

The “Local” Form of the National and Territorial Autonomy and the Possibility of the Application of its Experience

Victor Zavenovich Akopyan, Victor Pavlovich Ermakov and Ludmila Ivanovna Milyaeva

Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University, Pyatigorsk, Russia

Abstract: The article is dedicated to the territorial organization in the 1920s – early 1930s of the dispersed ethnoses of the North Caucasus. In the period under consideration the Soviet power was forced to exploit the idea of the national and cultural autonomy by combining the latter with the territorial autonomy. In the areas of the compact residence of the national minorities there emerged some “minor forms” of autonomy – national regions and village soviets. The national village soviet, as a rule, combined several near-by settlements populated by the representatives of the same nationality. The authors of the article are convinced that in modern conditions the experience of the organization and functioning of the national village soviets, the use of the native language in the office work, systems of the interactions between the local authorities and the higher authority is applicable to those regions of the compact residence of the dispersed ethnic groups where the potential of the ex-territorial cultural and national autonomy does not meet the national aspirations.

Key words: Granting autonomy • Local self-government • National village soviets • National regions • National and cultural autonomy • National minorities • The North-Caucasus Territory

INTRODUCTION

Many socio-economic, socio-political and on the whole national problems faced by the ethnic groups living among the “title nations” stand no chance of their solution by the potential of the national and cultural autonomy (NCA) specifically in the form consolidated in the Law of the RF “On the national and cultural autonomy” passed in 1996.

In the course of the formation of the new Russian statehood the scholars and politicians had a heated debate over the ways of the development of the NCA.

The centrifugal tendencies of the 90-s of the past century formed strong opinion of the exterritorial autonomy as “the most advanced and effective form of the realization of the rights and interests of the ethnic groups, capable of ensuring the progressive development and improvement of the multinational society”. For example the Head of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS) V.A. Tishkov noted that “the national and cultural autonomy is the most significant form of self-determination of the peoples of the Russian

Federation”, which evidently implied the consolidation with the NCA of substantial rights of the national representation.

This “motive” to a certain extent was traced in the Law of the USSR passed in the “perestroika” period in April 26, 1990 “On the free national development of the citizens of the USSR living outside the limits of their national and state formations or not having such formations on the territory of the USSR”. This normative act actually rehabilitated the idea of the NCA. In a number of its principles this normative act proved to be more well-founded than the subsequent legislation [1].

The law granted the right to the ethnic cultural centers, societies, local groups “to have with the local Soviets of the Working People’s Deputies and their executive committees their authorized representatives whose opinions should be heard and taken into consideration in the process of deciding about the issues that affect the ethnic interests of the citizens” [1].

The disintegration of the USSR made it impossible to realize the positive potential inherent in this law.

Corresponding Author: Victor Zavenovich Akopyan, Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University, Kalinina Street, 9, 357500, Pyatigorsk, Russia.

On the other hand, the approach that tended to narrow the functions and tasks of the NCA thus reducing it only to the possibility of setting up ethnic organizations pursuing exclusively cultural and educational goals suddenly revealed itself. That was the course taken by the authors of the above mentioned Law of the RF of 1996. This normative act laid the foundations of a certain legal basis aimed to secure the cultural interests of the ethnic minorities and, actually, introduced the very notion of the NCA. It contains the following interpretation of the indicated notion: “the form of the national and cultural self-determination that constitutes the association of the citizens of the Russian Federation who identify themselves with a certain ethnic group being in the situation of the national minority on a certain territory on the basis of their voluntary self-organization with the purpose of the solution on their own of the problems of the preservation of their originality, development of the language, education, ethnic culture” [2].

At the same time the document for all its obvious merits fails to answer such questions as: how will the national aspirations of the so-called “non-title” ethnic groups and particularly the Diaspora ethnoses residing in the monoethnic settlements be met? How will the organs of the central and local government function there? There is still no answer to the question of the relationship between the local government (self-government, administration) and the NCA defined in the law as a “public association”. Nor the answer to this question is provided by the Federal Law of the RF of 6 October 2003 “On the general principles of the organization of the local government in the Russian Federation” published in October 2003 and put into force on 1 January 2006 [3].

