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TERRITORIAL IN PRINCIPLE, PERSONAL IN PRACTICE:

Early Soviet Non-Territorial National Autonomy Arrangements*

Although it has long been acknowledged that Soviet rule defined and institutionalized nations according to the principles of territoriality and personality,[1] the territorialization of ethnicity remains much better understood than the personal, non-territorial dimension of Soviet nationalities policy. In theory, territorial autonomy was the only form of autonomy acceptable to the Bolsheviks. Stalin called it "the only correct solution" in his 1913 polemic against cultural-national (i.e., non-territorial) autonomy and its most prominent Austro-Marxist theoreticians, Karl Renner and Otto Bauer.[2] As late as 1929, he cautioned party members not to confuse

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[1] Rogers Brubaker. Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe. Cambridge, MA, 1996. P. 34; Yuri Slezkine. The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism // Slavic Review. 1994. Vol. 53. No. 2. P. 415.

[2] Joseph Stalin. Sochineniia. Vol. 2: 1907–1913. Moscow, 1954. P. 361.

the Soviet policy of promoting and patronizing national cultures with the fallacy of Otto-Bauerism (*otto-bauerovshchina*).[3] However, in practice the initial Soviet response to national diversity was marked by non-territorial autonomy arrangements, even if territorial autonomy had been increasingly dominant since the mid-1920s.

Scholars have noted that the Soviet discourse on nationhood and emphasis on national autonomy owed much to Austro-Marxism.[4] They have also acknowledged the inherent tension between the personal and the territorial elements in the Soviet approach to nationhood.[5] The Soviet attempt to solve this dualism by creating ever smaller national territories, too, has been studied in some detail, especially by Terry Martin.[6] Scholars have also identified what is usually portrayed as non-territorial departures from an otherwise territorial nationalities policy. In a footnote, Martin pointed out that institutions such as national schools, clubs, and reading rooms were provided extraterritorially.[7] And Jeremy Smith has argued that even though Soviet autonomy was based on territorial units, it was hard to distinguish from the previously vilified model of "extraterritorial cultural autonomy" because: (a) Soviet national territories had authority over the cultural affairs of their respective nationals even outside these territories; and (b) minorities who lacked their own territorial autonomy were catered to by a central Commissariat for Nationalities Affairs.[8] Still, the historiography on the issue tends to remain too fettered to the territorial analytical framework and thus fails to fully account for how pervasive and integral non-territorial autonomy arrangements were to early Soviet nationalities policy. As Smith pointed out in his critique of the very concept of a Soviet nationalities

[3] Matthias Battis. On Common Ground: Soviet Nationalities Policy and the Austro-Marxist Premise // Europe-Asia Studies. 2024. Vol. 76. No. 7. P. 996.

[4] Iurii Semenov. Iz istorii teoreticheskoi razrabotki V. I. Leninym natsional'nogo voprosa // Narody Azii i Afriki. 1966. No. 4. Pp. 106–129; Jeremy Smith. The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917–1923. London, 1999. P. 28; Gerhard Simon. Nationalismus und Nationalitätenpolitik in der Sowjetunion: Von der totalitären Diktatur zur nachstalinschen Gesellschaft. Baden-Baden, 1986. P. 156; Eric van Ree. The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin: A Study in 20th Century Revolutionary Patriotism. London, 2002. Pp. 56–57; Hélène Carrère d'Encausse. The Great Challenge: Nationalities and the Bolshevik State, 1917–1930. New York, 1991. Pp. 12, 38.

[5] Brubaker. Nationalism Reframed. P. 34; Terry Martin. The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939. Ithaca, NY, 2001. P. 72.

[6] Martin. Affirmative Action Empire. P. 32.

[7] Ibid. P. 33.

