituent part of the Russian Federation.

January 1992: The parliament of **Yakutia** moves to increase the sovereignty of the republic by issuing a draft treaty delimiting powers between the republican and federal (Moscow) governments. The document envisions the creation of **Yakutia**-controlled reserves of precious metals to be sold independently on the world market. Local Russian legislators immediately criticize the treaty, claiming that it is secessionist and provocative.

February 1992: Executive authorities in **Yakutia** deny rumors that the republican government is following a secessionist course.

May 1992: A new constitution is instituted as the basic law of the **Yakut-Sakha** republic. Among its new features, the document declares that the natural resources of the region are the property of the local population. The parliament of **Yakutia** accuses the Russian Central Bank of withholding cash payments to the republic as a form of economic coercion. Due to shortages of funds, the government has been unable to pay workers, who in turn have threatened to strike and disrupt exports of diamonds, gold, coal, and other materials.

June 1992: A trade delegation from **Yakutia**, headed by President Nikolayev, visits Latvia in order to increase economic ties.

August 1992: The presidents of **Yakutia**, Tatarstan, and Bashkortostan issue a joint statement warning the Russian central government that they intend to enhance the sovereignty of the regions in the face of what they call Moscow's obstructionist policies, including the nullification of republican laws.

February 1993: **Yakutia** and the Irkutsk Oblast conclude an economic cooperation agreement.

May 1993: **Yakutia** and Mongolia conclude a cooperation agreement in the spheres of science, culture, and trade.

June 1993: **Yakutia** and Kazakhstan conclude a five year economic cooperation agreement. The treaty envisions an exchange of Kazakh agricultural products for minerals and raw materials produced in **Yakutia**.

January 1994: **Yakutia** and Ukraine conclude a five year economic cooperation agreement.

April 1994: Russian President Boris Yeltsin issues a decree denouncing the persecution of ethnic **Yakuts** under Stalin in the late 1920s and 1930s.

June 1994: President Nikolayev of **Yakutia** states that the Russian Federation must remain intact and that the assumption of sovereign powers by its constituent parts will not lead to a breakup of Russia.

January 1995: **Yakutia** issues a decree banning recruitment of its citizens into the Russian military on the grounds that draftees are being sent to fight in Chechnya, where separatist forces are battling with Russian troops.

June 1995: Russia and **Yakutia** conclude a series of agreements delimiting authority between the republican government and the central government in the economic, political, and social spheres.

December 1995: In elections for the Russian State Duma (parliament), the Communist Party of the Russian Federation wins the largest percentage of the vote (18 percent) in **Yakutia**.

Update: 5/30/00

February 1996: The Sakha national broadcasting corporation is the first Russian broadcaster to have its own transmission system for broadcasting television programs throughout the territory of the **Yakut** republic, with about 100 relay stations in the republic, solely for **Yakut** channels. The **Yakut** corporation is the closest that Russia comes to emulating world television networks, with local divisions broadcasting supplementary local news and programs - all on the same channel. (British Broadcasting Corporation 2/26/96)

President Mikhail Nikolayev of **Yakutia** and Vyacheslav Khokhlov, the head of Moscow-based Tokobank, signed a long-term deal in Moscow last week for the bank to act as agent for the government of this mineral-rich republic, promoting it to investors and brokering credit deals for resource development and processing. **Yakut** officials in Moscow said Tokobank had been selected as a partner because of its authority on the international capital markets and track record of dealing with the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, other foreign banks and credit insurance companies. (British Broadcasting

Corporation 3/7/96)

March 1996: According to Russian statistics, foreign investment in **Yakutia**, was 11.5 million dollars in 1995, a 2.7-fold increase from 1994. The **Yakut** statistics department said direct investment had risen 32%, to \$5.2 million. (TASS 3/12/96)

Russia reported that it had paid the last of its wage and pension debts to the **Yakut** region, amounting to 324.5 billion rubles. (British Broadcasting Corporation 3/29/96 and 4/4/96)

