

The Model of Tatarstan under President Mintimer Shaimiev. Richmond, Curzon, 1999, xvi-251 p., photographs.

Allen J. Frank

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- 1 In his study of the political and economic history of Tatarstan following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ravil Bukharaev pays particular attention to the role of Tatarstan's president, Mintimer Shaimiev, in moving Tatarstan toward political and economic liberalization. In so doing, Shaimiev has sought to enjoy the political benefits of semi-independence within the Russian Federation, without the taking the economic and security risks of full-scale independence. As Bukharaev ably demonstrates, Shaimiev has been able to accomplish these goals as a result of his political sense and his flexibility, while walking the tightrope of Tatarstan's ethnic politics and of Russia's unstable political and economic circumstances.
- 2 A major shortcoming is that Bukharaev's treatment of Shaimiev often seems hagiographical and uncritical, and he devotes little space to Shaimiev's formative years in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. While the work does not purport to be a political biography, a more critical approach to Shaimiev may have given the reader greater insights into his goals as essentially a Russian provincial politician. Indeed, the story of Tatarstan's « sovereignty » and Shaimiev's political future is facing its most serious challenge with Vladimir Putin's accession to power. Putin has vowed to reign in the country's provincial leaders, including Shaimiev, who is perhaps Russia's most high-profile ethnic political figure outside of Chechnya. The new arrangement will certainly test Shaimiev's vaunted pragmatism and flexibility to the fullest, and one cannot but wonder whether Bukharaev will attempt a sequel.

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Thèmes : 13.3. Asie centrale

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