[8] Smith. Bolsheviks. P. 171.

policy, the consensus in Western historiography is that this policy promoted "the national and cultural development of non-Russian nationalities (nation-building) *on a territorial basis*."[9] There is a growing awareness of the shortcomings of Soviet territorial autonomy with regard to mobile or dispersedly settled groups and to "non-titular" minorities.[10] And while our article speaks to this increased interest in territory in the study of global and imperial history,[11] it shifts the focus away from territory and toward the non-territorial autonomy arrangements embedded within the structures of the Soviet state and Bolshevik Party.

Specifically, this article zooms in on the few albeit formative years *preceding* what has been called the "great era of the territorialization of ethnicity" during the second half of the 1920s.[12] During this period, the initial Soviet response to national diversity was marked by the provision of non-territorial autonomy arrangements to particular nationalities countrywide through a network of nationality-specific organs of the Soviet state and Bolshevik Party. In the case of the party, these organs were the national sections of the Russian Communist Party (RKP[b]). In the state – that is, the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (RSFSR) – they were known as the national commissariats (later departments) of the People's Commissariat for Nationalities Affairs (Narkomnats RSFSR). The People's Commissariat of Education (Narkompros RSFSR), too, maintained a net-

[9] Jeremy Smith. Was There a Soviet Nationality Policy? // Europe-Asia Studies. 2019. Vol. 71. No. 6. P. 980 (emphasis added).

[10] Stephan Rindlisbacher and Alun Thomas. Paths Not Taken: How Did Nomadism Affect Border-Making During National Delimitation in Central Asia? // Ab Imperio. 2023. Vol. 24. No. 2. Pp. 117–141; Timothy Blauvelt. The "Mingrelian Question": Institutional Resources and the Limits of Soviet Nationality Policy // Europe-Asia Studies. 2014. Vol. 66. No. 6. Pp. 993–1013; Jonathan Raspe. Soviet National Autonomy in the 1920s: The Dilemmas of Ukraine's Jewish Population // Nationalities Papers. 2022. Vol. 50. No. 5. Pp. 886–905.

[11] Charles S. Maier. Once Within Borders: Territories of Power, Wealth, and Belonging Since 1500. Cambridge, MA, 2017; Kate Brown. A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland. Cambridge, MA, 2003; Svetlana Gorshenina. L'invention de l'Asie centrale: histoire du concept de la Tartarie à l'Eurasie. Geneva, 2014.

[12] Martin. Affirmative Action Empire. P. 33. While territorialization had already begun in early 1919 with the creation of the Bashkir Autonomous Socialist Republic, large-scale, consistent territorialization was established in 1924 with the creation of national districts and soviets in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. See Olena Palko and Roman Korshuk: Constructing Ethnic Identities in Early Soviet Ukraine // Manuel Férez Gil and Olena Palko (Eds.). Ukraine's Many Faces: Land, People, and Culture Revisited. Bielefeld, 2023. Pp. 176–178.

work of national subdepartments within its Department for the Education of National Minorities. Together, they formed a granular network of organs that extended from the level of the central state to that of local government to deal predominantly with the cultural affairs of individual nationalities on a non-territorial basis.

While this article focuses primarily on the RSFSR and Jewish and Muslim non-territorial autonomy arrangements within it, it is worth noting that these arrangements often extended to (or were replicated in) other Soviet republics. In the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, for example, there were Polish and Jewish national sections of the Communist Party of Ukraine KP(b)U; a Department for National Minorities Affairs (established within the Ukrainian People's Commissariat of the Interior in 1921); and as of 1922, national subdepartments within the Ukrainian People's Commissariat of Education.[13] In Soviet Turkestan, non-territorial autonomy arrangements were instituted both when the region was formally part of the RSFSR and when it was cut off from Moscow between late 1917 and October 1919. The realities of early Soviet rule meant that the competences of central institutions, such as the Narkomnats RSFSR, tended to transcend the borders of Soviet republics. A 1920 RSFSR government decree authorized the Narkomnats RSFSR to establish representations (*predstavitel'stva*) not just in all autonomous republics and regions (*oblasti*), but also "in friendly Soviet Republics that are not part of the RSFSR" to ensure the protection of "the rights and interests of national minorities."[14] Outlining the rationale for this decision, an internal Narkomnats document spoke of the need to further centralize nationalities policy toward national minorities and to better "adapt the Soviet apparatus in any given republic or region to them."[15] In Baku in July 1921, a Narkomnats official was thus able to berate members of the Azerbaijani government for their lack of attention to minority affairs, telling them that