April 1996: The **Yakut-Sakha** health ministry reported that the incidence of tuberculosis had increased 60% between 1991 and 1995. The increase was blamed on a lack of funds for prevention programs, and the need for laws against avoiding treatment. (RusData DialLine 4/13/96)

An analysis of the 1995 parliamentary elections pointed out that as a result of election laws requiring political parties to attain at least 5% of the vote before winning a seat in the Russian Duma, many parties did not win seats in the legislature. Furthermore, regions which overwhelmingly supported such parties wound up being **Aunderrepresented.** The **Yakut-Sakha** Republic was among these regions. (Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press 4/24/96)

May 1996: Kyrgyzstan and the Republic of **Yakutia** signed a package of intergovernmental accords in Bishkek on 28th May. The documents, signed by Kyrgyz Prime Minister Apas Dzhumagulov and President Mikhail Nikolayev of **Yakutia**, included agreements on cooperation in the spheres of production, trade, economy, culture, science and education. The two sides also signed a protocol on creating a Sakha-Kyrgyz trading center and an interdepartmental agreement on cooperation between the Sakha Contract company and the Kyrgyz state-owned gold concern Kyrgyzaltyn. Under the agreement, **Yakutia** would deliver 13-14 tonnes of antimony concentrate a year to Kyrgyzstan, where the gold contained in the concentrate would be extracted and returned to **Yakutia**. (British Broadcasting Corporation 5/29/96)

July 1996: The **Yakut** parliament declared a state of emergency has been declared in a number of districts because of a series of natural disasters, including floods, fires, and drought. Damage from spring flooding earlier in the year is estimated at R200bn. Six people died when the River Lena burst its banks. Fires swept more than 45,000 hectares of forests. The Federal Ministry for Civil Defense, Emergencies and Natural Disasters promised to send aid. (British Broadcasting Corporation 7/12/96)

September 1996: Power workers in Sakha-**Yakutia** began switching off consumers as part of a strike to protest the delay in pay. In certain units the workers had not received wages for seven months. The overall debt amounts to about R300,000bn. (British Broadcasting Corporation 9/24/96)

December 1996: In an interview with the newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda, the President of **Yakutia** (Sakha), Mikhail Nikolayev said that Moscow's strong pressure on the Diamonds of Russia-Sakha company revealed the desire of financial quarters in Moscow to take control of that lucrative enterprise. He noted that critics of the company questioned its legal status and wanted to convince the public that it needs a radical reorganization. Nikolayev blamed Federal authorities for a longstanding dispute which prevented the company from signing a trade agreement with De Beers. (Soviet Press Digest 12/7/96)

The president of the Russian Republic of Sakha -**Yakutia**, Mikhail Nikolayev, interrupted his re-election campaign after heating systems broke down in five districts of the Siberian region, threatening the lives of hundreds of people. A major power failure on 13th December had caused heating systems to freeze in

temperatures below minus 50 C. Investigators suspected sabotage. (British Broadcasting Corporation 12/16/96)

During a campaign speech, Mikhail Nikolayev insisted on state regulation of the economy, at least during the transitional period, to cushion the blows of Ashock therapy@ and ensure stability in industrial production. Responding to questions from voters, Nikolayev said that Athe principal task of state regulation of the economy is to create conditions generating and stimulating business and entrepreneurial activity. If we did not have state and economic sovereignty, we could not have held back the process of the ruin of the economy.@ (British Broadcasting Corporation 12/16/96)

Russian Minister for Nationalities and Federal Relations, Vyacheslav Mikhaylov, speaking at a round table meeting in the House of Government in Russia's Sakha Republic noted that there were Ano efficient mechanism[s] to control signed agreements between the subjects of the federation and the center.@ The minister also made a point of saying that Russia's national policy for the first time provided for state support to develop nations and their spiritual spheres. (British Broadcasting Corporation 12/16/96)

