

“Mobilization of Ethnicity” as Europe-Asian Project: Constructing a Higher Education Policy

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Abstract. The article discusses the ethnic policy in the field of higher education in Russia between the First and Second World Wars. The "mobilization of ethnicity" in the educational policy of the first years of Soviet power is presented in the study as the "European-Asian project" of Soviet Russia - an attempt to create a single supranational economic, political and cultural space in a significant part of Eurasia. Based on the materials of the multicultural region of the Middle Volga region, the authors analyze the process of integration of the Volga peoples (Tatars, Mordovians and Chuvash) into the higher education system. The study showed that at the first stage of designing the new policy (1920s), the key direction was to provide ethnic groups with relative cultural autonomy (preserving and supporting national languages, religious customs and social traditions) in exchange for recognizing the legitimacy of the new government. At the second stage (1930s), the national educational policy of the state became more straightforward, integration processes intensified and, as a result, the mutual economic dependence of the capital and regions.

Keywords: higher education, ethnic educational policy, industrialization, «homo soveticus», Europe-Asian education, Russia.

1 Introduction

The process of changing technological structures providing the next technological transition is accompanied by the adaptation of old and the emergence of new institutions. The analysis of the institutional forms of this transition shows the general and special trajectories of the economic development of states included in the transformation process. At the stage of the modern fourth industrial revolution, called digitalization, the Russian version of the second industrial revolution, which took place a century ago, can be useful, despite the temporary remoteness. It solved many “attendant” problems, was determined by the territorial extent and multinational diversity. In the Russian Empire and then in the USSR, it took place over a considerable space from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean, and in this regard, the experience of the second industrial revolution in Russia can be regarded as a kind of “Eurasian model” for the development of economic design. Recent studies of the Russian Public Opinion Research Center have shown that more than a quarter of Russians (28%) would like to see “the USSR in a new form” in the modern Eurasian Economic Union [1]. In this context, the study of the experience of economic, political and cultural integration of the peoples of Eurasia in the conditions of the Soviet model of the economy is relevant. Then, a century ago, the creation of an industrial economy, the training of highly qualified personnel for it, the solution of the tasks of creating a classless society merged into one large social project, conditionally called “Homo Sovieticus”.

2 Problem Statement

In the scientific literature, the social and socio-political mechanisms of imperial and Soviet industrialization, of course, successful, are not considered from the point of view of its educational and especially ethnic component. Various aspects of the formation of ethnic education are covered mainly in the context of studying the national policies of the Russian Empire and the Soviet state, regional history, and certain areas of ethnocultural research. The first to note the connection between national and economic issues was E. Lohr [2]. F. Hirsch, analyzing the experience of building the Soviet state, examined in detail the scientific and inter-party discussions on administrative-economic and national construction in the 1920s, linking economic, national and administrative-territorial subjects [3]. In turn, J. Cadiot also noted the relationship between the national policies of the late Russian Empire and the early USSR, which allows us to consider them as a single process in this study [4].

At the same time, the transformation of educational policy and its connection with national and economic construction eludes the attention of researchers. Only in the works of R. Suny, T. Martin and T. Krasovitskaya showed the influence of ethnic education on the projects of political and economic modernization of the country [5; 6; 7]. In particular, R. Suny shows that “education was one of those areas in which nationality began to signify the differentiation of Russian society” [5, p. 65].

3 Research Questions

In this paper we try to fill in the gaps in understanding economic and educational modernization and analyze the national educational experience of the USSR through the factors of the technological revolution (socialist industrialization). The key question of the study is to find out how ethnic policy was embedded in the program of technical and economic reorganization. Answering this question, we examine the integration practices and mechanisms of “embedding” the Eurasian peoples inhabiting the multinational Soviet Union, using the example of one of its regions. As an object of study, we took the region of the Middle Volga. Until the mid-19th century, Middle Volga and Trans-Volga Region, as modern Russian historians P. Kabytov, E. Dubman and O. Leontieva consider, could be described as “a frontier of the Russian state” [8, p. 118].