[13] Yuki Murata. Nationalization in Revolutionary Ukraine, 1905–1921: Ukrainian Self-Determination and Russian Nationality / PhD diss.; University of Vienna, 2025. Chapter 8.1.3; Viktor Husiev. Zakon Tsentral'noi Rady "Pro personal'no-natsional'nu avtonomiiu": Peredumovy, istoriia pryiniattia ta naslidky // Naukovi zapysky IPiEND. 1999. No. 8. Pp. 72–79.

[14] Issued by the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (VTsIK) and the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom): Postanovlenie VTsIK i SNK ob uchrezhdenii predstavitelei Narodnogo komissariata po delam natsional'nostei v avtonomnykh respublikakh i avtonomnykh oblastiakh, December 14, 1920 // State Archive of the Russian Federation (henceforth GARF). F. 1318. Op. 22. D. 44. L. 177.

[15] GARF. F. 1318. Op. 22. D. 44. L. 170 (Sovnarkom and VTsIK on Narkomnats plenipotentiaries, December 9, 1920).

his commissariat was equipped with "the broadest scope for action and all rights and powers to organize the affairs of all nationalities both within the RSFSR and beyond its borders."[16]

While such blurring of borders and competences mirrored the wider chaos and fluidity of revolutionary Russia during the Civil War, it also reflected the Bolsheviks' hope to gain the support of non-Russians both within and outside of the former Russian Empire and to export the revolution. The Piedmont principle played a role in the provision of Soviet territorial autonomy.[17] But it could also apply to non-territorial autonomy arrangements.[18] In 1918 and 1919, Bolshevik Muslim party sections worked not just among the communist parties of Bukhara and Khorezm, but also with Turkish and Iranian revolutionaries.[19] And in 1921, the Central Bureau of Turkic Peoples at the Central Committee of the RKP(b) (Biuro Turknarodov) reported that its official newspaper *Eshche* (Worker) circulated throughout "all of inner Russia" and "in Afghanistan, Persia and among prisoners of war in Turkey" and that the bureau had overseen the organization of schools and party schools, cultural-educational clubs, "reading huts," libraries, nurseries, and orphanages and worked with women "in all Eastern Autonomous Republics, regions, and provinces."[20]

The remit of national party sections did not end here. In 1920 and 1921, the Muslim Bureau of the Agitprop Department of the TsK RKP(b) in the Petrograd City region was, as its name suggests, responsible for publishing newspapers, staging plays, and working with prisoners of war. Moreover, its duties included rallying funds for famine relief and "the inspection of resettlement centers for refugees from the famine-stricken provinces of [Soviet

[16] Protokol soveshchaniia po delam natsional'nykh men'shinstv 18.7.1921 v Polnomochnom Predstavitel'stve RSFSR po natsional'nym delam pri Pravitelstve ASSR // GARF. F. 1318. Op. 23. D. 13. L. 301ob.

[17] In 1923, for example, Volga Germans lobbying for the upgrading of their region to republic status stressed that this would have "beneficial political results … on an international scale." Dokladnaia zapiska po voprosu o provozglashenii Oblasti Nemtsev Povolzh'ia, November 3, 1923 // GARF. F. 1318. Op. 23. D. 9. L. 13.

[18] Ivan Sablin. National Autonomies in the Far Eastern Republic: Post-Imperial Diversity Management in Pacific Russia, 1920–1922 // History and Anthropology. 2017. Vol. 28. No. 4. P. 454.

[19] Ia. Sh. Sharapov. Natsional'nye sektsii RKP(b). Kazan, 1967. Pp. 100–102; Zvi Gitelman. Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics: The Jewish Sections of the CPSU, 1917–1930. Princeton, 1972. P. 94.