January 1997: Russia's population shrank by 475,000, or 0.3%, in 1996. Only ten regions, including **Yakutia** and other autonomous areas with high indigenous populations, reported birthrates exceeding mortality. (TASS 1/31/97)

February 1997: A huge section of Siberia will be ringed off for ecological protection under an accord with the World Wide Fund for Nature. The project is designed to protect the mineral-rich land. Mikhail Nikolayev, president of the Sakha Republic, signed the agreement with WWF director-general Claude Martin. It covers an area of around 700,000 square kilometres (300,000 square miles) of mainly Arctic tundra, an area one and a half times the size of France. The WWF will allocate 500,000 Swiss francs (400,000 dollars) to conservation projects in **Yakutia**. Most of the protected areas will be populated. (Agence France Presse 2/11/97)

March 1997: The government of **Yakutia** urged the cancellation of the military launch of a Start-I booster rocket from the Svobodny Space Center. **Yakutia's** Deputy Prime Minister explained that AWe doubt the environmental and technical safety of the launched rocket, and the military space forces of Russia cannot present materials that documentarily refute our apprehension.@ The Sakha government and the Defense Ministry had agreed to a 1996 contract allowing the spent stages of rockets to fall in the Republic, as they had before. Officials of Svobodny had tried to convince the government that the rocket parts would not cause environmental damage. The demand was ignored by the Ministry, which launched the rocket, saying that Ait was technically impossibility to postpone the launch.@ Six minutes after the blast off, the spent second stage of the rocket fell near the village of Keptin in **Yakutia**. This led the **Yakut** government to sue the Military Space Force, and cancel its 1996 agreement. (TASS 3/1/97 & 3/4/97 and Agence France Presse 3/6/97)

The editorial office of Rossiiskaya Gazeta received a letter from the President of the Sakha Republic (**Yakutia**), Mikhail Nikolaev and the Premier, Valentin Fedorov, entitled AAn Appeal to Russia's Businessmen.@ The two officials called upon businessmen to invest in projects providing for the development of **Yakutian** mineral resources. (Banking and Exchanges Weekly 3/3/97)

First Vice Prime Minister Anatoly Chubais blasted **Yakutia's** Prime Minister Valentin Fyodorov's call to picket the government building in Moscow to protest the Aeconomic blockade@ against **Yakutia**. Chubais said he ordered the Finance Ministry to look into the use of federal funds in **Yakutia** and Afind out whether

its government worked wisely or unwisely,@ since **Yakutia** ranked last among other constituent republics and regions in terms of payments to the pension fund. The republic had transferred only 44% of the amount due. (TASS 3/26/97)

April 1997: On the 75th anniversary of the Republic of Sakha and the fifth anniversary of its constitution, Russian President Boris Yeltsin sent a congratulatory message to Sakha President Mikhail Nikolayev, emphasizing its economic, cultural and spiritual potential as well as the social, economic and political transformations that had occurred. He added that Sakha made a considerable contribution to the Russian Federative State. (TASS 4/27/97)

May 1997: The president of **Yakutia** issued a decree regulating the stay of foreign citizens on the territory of the Republic of Sakha, which stated that all foreigners had to secure the permission of the local bodies of power and internal affairs to visit the Russian autonomous republic. This included proving that visitors had sufficient funds to afford shelter, and the intention of leaving on a set date. This differed from the policy of the Russian federation, and press sources feared that it could lead to the deportation of foreigners. (British Broadcasting Corporation 5/5/97)

June 1997: Russian President Boris Yeltsin ordered the creation of a working group to draft proposals concerning an economic agreement between the federal government and **Yakutia**. Among the group's tasks were the preparation of proposals for the development of Russia's diamond business to streamline its structure and increase budget revenues from the extraction, sale and cutting of diamonds. (TASS 6/18/97)

The government of **Yakutia** announced plans to offer a 49% stake in Sakhazoloto, the wholly state-owned company which represented its major gold producers. (British Broadcasting Corporation 6/20/97)