4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to trace the relationship between centrifugal trends (the concept of "the right of nations to self-determination" and the diversity of ethnic schools) and centripetal trends (building a single ethos "homo soveticus" and unification of education) in national educational policy in the USSR of the 1920s-1930s from the perspective of solving the state goals of the country's industrialization (technological revolution). Diversity and unification are differently directed vectors, and the historical experience of their coordination, according to the authors, can be useful for creating a modern model of Eurasian education. The logic of our study is based on three main subjects. The first section examines the ideological and conceptual sources, the conceptual apparatus and state organizational structures related to the national question. In the second section, we analyze the ethnic politics of Soviet authorities in the 1920s and 1930s. The third section, based on the factual material of the Middle Volga region, traces the specific implementation of these steps in the field of higher education.

5 Research Methods

The theoretical basis of the study is the concept of "Big Waves" by K. Peres, proposed for the analysis of technological revolutions. According to this concept, technological transitions are accompanied by institutional and sociocultural changes. Often they are associated with political changes in the country. The system of higher education in Russia was transformed under the influence of all these changes. We consider the sphere of higher education as the deployment element of the Great Wave of the industrial revolution - a kind of “social project” of industrialization.

In the project for the reconstruction of society according to the Soviet version, the key role was given to education of the population and ethnic politics. Those were the factors which were supposed to form a society loyal to the new government and sharing its ideals. The authors' methodological approach consists in recognizing the structural interdependence of all these elements.

6 Findings

6.1 “Mobilization of Ethnicity”: from idea to organizational structures

The success of industrialization in the USSR in the first half of the twentieth century was indisputable. The average annual rate of economic growth during the years 1870-1950 was quite comparable and even ahead of the European ones (Table 1). The average GDP per capita exceeded the Asian one and only approached Western European, but in the rate of increase this indicator in the USSR was clearly faster.

Table 1. The GDP changes in the regions of the world in 1870-1950.

years	The average annual rate of economic growth, %		The average GDP per capita, \$	
	1870-1913	1913-1950	1913	1950
Western Europe, totally 12 countries	1,33	0,84	3688	5018
The USSR (Russia)	1,06	1,76	1488	2841
Asia (except Japan)	0,43	- 0,08	658	639
The whole world	1,31	0,88	1526	2113

Source: Authors based on [9].

Economic success was the result of the active involvement in the technological revolution of the labor potential of all the peoples of the country mobilized to solve this problem. The term "mobilization of ethnicity" in relation to the Russian history of the civil war was first used by Mark von Hagen and quickly entered the research practice devoted to

the period of the war, revolution and the first years of Soviet power [2; 3]. We use this concept in a wider historical context, identifying the conceptual sources, the conceptual apparatus and organizational structures created by the state to involve different peoples in solving national problems.

The imperial authority recognized the ethnic group as a separate, different from the main part of the country's population living on the territory of the Russian Empire, accounted for the late XVIII - early XIX centuries. It was associated with the study of territories relatively recently included in the state and economic space of the country. First, the military [10] and only then did geographic scientists compose the first descriptions of the provinces and the cultural and historical regions of the Russian Empire [11]. The military-strategic tasks predetermined the methodological approach: the "people" became the "population", which needed to be counted and which needed to be managed. In this case, the criterion of difference was not ethnicity, but religion, which was shown by the first general census of the population conducted in the Russian Empire in 1897.

In 1917, Soviet power proclaimed the equality and equal rights of all peoples. Ambitious plans were developed for the technical, economic, socio-cultural and ideological reconstruction of society. They were planned to be implemented by the newly formed state bodies (people's commissariats) - the People's Commissariat for Ethnic Affairs (People's Commissariat), the People's Commissariat of Education (People's Commissariat for Education) and the State Planning Commission (Gosplan).

6.2 Ethnic Policy of Russia: from "non-Russian" to "national minority"

In the years 1917-1923, the Bolsheviks worked out policies aimed at integrating the entire multinational population of the country based on the recognition of the equal rights of all nationalities [4]. Outwardly, this looked like a direct contradiction to the politics of the late Russian Empire, which sought to establish "state nationalism" and limited the rights of nationalities. However, closer attention to the content of the ethnic policy of the Soviet government shows that it professed the same idea of "linear evolution" of peoples, which considered the "indigenous peoples" of Russia (Volga, Siberia, the Caucasus and the Caucasus, etc.) as "the most undeveloped" and therefore requiring special custody of the central administration, as imperial Russia. And if in the XIX century, the term "foreigners" was used to designate the non-Russian population of the empire, after the revolution of 1917 the Bolsheviks began to use the concept of "national minorities".

