Tsarism’s failure to integrate its national minorities into the state and society constitutes a major factor in its collapse in 1917. Yet few existing studies reflect the connection between the failure of nationality policy and the broader structural developments of the late tsarist period. While much recent scholarship has insightfully explored the blockages of solutions to pressing problems, these studies have not dealt with nationality issues. This article attempts to isolate the fate of one effort at national integration after 1861 and to relate it to the broader context. This effort at integration is known as the Il’minskii system after its founder, N. I. Il’minskii (1822-91).

This system must be grasped in the context of imperial policy as a whole because it represented a culmination of efforts up to the reign of Alexander II to integrate the sizable Muslim population while dealing with accelerating social change. Of crucial importance for imperial stability was the long term policy of cooptation of elites. The process and policies of cooptation facilitated the attraction of potential and actual native elites into the Russian state service, their social integration, e.g., through intermarriage, and their socialization through service. Frequently conversion to Orthodoxy was the natural outcome of this process.¹

Such policies, carried out by Alexander’s predecessors, had been of great benefit to Russia in stabilizing the empire. But in the mid-nineteenth century several developments threatened to undermine the stability which the fusion of native elites with the state and Russian society had fostered. One of these forces was the rising tide of nationalism which, in its Russian manifestation had become a major prop to the regime, but, in its non-Russian garb, was viewed with great fear. A second phenomenon was the visible and growing estrangement of vlast’ (state power) and obshchestvo (civil society) that undermined the traditional social organization of the empire and the mutual confidence of each sector in the other. The implacable revolutionary movement symbolized this development. Third, capitalist industrialization clearly

was transforming the basis of social adhesion from estate to a new form of association, and gradually freeing new economic elites, or seeking to free them, from bureaucratic tutelage. This reinforced the transition from soslovie and contributed to a critical spirit which, \textit{inter alia}, eroded belief in traditional authorities like the Church. These developments cast a lengthening shadow over nationality policy after 1861.

Il'minskii's system, which grappled with these problems, was only the last in a series of attempts by Alexander II and his advisors to overcome these developing obstacles to integration among the Muslims. Episodes such as Shamil's war or the Crimean fiasco brought home to them the fragility of the Empire and the danger that coercive Russification posed to imperial Russia's integrity by stimulating Muslim resistance. Apart from the forced deportation of Crimean Tatars due to suspicion of their loyalty, Alexander's Muslim policies reflected the belief that continued access of state authority to Muslim elites, if not masses, was essential to preserving the fabric of order.

Alexander also took seriously his younger brother's opinions on the need to revitalize the Church's administrative and educational work to make it a more effective instrument of the state. He and his ministers were also imbued with the goal of affecting greater administrative uniformity throughout Russian in order to enhance state capacity. All these factors contributed to the government's acceptance of the scheme devised by Il'minskii in 1865-66 to succeed where others had failed previously, i.e., in a program at the lasting conversion of Muslims to Orthodoxy.

Il'minskii's program, which had been tried out in schools along the Volga, was stunning in its simplicity. Based on his own experience and observation, he proposed that the government establish schools after his own model school in Kazan'. This model was an institution which taught Tatars (and as he later envisaged other Muslim peoples) in their own native languages a curriculum based on Russian Orthodoxy. His schools also aimed at creating instructional materials in these languages, often pioneering in the creation of written languages and textbooks among Muslims of the steppe and trans-Volga region. State support was vital if this program was to grow. Only state patronage would allow Il'minskii the money to print and circulate instructional materials in these often new languages and to train enough teachers who would proselytize their peoples in their own tongues. This educational program was national in form but Orthodox in content. And he expected it to cement the loyalty of the emerging intellectual Muslim elite to the state thus adding an intellec-

3. Ibid., p. 56.