According to the State Statistics Committee, Russia's Far East had the highest staple foods prices. The cost of 25 staple foodstuffs, or a consumer basket in monthly calculation averaged 244,000 roubles across the country in May. In Moscow, it grew by slightly more

than 4 percent to 280,000 roubles. The most expensive city is Yakutsk, where the cost of the monthly diet exceeded 550,000 roubles. (TASS 6/26/97)

July 1997: First deputy prime minister of Belarus, Pyotr Prakapovich, and the deputy chairman of the government of the Republic of Sakha (**Yakutia**), Ruslan Shipkov, signed an intergovernmental agreement on commercial, economic and cultural cooperation. (British Broadcasting Corporation 7/5/97)

North Korea and the Russian republic of Sakha signed a joint venture agreement on coal. Mineral-rich North Korea has copious reserves of both bituminous and anthracite coal, estimated in 1993 by researcher Hwang Eui-Gak at a combined total of 13 billion tons. (Agence France Presse 7/6/97)

According to a study by Russian federal prosecutors, **Yakutia** had the highest number of violations of the federal law, especially election laws. Some other Russian Federation member territories have usurped the exclusive federal right to control the formation of regional military and quasi-military units. The **Yakut** constitution guarantees it the right to create its own military. (British Broadcasting Corporation 7/10/97)

The Constitutional Court ruled unconstitutional articles in the Basic Law of the Republic of Khakassia stipulating that candidates for Deputy's seats in the republic's Supreme Council must have lived in Khakassia

at least five years, and candidates for the office of Prime Minister, at least seven. The decision did not directly apply to the other republics, but it was expected that it would hit **Yakutia**, with its 15-year residency requirement for presidential candidates, hard. (Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press 7/23/97)

In response to Russia's inability to pay wages on time, the Republic of Sakha decided to issue a new and original type of security, known as commercial coupons [Russian: tovarnyye talony]. The republican government hoped that the commercial coupons would enable it to free up a total of R233bn. for other expenses. People who had not received pay for six months or more will be able to buy food, pay for their municipal services and possibly for air tickets on local routes. (British Broadcasting Corporation 7/26/97)

The administration of Yakutsk, the capital of the republic of **Yakutia**, declared a state of emergency beginning August 1, due to the high pollution level and the dangerous melting of the permafrost in the area. The melting ice endangered the foundations of the houses built on top of it. (TASS 7/31/97)

September 1997: Two hundred deceived depositors in a **Yakut** commercial bank seized the office of President Mikhail Nikolayev of **Yakutia**, overwhelming guards. Nikolayev himself was not in the building at the time. The investors met with the first deputy prime minister and the minister of finance, who promised that R8bn of arrears owed on deposits would be settled by the end of the week. (British Broadcasting Corporation 10/1/97)

October 1997: **Yakutia** Parliament members sent a letter to Federation Council and State Duma deputies, expressing their concern over the inadequate efforts to provide for residents of Russia's Far North during the approaching winter. The address states that over 80% of all **Yakutia's** material resources have to be brought in from outside the republic during the short summer navigation period, whereas the government's support of these deliveries has dropped to 20% this year. At the same time, **Yakutian** deputies contend that the state's support for delivering products to the Far North regions is not provided for in a separate article in the proposed 1998 federal budget. Thus, according to the deputies, the state is completely refusing to accept any responsibility for supporting the residents of Russia's large Far North region. (What the Papers Say 7/8/97)

October 1997: According to the Health Ministry, the number of tuberculosis cases in Russia has gone up by 3.9 per cent in the past year to stand at about 2.2m. In some parts of the country, including Kaliningrad and Kamchatka Regions and the republics of North Ossetia and **Yakutia**, TB cases are 50 per cent above the national average. (British Broadcasting Corporation 10/24/97)

Russia began issuing new internal passports to its citizens which - for the first time - did not include a description of the person's ethnicity. (Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press 11/19/97)