The People's Commissariat considered its main task the economic, cultural and political revival of the "backward peoples" (meaning nomadic peoples) of Russia, as well as the inclusion of nationalities in the mainstream of Soviet construction [12]. Having abolished class division, the Soviet government equalized all citizens of the country, but granted special status to "national minorities" as ethnic groups that were oppressed by the imperial administration and needed special state guardianship for their equal accession to Soviet society. At the same time, there was a restructuring of the territories based on the ethnic principle and measures were taken to attract indigenous representatives to the local administration. As noted by J. Cadot, such a policy encouraged people to use ethnicity as an important identification feature [4, p. 117].

In the 1920s Soviet policy in the field of nationalities was aimed at the development of national languages, elites, cultures and territories. In fact, the Soviet regime institutionalized nationalities: changes in society were accompanied by large-scale mobilization of national identities and created nationalities even where they were still poorly aware of themselves.

However, since the beginning of the 1930s, when the legality of power desired by the Soviet government was achieved and the ethnic groups of the state supported the establishment of the Soviet regime, "indigenization" was curtailed, and the government headed for the unification of nationalities. The Soviet government, in fact, returned to the imperial model of unification and Russification, and the status of "national minorities" from privileged turned into marginal.

6.3 The practices of designing the new nation by the means of higher education as part of social project "homo soveticus"

The Soviet government saw in education the most important tool for influencing the masses and one of the means of rebuilding society. The implementation of these principles is visible in the opening of national schools and professional educational institutions, in the creation of writing for peoples who did not have it before, in the publication of national literature and the training of national teaching staff.

The issue of enlightening non-Russian peoples remained particularly relevant for regions with a multinational composition, which included the Middle Volga region. The average percentage of literacy in the region from 1926-1927, in general, it was 36.4%, while among the Mordovian population - only 22.7% (for women - 8.4%), and for the Chuvash - 32.4 (for women - 17.3%) [13].

Since the mid-1920s, the country's leadership has established a quota for the training of representatives of national minorities in higher educational institutions. In this way, the authorities tried, on the one hand, to level the situation with the illiteracy of the non-Russian population, and, on the other, to attract "foreigners" with higher education in the economic, cultural and socio-political life of the region. First, the local authorities were interested in attracting representatives of those folks, who made up a significant share among the population of the region. For the Middle

Volga, these are the Tatars, Mordovians and Chuvash, who, in the terminology of the 1920s and early 1930s. were the "national minorities" of the region.

The country's party leadership has declaratively announced to universities what percentage of representatives of indigenous peoples they should accept. For example, in 1925, when admitting to the Samara Agricultural Institute, a quota was established: 5 Tatars, 5 Chuvash and 15 Mordvinians, a total of 21.4% of the total number of applicants [14, f. R-81, op. 1, d. 705, l. 23]. In 1929, at the Samara Pedagogical Institute, representatives of national minorities should have been at least 10% [14, f. R-2304, op. 1, d. 1212a, l. 4.6]. The largest percentage of indigenous students in 1930 was at a medical institute - almost a third of freshmen (28%), the dominant ethnic group among whom were Mordovians (more than a third) and Chuvashs (13%). However, the local party leadership also considered such an indicator to be low, requiring decisive measures from the leadership of universities.

After 1936, the curtailment of national components in the education system began, and the model began to take shape of the so called "Soviet education" - a unified, international, aimed at educating the "Soviet man".

7 Conclusion

In a multinational country located in the Eurasian space, the national educational state policy was, from the point of view of the authors, an important component of the socio-economic, socio-political and socio-ethnic project "homo soveticus". During the implementation of this project at the first stage (1920s), the national theme was a key one. The peoples were to become the social pillar of the new government and for the support of its legitimacy they received benefits: the preservation and support of national languages, religious customs and social traditions. The study of peoples, their statistical accounting and the identification of the development potential of the territory in which they lived, became the basis for the development of plans for the administrative and economic regionalization of the country, and, ultimately, for industrialization and the technological revolution. With the strengthening of Soviet power and the success of industrialization already in the late 1920s. a hierarchy of relations between the center and the regions was built. At the second stage (from the beginning of the 1930s), the national educational policy became more straightforward, integration processes intensified and, as a result, the mutual economic dependence of the capital and regions was achieved. The government has relied on the formation of an ethnic Soviet elite, capable of leading the processes of technological reorganization of society in national regions. Such institutionalization of peoples did not become a policy of equality, but a "leveling" of peoples.

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