[20] Otchet TsBbiuro Tiurkskikh Narodov pri Ts.K.R.K.P.(b) k 10 s"ezdu // Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (henceforth RGASPI). F. 17. Op. 60. D. 957. L. 78.

Tatarstan]."[21] Similarly, in 1922 the German section of the Communist Party of Ukraine (KP[b]U) had to deal not only with cultural matters, such as the secularization of German-language education, but also with more material concerns, such as the subversion of the Union of Mennonites (not least to appropriate twenty-five tractors it had received from the US), the transfer of malnourished children from the Volga region to Odesa, and the sending of delegations to Germany and Switzerland to secure funds for famine relief.[22]

All this nationally targeted and centrally coordinated state and party work among nationalities in and beyond the RSFSR could be described as non-territorial diversity management rather than "autonomy" – a term that in Soviet terminology was reserved for territorial arrangements. Admittedly, the provision of native-language propaganda and press, education and culture (theater, film, literature) and even material assistance, such as hunger relief or the housing of refugees, amounted to "autonomy" only in a very limited sense of that word. Soviet non-territorial autonomy was highly constrained, volatile, and designed to control and subvert. It had more to do with Soviet imperial diversity management than with national self-rule. But the same holds true for Soviet territorial autonomy, notwithstanding the declared and in part genuine anti-imperial and anti-colonial impulses of early Soviet rule. A long and confidential letter by Bashkir communists to the Narkomnats and to Stalin personally dating from November 1922 provides a litany of complaints about the lack of indigenization and the privileged position of Russians in the Bashkir Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic and argues that "the Bashkir people will feel like a nation" only if Bashkort is made the official language in the republic.[23] Clearly, territorial autonomy was not everything and cultural autonomy was more than nothing.

It is important to bear in mind that a lack of resources often meant that non-territorial autonomy arrangements were not so much non-territorial as nonexistent. In 1922, the secretary of the RKP(b)'s Mari section issued a confidential warning to the Narkomnats that "all Mari cultural-educational institutions had to close" due to a lack of funds.[24] But the provision of Soviet territorial autonomy was often equally precarious. Incidentally, the same

[21] Doklad o deiatel'nosti musul'manskogo biuro Agitatsionno-Propagandistskogo Otdela pri Ts.K. R.K.P.(b) v period za vremia s 1-e ianvaria 1920 goda po 1-e fevralia 1922 goda // RGASPI. F. 17. Op. 60. D. 957. L. 113–114ob.

[22] Otchet podotdela Natsmen Agitpropa TsKKP(b)U za 1922 god // RGASPI. F. 17. Op. 60. D. 1012. L. 6ob.

[23] GARF. F. 1318. Op. 23. D. 13. L. 202–205ob. (November 1922).

[24] Ibid. L. 47.

report stated that things were so desperate that even party members were going hungry.

In other words, one might argue that any form of Soviet autonomy – territorial and non-territorial – was too constrained and flawed to be called autonomy. One might even be tempted to agree with Nikita Ivanov, the state prosecutor of the Kalmyk Autonomous Oblast since November 2, 1922, who was reported to the Narkomnats and fired in March 1923 for the "careless and unacceptable" statement that "it's no secret to anyone that nationalities policy is a fiction."[25] The fact that Ivanov was almost certainly dismissed for not having taken nationalities policy (presumably indigenization) seriously enough only goes to show that such a policy did exist. But there was truth in his implication that that policy was somewhat cosmetic. Any form of national autonomy was always going to sit uncomfortably with a political party and state whose declared aim was to overcome national diversity, just as any form of self-rule would always be hamstrung by the notions of proletarian dictatorship and democratic centralism. Even Lenin, who was always careful not to dismiss the slogan of national self-determination, explicitly cautioned against substituting class for nationality as late as August 1917.[26] This was also the crux of Stalin's 1913 polemic against non-territorial autonomy, in which he claimed that its adoption at the Brünn/Brno Party Congress in 1899 had led to the disintegration of the Austrian Social-Democratic Party (apparently, Stalin was untroubled by the fact that non-territorial autonomy was never adopted by that party).[27] Before 1917, the slogan of national self-determination was just that: a slogan. It was only after 1917 that the Bolsheviks came to see nationality more positively as a vehicle for non-Russian cultural, economic, and political development and that national autonomy became Soviet policy.[28] The fact that this autonomy took forms that were territorial *and* non-territorial ought to be no more surprising than the paradox that a state that dismissed nationalism as a bourgeois smoke screen designed to weaken class consciousness ended up promoting national diversity and autonomy.[29] How