November 1997: A report in a British newspaper highlighted another danger from Russian rockets. In the past, people living in the **Yakut** and other Siberian regions had used the debris from rockets as building materials. The materials had been highly toxic, however, and doctors blamed an increase in birth defects and childhood leukemia on the unspent rocket fuel residue in the fallen boosters. Others, however, pointed to the legacy of nuclear tests in the **Yakut** area as a reason for the illnesses. (London Telegraph 11/2/97)

Delegations from **Yakutia** and Magadan Region signed an agreement on cooperation, as well as a declaration on the socioeconomic development of the northeast of Russia, in Magadan today [9th November]. Relations between these two constituent parts of the federation were quite strong during the era of the former USSR, but had virtually ceased in recent times due to mutual financial claims. One point in

particular states that **Yakutia** pledges to take on some of the costs of maintaining and repairing roads going through the territory of Magadan Region. The other document, the declaration, contains an appeal for the northern regions to be made zones of special government control. (British Broadcasting Corporation 11/11/97)

December 1997: The government of the Republic of Sakha refused to sign an agreement with the Russian Defence Ministry which would have allowed the Military Space Forces to use **Yakutia's** territory as a dumping ground for secondary stages of space rockets launched from the Svobodnyy space centre in Amur Region. The Sakha government said the Space Agency refused to carry out a comprehensive examination of the territory in question to establish the extent of the damage caused by such dumping and financial compensation payable. The agreement was eventually signed after the Space Forces agreed to give the republic part of the revenue from commercial launches. (British Broadcasting Corporation 12/8/97 & 12/15/97)

After December elections, three district results were invalidated because the turnout was less than the required 35 percent. The other 67 **Yakut** parliamentary deputies were elected, but none of the 13 candidates collected the necessary 50 per cent of the vote in the election of the head of the **Yakut** administration (British Broadcasting Corporation 12/31/97)

February 1998: The Interfax news service published a report showing the disparity of standards of living between all of the various Russian regions. Sakha ranked among the bottom ten, with average incomes at 151.9% of the cost of living, 18.4 houses per square mile, 28.3 crimes per 100,000 residents and 19.0 unemployed per 1,000. Moscow, by contrast, had 579.8%, 20.3, 8.2 and 4.3, respectively. In addition, the provinces of Maritime territory, Arkhangelsk region, Sakhalin region and Buryat Republic had a high proportion of residents with criminal record which is likely to be attributed to the fact that convict prisons and former convicts in exile have been for centuries based there. (RusData DiaLine 2/23/98)

As part of a year-end government report, President Boris Yeltsin singled out the Khanty-Mansi, Yamalo-Nenetsky autonomous areas and **Yakutia** as being 40-50% short on their contributions to the state pension fund, essentially only paying into the fund the same amount as their residents would receive from it. (Official Kremlin International News Broadcast 2/26/98)

March 1998: Air traffic controllers at the Yakutsk airport, who had not been paid in over a year, went on a three-day strike to demand back wages. The conflict was settled after the president of **Yakutia** signed a decree ordering the disbursal of over five million rubles to the enterprise. The disbursed 5.5 million rubles sufficed only to pay the wage arrears to the striking air traffic controllers, while the total amount of overdue wages was 32 million roubles, and the general director of the Aeroport Yakutsk had received 260 new statements from radio technicians, airfield service employees and drivers, threatening to call more strikes if their salaries were not paid immediately. (British Broadcasting Corporation 3/8/98 and TASS 3/10/98)

Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov and Sakha (**Yakutia**) President Mikhail Nikolayev signed a framework agreement on cooperation for five years, including the development of links in the economic, cultural and social sectors. The sides agreed to cooperate in the building of an opencast coal mine in the Elginskoye field, and in the building and overall development of the

Srednebotuobinskoye and Talanskoye oil and gas condensate fields. There are plans to create an international bank of reconstruction and development of the Arctic - an interregional financial and credit organization for implementing projects of the Northern Forum nongovernmental organization based in

Alaska, USA. (British Broadcasting Corporation 3/13/98)

