



Introduction

For English-speaking vexillologists there are very few sources of information about the subnational flags of the Russian Federation. Probably the most thorough source is the website *FOTW: Flags of the World*. While an excellent site for flag information, the entries are not always current and it is sometimes difficult to trace information back to an original source. In addition, the level of detail for different flags varies widely. It is often difficult to tell if the information contained is a comprehensive treatment of all information available on a flag, or just what the contributor could find at the time.

F. I. Sharkov's bilingual book *Vetry peremen: flagi i gerby respublik Rossii / Winds of Change: Flags and Coats of Arms of the Russian Republics* provides some text in English about the flags of the Russian republics. However, it was published in 1992 and is out of date. In addition, it contains no information on the other federal subjects—the oblasts, krais, autonomous oblast, autonomous okrugs, and federal cities. Therefore it is far from a comprehensive treatment of the flags of all the federal subjects of Russia.

The purpose of this work is to present a discussion of all of the subnational flags of the Russian Federation, updated to 2009, in English. To do this, I have consulted a number of Russian-language sources to find explanations of symbolism, information about designs and history of the flags, and any other available information.

In the process of doing this, I realized just how little I (and, perhaps, most Westerners) really know about the territories of the modern Russian Federation. It was fascinating to discover just what could be learned about a place and its people from the flag they have chosen and the meaning that they have assigned to it. So, in addition to providing updated information about flags and symbolism, I have examined what this information can teach about the peoples and territories of Russia, and about the world's largest country—the Russian Federation.

Transliteration and Capitalization of Russian Words

Author-produced transliterations use the Library of Congress transliteration system for Russian. Citations to English-language sources using transliteration are cited according to the transliteration scheme used in the original. This accounts for variations in transliteration in the notes. According to the LC transliteration system, Russian letters (in alphabetical order) are represented as follows:

А,а: A,a	К,к: K,k	Х,х: Kh,kh
Б,б: B,b	Л,л: L,l	Ц,ц: Ts,ts
В,в: V,v	М,м: M,m	Ч,ч: Ch,ch
Г,г: G,g	Н,н: N,n	Ш,ш: Sh,sh
Д,д: D,d	О,о: O,o	Щ,щ: Shch,shch
Е,е: E,e	П,п: P,p	Ъ: ”
Ё,ё: Ё,ё	Р,р: R,r	Ы: y
Ж,ж: Zh,zh	С,с: S,s	Ь: ’
З,з: Z,z	Т,т: T,t	Э,э: E,e
И,и: I,i	У,у: U,u	Ю,ю: Iu,iu
Й,й: I,i	Ф,ф: F,f	Я,я: Ia,ia.

In other systems *yo* is used instead of *ё*, *yu* instead of *iu*, and *ya* instead of *ia*.

All transliterated names, phrases, and titles in the text and in the notes use the Russian rules of capitalization, which capitalize fewer words than would be standard in English. However, in the English text the standard English rules of capitalization are applied to Russian place names.

Geographic Names and Terms

To make the text more readable, the Russian geographical terms “*oblast*”, “*krai*”, and “*okrug*” have only been italicized on the first use where they are defined, but not for any following instances of use. Also, these terms are not translated in the text as they are commonly used in English-language texts about Russia. This practice will keep the geographic names closer to the original language. The majority of Russian place names throughout the text are stated using one of the conventional spellings from *Merriam-Webster’s Geographical Dictionary* (2001), which uses the transliteration standard of the United States Board on Geographic Names. In a few cases, common usage has varied from the most current edition, so I have

chosen to use the more common forms of the names. For example, the dictionary uses the spelling “kray” rather than “krai” for that type of federal subject. In this work, it made more sense to use “krai”. Also, there is a lot of variation in the English forms of the names for the autonomous okrugs. In the flag description section, common names in English are followed by the official name in Russian, and then transliterated Russian using the LC transliteration scheme.

Republics are typically called just by their place names, but other federal subjects will be called by their full names to avoid confusion with cities of the same names.

Flag Descriptions

As much as possible, flag descriptions and symbolism have been drawn from the text on the official websites of the federal subjects. Where information was not available from the federal subjects, secondary sources (primarily in Russian) have been used.

The descriptions are not direct translations, but are instead English-language descriptions based upon a variety of Russian-language sources. In some cases translation has been challenging, as some Russian words can be translated using various terms in English. Wherever possible, I have attempted to use the term that I felt most appropriately described the flag and symbolism in English.