[25] Protokol zasedaniia kalmytskogo oblastnogo komiteta RKP(b), March 24, 1923// GARF. F. 1318. Op. 23. D. 9. L. 48.

[26] Vladimir Il'ich Lenin. State and Revolution. New York, 1932.

[27] Stalin. Sochineniia. Vol. 2. Pp. 330–331; Börries Kuzmany. Vom Umgang mit nationaler Vielfalt: Eine Geschichte der nicht-territorialen Autonomie in Europa. Berlin, 2024. P. 57.

[28] Smith. Bolsheviks. P. 28.

[29] Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin. Introduction // Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (Eds.). A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin. New York, 2001. P. 16.

severely limited this autonomy was is even less surprising and a different question altogether.

To deflect from the integration of non-territorial autonomy arrangements into their avowedly territorial nationalities policy, the Bolsheviks tended to juxtapose territorial and non-territorial autonomy as inherently incompatible.[30] In reality, Karl Renner and Otto Bauer had suggested a hybrid approach that combined territorial and non-territorial autonomy within a multinational state.[31] The same hybridity also characterized the diversity management trends that developed in the Russian Empire before and during the Revolution. When members of socialist parties of the various nationalities of the empire met in 1907 on the initiative of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, both territorial and non-territorial forms of autonomy were seen as legitimate options, even if significant disagreements remained on the issue of whether non-territorial autonomy was supposed to be extended to all nationalities or only to some.[32] A similar dynamic emerged when this debate moved from the imperial center to other parts of the empire. The All-Russian Congress of Muslims in May 1917 voted for a Russian republic that was based on "national-territorial, federal principles," but would provide "nationalities who are lacking a concrete territory … with national-cultural autonomy."[33] A very similar resolution was adopted at the Congress of Representatives of the Peoples of Russia, held on the initiative of the Ukrainian Central Rada in Kyiv in September 1917.[34]

Given this widespread support for national-cultural autonomy, it is perhaps unsurprising that even Bolshevik polemicists occasionally hinted at the need for compromise. As Stepan Shaumian conceded in his 1914 attack on Davit Ananun, the leader of the Armenian Social Democratic Labor Organization, "there might be a set of circumstances in which we will be forced

[30] Battis. On Common Ground.

[31] Kuzmany. Vom Umgang. Pp. 54–79.

[32] Tat'iana I. Khripachenko. Poniatiia federatsiia, detsentralizatsiia, avtonomiia v sotsialisticheskom i liberal'nom diskursakh Rossiiskoi imperii (konets XIX–nachalo XX veka) // Aleksei Miller, Denis Sdvizhkov, and Ingrid Schierle (Eds.). "Poniatie o Rossii": K istoricheskoi semantike imperskogo perioda. Vol. 2. Moscow, 2012. Pp. 99–142; Klaus Heller. Revolutionärer Sozialismus und nationale Frage: Das Problem des Nationalismus bei russischen und jüdischen Sozialdemokraten und Sozialrevolutionären im Russischen Reich bis zur Revolution 1905–1907. Frankfurt Main, 1977. Pp. 149–155.

[33] S. M. Iskhakov. Velikaia rossiiskaia revoliutsiia 1917 goda i musul'manskoe dvizhenie. Moscow, 2019. P. 153.