The Federation Council last week approved the Law on Precious Metals and Precious Stones, after five years of negotiations. Licenses to mine gold and diamonds, which were issued by the Natural Resources Ministry jointly with regional administrations, would change. A new federal agency would also assume the functions of a commercial structure (lending to gold producers) and a regulator (fixing gold prices within the framework of the Gold Club of Russia, which is now in the making). The plan promised more efficiency, but would also enable the federal authorities to retain rigid control over the sector. Regions such as **Yakutia** did not like the plan, claiming their right to participate in the division of precious raw materials was adequately protected by legislation. Article 72 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation stated that matters pertaining to the possession, utilization and disposal of underground resources fell under the joint jurisdiction of the Russian Federation and its constituent regions. If the project to set up the new federal department is approved, a rebellion of senators can be expected at the Federation Council's next session, and regions were expected to challenge the provision in the constitutional court. (Moscow News 3/28/98)

During elections for the state Duma, only 23.1% of eligible voters in Yakutsk went to the polls. Because of a law requiring at least a 35% turnout, the elections were pronounced invalid. (TASS 3/30/98)

April 1998: A **Yakutia** resident and his wife barricaded themselves in a Moscow hotel for several hours, threatening to set it on fire unless they were guaranteed an apartment in Moscow and a pension. The mayor of Moscow claimed the incident proved the need for permits to restrict residency in Moscow solely to those already living there. (TASS 4/7/98)

June 1998: At a meeting of the Russian Union of Coal Industry Workers, representatives from **Yakutia** and Krasnoyarsk proposed, with government support, to stop shipments of coal from their regions if the coal had not been paid for. The government was also providing financial assistance to miners who, due to lack of payments on the coal shipments, had no other income. (British Broadcasting Corporation 6/2/98)

Mikhail Nikolayev, president of the Republic of Sakha (**Yakutia**), cancelled the posts of his aides and the aides of the vice-president. According to the decree published today, this measure was taken in order to reduce the administration, given the complicated financial situation in the republic. (British Broadcasting Corporation 6/25/98)

July 1998: Sakha Republic passed a new law regarding its mineral deposits. Under the adopted law, mineral deposits could be used by legal entities regardless of forms of ownership and by individual entrepreneurs, including legal entities and citizens of foreign states, provided they are registered on the territory of the republic and are empowered to engage in the corresponding type of activity by legislation of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Sakha (**Yakutia**). The law prohibited the use of **Yakutia**'s mineral wealth for the deployment, storage and testing of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, as well as for the burial of radioactive substances. (British Broadcasting Corporation 7/6/98)

Russian experts announced that the incidence of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) had reached epidemic proportions in its far eastern regions. Experts are particularly alarmed over the rate of growth of the incidence of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) among young people under 25. The situation was considered especially serious since the experts felt that those identified as carriers of HIV represented only a small proportion of those actually infected. (TASS 7/9/98)

During the sessions of Russia's Plenary Council, Premier Sergei Kirienko announced plans to offer financial

assistance to **Yakutia** in response to major flooding which had occurred in June. The Premier stressed, however, that he would be discussing funds being **aimproperly** held in **Yakut** banks which he felt should have been contributed to the Russian budget. (Russian Business Monitor 7/17/98)

August 1998: The airport at Yakutsk was closed because of a strike by air traffic controllers who claimed they had not been paid in four months. The **initiators** of the strike were reportedly fired. (British Broadcasting Corporation 8/28/98)

The republic of Sakha declared a budget deficit of 859.23 million rubles in the first seven months of the year, or 34.4% of revenue. Budget revenue as of August 1, was 2.494 billion rubles, or 28.9% less than planned, according to a report distributed by Sberbank- Kapital, the general agent for a **Yakut** bond issue. (Middle East News 9/1/98)

Sakha Republic President Mikhail Nikolayev ruled that all **Yakutia** -produced gold be sent to the region's precious-metals reserve and sold to the federal government only after approval from the region's committee for precious metals and stones and foreign currency. (TASS 1/10/99)