Main Body: In connection with what has been said, in our Soviet past (20-s – early 30-s of the 20th c.) one can find positive experience (though formal to some extent and dictated in the interests of the official doctrine) of meeting the aspirations of the ethnic groups that either resided outside the limits of their national and territorial formations or the ethnic groups that did not have such formations at all.

The socio-economic stabilization in the country prompted by the successes of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and the general loyal attitude developed by the peasant population to the new authorities formed a favourable background to the liberalization of the social life. The party in power in the whole number of its decisions put forward as the key task the “revival” of the Soviets as the organs of government and public self-government, the extension of the involvement of the various categories of the population in their work

(except the so-called “class-alien elements”), including the dispersed ethnic groups called in the terminology of that time “the ethnic minorities”.

The need for the “involvement of the national minorities in the Soviet construction”, particularly their involvement in the elections of various levels to the Soviets was strongly emphasized already at the XIVth party conference of the Russian Communist Party (of the Bolsheviks) (April 1925) and at the IIIrd Congress of the Soviets of the USSR (May 1925) [4].

The multiethnic Northern Caucasus was for the whole country an experimental territory both for the realization of the new administrative and territorial construction and for the realization of the policy with respect to the national minorities. One of the main results of the administrative and territorial reform was the setting up by the decision of the Presidium of the All-Union Central Executive Committee in June, 1924 of the united South-East region renamed in October that year (by the IIrd session of the ninth All-Union Central Executive Committee) the Northern Caucasus territory.

This enormous area of 293 thousand square metres was divided into 21 administrative units. All the districts and autonomous regions (in 1931 Daghestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was included in this territory) were in direct subordination to Rostov-on-Don – the administrative centre of the Region.

The ethnic composition of the Region (excluding Daghestan) according to the All-Union Census in December 17, 1926 was represented in the following way: Russians – 3.8 mln, Ukrainians – 3.1 mln (a considerable part of the Cossacks, especially the Kuban Cossacks, identified their “class-consciousness” in the Ukrainian ethnicity), Chechen – 296282, Armenians – 162186, Ossets – 155400, Kabardian – 139689, Germans – 93915, Ingush – 72043, Circassians – 64031, Karachai – 55068, Belorussians – 51317, Jews – 42476, Balkar – 33280, Greeks – 32176, Tatars – 19053, Polish – 18425, Georgians – 15011, Kalmyk – 11712, Nogai – 9948, Kumyk – 6.5 thousand, Persians – 3.4 thousand, etc. In percentage terms the Russian population of the Northern Caucasus totalled 46%, the ethnic minorities – 44% and the mountaineers – 10% [5].

In the Northern Caucasus region the 1924-1925 elections to the Soviets for the first time demonstrated a greater activity of the national minorities than it had been before. However their representation in the local government and particularly their participation in the executive bodies utterly disagreed with their number and activity. This fact was given special attention by the plenum of the regional executive committee (Spring 1925) [6].

After the completion of the election campaign the regional committee and regional executive committee carried out the inspection of the involvement of the ethnic minorities in the Soviet administrative bodies in the different regions of the Northern Caucasus area. The results of the inspection were analyzed at the regional meeting on the Soviet construction held in November 1925 in Rostov-on-Don. The resolution "On the work among the Region's ethnic minorities" passed at the meeting noted that the disregard of the ethnic and language peculiarities of the population is bringing to naught "the main prerequisites for the intensification of the work of the Soviet socially active members among the working masses of the ethnic minorities, is undermining and discrediting the authoritative directives of the Party and the Soviet power in respect of the ethnic minorities. Owing to this the question of their involvement in the Soviet construction...is becoming the immediate task and one of the most important features of the regional construction" [7].

Apart from other measures it was proposed to set up some "minor forms" of the autonomy – national regions, districts and Village Soviets in the locations of their compact residence. Moreover the Village Soviets, the article deals with, were actually becoming the most "local" form of the autonomy.

The national Village Soviet as a rule united several neighboring settlements populated by the representatives of one ethnic group. In addition there were "mixed" Village Soviets that united two or several ethnic groups.