September 1998: An agreement on cooperation between the national assemblies of the Republic of Sakha (**Yakutia**) and Bashkortostan (Republic of Bashkiria) were signed on Friday 18th September in Yakutsk by legislators of the two republics. The document provides for the exchange of legislative acts and the holding of parliamentary hearings, meetings and talks on problems of mutual interest. (British Broadcasting Corporation 9/18/98)

October 1998: After low-profit gold mines in **Yakutia** closed down, the residents of 9 gold-miners' settlements received no money to move. As a result, about 5,500 people, including 1250 children and 500 pensioners, had to stay in towns with no stores, post offices, schools, power, or heat. (TASS 10/30/98)

November 1998: **Yakutia**, along with Orenburg and Leningrad Provinces, failed to make their bond payments, lowering their credit rating and deepening the Russian financial crisis. (Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press 11/18/98)

January 1999: Russian President Boris Yeltsin announced that the Sakha decree issued in August regarding precious metals mined in Sakha ran contrary to the federal law on precious stones and metals and must be put in line with it. The ruling was suspended. (TASS 1/10/99)

February 1999: The city councils of the capitals of the Buryat and **Yakut** Republics signed a treaty on socioeconomic and cultural cooperation. The city administrations of Ulan Ude and Yakutsk agreed to coordinate their work on a broad range of problems, including the transmission of electric power from **Yakutia** to Buryatia in exchange for farm produce. (British Broadcasting Corporation 2/19/99)

April 1999: Commander of the District Colonel General Viktor Chechevatov reminded everybody that, as of December 1, 1998, the **Yakutia** made up part of the Far East Military District, and **Yakut** inductees would serve there. **Yakutian** President Nikolayev supported Chechevatov by saying that, in a war, **Yakutia** would produce 250,000 servicemen and 40,000 transport vehicles, and that a Suvorov military school and a network of schools for cadets would be opened in the republic for this particular purpose and in order to promote patriotic upbringing. (Defense and Security 4/28/99)

November 1999: Russian Deputy Prime Minister for agricultural issues, Vladimir Sherbak, warned that the

Russian government will take tough measures against regions that received deliveries of U.S. food aid but delayed making payments for this aid to a special Finance Ministry account. According to a Russian-American inter-governmental agreement signed at

the end of 1998, 18 billion rubles from the sale of food aid was to be transferred to the Finance Ministry special account and subsequently to the Pension Fund to pay off pension arrears. Sherbak announced that in order to recover the debt the government may temporarily suspend food aid deliveries to debtor regions, suspend budget transfers for pension payments, and/or restricting the delivery of new food aid until payment was received for the old aid. The Sakha Republic was among the regions most in arrears. (Interfax 11/11/99)

December 1999: The city of Mirny held its first festival of the ethnic groups of **Yakutia**, to emphasize the peace and concord of the region. (TASS 12/12/99)

31 December 1999: Russian President Boris Yeltsin resigned. Vladimir Putin, his heir apparent, took control of the government. Elections were scheduled for spring 2000.

January 2000: **Yakutia's** President Mikhail Nikolayev published a decree making English a mandatory language to be taught in schools and one of working languages of official functions, given the intensification of planetary inter-state communication, broad adoption in the international practice of high information technologies, and given the quest of **Yakutia** for integration in the world economic community, as well as the need for providing the republic with a cadre potential meeting international standards. The decree ordered **Yakutia's** education ministry to adapt school curricula and programs of teaching English. Leaders of ministries and departments got orders to arrange English studies for their personnel. (TASS 1/6/2000)

March 2000: Vladimir Kartashkin, chairman of the federal Commission for Human Rights, said that Nikolaev's decree making English a mandatory language in **Yakutia** violated the Russian Constitution, violated human rights and weakened the Russian federation. (Radio Free Europe reprinted in IPR Strategic Business Information Database 3/2/00)

A group of pensioners in the Sakha Republic appealed to the republic's president, parliament, and government in an open letter, stating that the federal pension law did not take into account the geographical and climatic particularities of the Far North in computing compensation. The pensioners called on the republic's authorities to defend their interests and preserve a single pension service for Sakha. (Radio Free Europe reprinted in IPR Strategic Business Information Database 3/16/00)

May 2000: Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree ordering the creation of seven federal districts in Russia, each incorporating several existing republics, territories and regions. The president planned to appoint a representative to each federal district. The purpose of the reorganization was to ensure the exercise by the president of the Russian Federation of his constitutional powers, to make the work of federal bodies of state power more effective and to improve control over compliance with their decisions. The Sakha Republic was to become part of the Far Eastern Federal District (capital Khabarovsk). (British Broadcasting Corporation 5/15/00)

Risk Assessment

Despite political clashes between **Yakut** and Russian leaders, Russian President Boris Yeltsin made moves to accommodate **Yakut** sensibilities during his tenure in office. Symbolically, in April 1994 Yeltsin issued a decree denouncing the persecution of ethnic **Yakuts** under Stalin. Substantively, Yeltsin granted greater local control of **Yakutia's** natural resources. Yeltsin's willingness to compromise led to an improvement in Russian-**Yakut** relations, as manifested by **Yakut** President Nikolayev's repeated statements that his republic does not seek secession and that the Russian Federation must remain intact. On the other hand, **Yakutia** clearly aims to maintain significant policymaking freedom. For example, in January 1995 **Yakutia** issued a decree banning recruitment of its citizens into the Russian military on the grounds that draftees would be sent to fight in Chechnya.

The relationship between the center and **Yakutia** seems to have grown slightly more tense in the last few years; as both sides engage in economic one-upsmanship. Each side is attempting to withhold promised payments from the other, until it gets what it wants, straining **Yakutia's** relations with the center considerably. The results of this will affect **Yakutia**, with its dependence on aid to get through the winter, more severely than Russia, however, and **Yakutia** is by no means alone in the Federation in having problems with nonpayment of debts by Russia. An additional source of ethnic tension in **Yakutia** stems from the position of the republic's five native Siberian ethnic groups, with whom the **Yakuts** may be distantly related. Unlike the more numerous **Yakuts**, in Soviet times **Yakutia's** indigenous peoples were counted among what were called the "northern minorities," "peoples of the North," or "small-in-number-peoples." Despite recent **Yakut** claims to indigenous status, the previously-designated indigenous peoples of **Yakutia** tend to view both **Yakuts** and Russians as colonizers. Although the **Yakut**-indigenous dimension of ethnic relations is much harder to document than **Yakut**-Russian interaction, it can be stated that indigenous groups have often felt alienated from the **Yakut**-controlled administration that has held power since the waning days of the Soviet Union. However, it is important to note that the **Yakut** constitution is rare in that it formally institutionalizes the rights of indigenous peoples. As reflected in its progressive legal standards, prospects are favorable that **Yakutia** will prove successful in managing ethnic relations in the future.

References

BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, numerous stories, 1990-1995.

Kaapcke, Gretchen. "Indigenous Identity Transition in Russia: An International Legal Perspective." Cultural Survival Quarterly (Summer/Fall 1994): 62-68.

Lexis-Nexis: All News Files 1995-2000.

Olson, James S. An Ethnohistorical Dictionary of the Russian and Soviet Empires. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994.

Reuters World Service, numerous stories, 1990-1995.

TASS, numerous stories, 1990-1995.

Tishkov, Valery. The Principal Problems and Prospects of the Development of National-Territorial Entities in the Russian Federation. Cambridge: Harvard University Strengthening Democratic Institutions Project,

n.d. [probably 1992].

Vakhtin, Nikolai. Native Peoples of the Russian Far North. London: Minority Rights Group, 1992.

Wixman, Ronald. The Peoples of the USSR: An Ethnographic Handbook. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1984.