The project of the formation of the ethnic Village Soviets into separate units was designed by the regional (district) executive committee on the basis of the general instructions of the state. In April 29, 1926 they published the letter of the All-Union Central Executive Committee (AUCEC) "On the formation of the ethnic Village Soviets into separate units" which became the key document to be guided by in the process of setting up ethnic Village Soviets. This document ordered the districts with the "mixed ethnic population when breaking up the ethnic Village Soviets into smaller units to select the villages with the homogeneous population in order to set up their own Village Soviets". In the cases when the number of the population in such a village failed to reach the norm required to set up the Village Soviet, the latter could be set up by the decree of the territorial, regional, provincial and district executive committees [4].

Both the central and ethnic Village Soviets in conformity with the VIIIth chapter of the Regulations on the Northern Caucasus territory had a common structure

of power. The difference was in their national character and norms of representation in the Soviet. One delegate was elected per "each 50 inhabitants" so that the total number of the deputies did not exceed 100 and one third of the candidates [8]. Certainly the most important specific feature of such Village Soviets was the broad application of the native language in the office work, legal procedure, cultural and educational sphere, specifically in education. At the territorial meeting of the officials responsible for the affairs of the ethnic minorities (1927), they passed the resolution "On the Soviet work among the ethnic minorities" where they paid attention to the fact that all the office work in the ethnic Village Soviets should be done in the native language" [9].

Thanks to the measures taken in the course of the re-election campaign to the local Soviets in 1925/26 fresh impetus was given to the process of the formation of the ethnic Village Soviets into separate units. So, for example, at the sitting of the Presidium of the Northern Caucasus Territorial Executive Committee on 30 December 1925 it was decided to set up 13 ethnic Village Soviets and the instructions were given to speed up work to form the new ones into separate units. At the same session of the Presidium they considered the issue of breaking up into separate units a certain number of Village Soviets in the Black Sea area [10].

During the election campaign of 1926-1927 the number of the ethnic Village Soviets grew considerably. In 1928 in the Northern Caucasus there were already 158 ethnic Village Soviets among them 46 German, 22 Armenian, 14 Turkmenian, 12 Russian (included in the mountaineer autonomies), 11 Greek, 7 Kalmyk, 5 Ukrainian, 5 Shapsugh and others [11]. This number excluded the "mixed" Village Soviets. In the process of the development of the indicated "local" forms of the national autonomy in the neighboring ethnic and "mixed" Village Soviets the following national districts were formed: Turkmensk, Shapsugh, three Cossack (Maisk, Petropavlovsk, Ardon), two Armenian (Miasnikov, Armenian), German, Vanno, Kalmyk and Greek.

The one hundred thousand-strong German population of the Northern Caucasus and the Don area, of which 95% were peasants, were involved on a large scale in the work on the formation of the ethnic Village Soviets into separate units [12]. The German population led in the national colonies (settlements) quite a secluded life. It retained its language, confession (Lutheranism, Mennonite religious practice, Catholicism) and managed the farm-type economy. Despite the serious damage caused by the Civil War, the "middle class"

German farms were notably distinguished from those of some other ethnic groups by their potential and the culture of crop-growing.

The need for the enormous quantities of marketable grain, special mutually beneficial relationships that had taken shape between the Soviet Russia and Germany were the main cause of a more careful treatment of the German population by the authorities. During the election campaign of 1925-1926 the German Village Soviets were formed into separate units practically in all the districts of the South of Russia. By the end of 1928, not counting the “mixed” Village Soviets, Donetsk district had had 10 German Village Soviets, Armavir district – eight (Vanno district was formed on its basis), Don district – eight, Stavropol district – eight, Terek district – seven, Kabardian-Balkar Autonomous District – three, Matveev-Kurgan territory of Taganrog district – five, etc. By mid-30-s the Northern Caucasus had had 56 German Village Soviets [12].

In the early 30-s the total of all the ethnic Village Soviets in the Northern Caucasus territory was 203 [13]. The autonomies and especially Daghestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic that had joined the Northern Caucasus territory, where in 1931 there were 44 ethnic Village Soviets added considerably to the number of the ethnic Village Soviets.

In other autonomous districts there were 71 ethnic Village Soviets, including 18 in Adygh and Kabardian-Balkar Autonomous Regions, 13 – in Chechnya, 11 – in Karachai, 7 in Circussian, 4 in the North-Ossetian Autonomous Regions [14].

Other multinational regions of Russia applied the experience of the ethnic construction in the Northern Caucasus. By mid-1930s in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic they had set up 4264 ethnic Village Soviets [15].

The late 20-s marked the beginning of the “great change” that consolidated the totalitarian foundations of the Soviet society. In the conditions of the rigid centralism the status of the ethnic districts and Village Soviets tended to become more and more formal. In the long run they were abolished.

CONCLUSION

In modern conditions, the experience of the organization and functioning of the ethnic Village Soviets, the use of the native language in the office work, the system of interaction between the local government and

the higher bodies is only applicable in those regions of the compact residence of the ethnic groups where, on the one hand, the potential of the exterritorial cultural and ethnic autonomy fails to meet the ethnic aspirations and, on the other hand, where due to a whole number of objective and subjective reasons there is no opportunity to form an ethnic district into a separate unit. What, for example, will be the negative results of the introduction of the status of the ethnic self-government in a number of the Ingush settlements of Northern Ossetia? Of the Nagai settlements of Daghestan, Karachai-Circussia and Stavropol, etc.?

Unlike the demands for the regional autonomy and the revision of the existing boundaries that abound in the programs of a whole number of the ethnic movements the existence of the ethnic self-government within the limits of the monoethnic settlements cannot but cause quite justifiable misgivings about a possible intensification of the centrifugal tendencies and even the violation of the “territorial integrity” of the “title nation” of a number of the subjects of the RF. On the contrary, the disregard of the national problems is the right breeding-ground for the intensification of the ethnofugal processes.

These proposals are also related to the Russian settlements of a number of the Northern Caucasus subjects whose population is deprived of the “protection mechanism”. The ethnic self-government could successfully perform this function.

REFERENCES

1. Kriazhkov, V., 1994. The status of the small nations in Russia: legal acts and documents. Moscow: Iuridicheskaya Literatura, pp: 250.
2. The Federal law of the Russian Federation “On the national and cultural autonomy” of 17.06.1996 #74-FZ.
3. The Federal law of the Russian Federation “On the general principles of the organization of the local government in the Russian Federation” of 06.10.2003 #131-FZ.
4. Lazovskii, I. and I. Bibin, 1928. The Soviet policy for the period of 10 years on the national question in the RSFSR. Moscow – Leningrad, pp: 499.
5. The All-Union Census of 17 December, 1926. Preliminary results. Issue 3. Moscow.
6. The Center of the Documentation of the Modern History of Rostov Region. F.R.-7. op. 1, d. 165. l. 8; d. 139, l. 23.

7. Proceedings of the Northern Caucasus regional executive committee, 1925. *Izvestiia Severo-kavkazskogo Kraiispolkoma*, pp: 19.
8. The State Archives of Rostov Region. F.R.-1485. op. 1. d. 172, l.182.
9. Proceedings of the Northern Caucasus Regional Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (of the Bolsheviks), 1927. *Izvestiia Severo-Kavkazskogo kraikoma VKP(b)*. #10-11.
10. The Center of the Documentation of the Modern History of Rostov Region. F.R.-7. op. 1, d. 173. ll. 245-246.
11. The Central State Archives of Chechnya. F.R. -264. op. 1. d.1.
12. Akopian, V., 2005. Brief essay on the history of the Germans in the Northern Caucasus. Pyatigorsk: PGLU, pp: 60.
13. Petrov, V., 1930. Socialist construction in the national regions and regions of the national minorities of the Northern Caucasus. Rostov-on-Don.
14. Rodnevich, B., 1931. Indigenization of the apparatus in autonomies and regions of the national minorities in RSFSR. *Revoliutsiia I Natsionalnosti*, 12: 12-13.
15. Nurmakov, N., 1934. The main results and tasks of implementation of Lenin's national policy in RSFSR by XVII party convention. *Revoliutsiia I Natsionalnosti*, 2: 29.