[34] Z''izd ponevolenykh narodiv (8–15 veresnia 1917 r.) / Ed. Oleksandr P. Reient and Bohdan I. Andrusyshyn. Kyiv, 1994. Pp. 310–311.

to reconcile ourselves even to the demand for national-cultural autonomy with regard to some nation or other."[35] Evidently, while principles mattered to the Bolsheviks, so did political expediency.

Non-territorial Autonomy Arrangements of the State: the People's Commissariat for Nationalities and Its Muslim (Sub)Commissariat

The People's Commissariat for Nationalities is perhaps the best illustration of the early Soviet state's reliance on non-territorial autonomy arrangements. Usually unacknowledged, this was openly admitted by the senior Narkomnats official and prominent Tatar Bolshevik Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev in October 1918, when he described the constituent national (sub) commissariats of the Narkomnats as "the apparatuses of the cultural-national autonomy of the individual nationalities [of the RSFSR]."[36] Sultan-Galiev is recognized today as perhaps the most prominent proponent of what Alexandre Bennigsen has labeled Muslim National Communists, whose notions of national autonomy were often profoundly affected by the Austro-Marxist idea of non-territorial national autonomy as a means of bringing about Muslim unity in Russia.[37] It was thus only fitting that he led an institution that he deemed best suited to achieve these goals: the Muslim Commissariat of Narkomnats, known as Muskom in the acronymophile jargon of the time.[38] In October 1918, when he saw the integrity of the Muskom threatened by a proposed reform of the regional structures of the Narkomnats, he appealed to the Soviet government (Sovnarkom) to frustrate the reform and preserve the Narkomnats and its Muskom as guarantors of Muslim non-territorial national autonomy.[39]

Preoccupied with national diversity, the Narkomnats had always been a somewhat awkward fit for the Soviet state.[40] This was only increased by

[35] S. G. Shaumian. O natsional'no-kul'turnoi avtonomii. Moscow, 1959. P. 3. For more details on the spread of the idea of non-territorial autonomy in the Caucasus, especially among Georgian Mensheviks and the Armenian Dashnaktsutyun, see: Kuzmany. Vom Umgang. Pp. 237–239.

[36] Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev. Izbrannye trudy. Kazan, 1998. P. 157.

[37] Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush. Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union: A Revolutionary Strategy for the Colonial World. Chicago, 1979. P. 10.

[38] The term "Muslim" in the commissariat's name effectively served as an ethnoconfessional category mainly signifying Tatars and Bashkirs.

[39] Sultan-Galiev. Izbrannye trudy. P. 157.

[40] Stephen Blank. The Sorcerer as Apprentice: Stalin as Commissar of Nationalities, 1917–1924. Westport, CT, 1994. P. 54.

its focus on national *groups* rather than national *territories*. Sara Barbieri has convincingly argued that the Narkomnats, in particular before it was restructured in 1921, was de facto a non-territorial autonomy institution because it was structured around peoples rather than territories or topics.[41] A Narkomnats report-cum-mission-statement for the period November 1917 to June 1918 reflects this rather well. Stating that the "basic nucleus of our Commissariat is the national commissariats," it explained that each of these commissariats (and departments) dealt with the affairs of a particular nationality and was staffed by its members.[42] By June 1918, thirteen of these had been established, including Polish, Latvian, Armenian, Jewish, and Muslim commissariats along with Estonian, Chuvash, and Ukrainian departments. They were tasked with "informing the Soviet authorities about the needs of a *given nationality*," addressing the "cultural-educational needs of … a *given nationality*," and conducting propaganda "among the masses of a *given nationality*."[43] The principle of creating separate and non-territorial organs for individual nationalities could hardly have been expressed more plainly. Equally striking is the fact that the Narkomnats and its constituent national commissariats and departments were supposed to facilitate the establishment of "administrative-territorial national autonomy *in cases where this is required by special economic and territorial conditions.*"[44] Remarkably, territorial autonomy was seen as a potential but not an inevitable form of autonomy.

Established in January 1918 as the Commissariat for the Affairs of the Muslims of Inner Russia, the Muskom was an important and independent constituent national commissariat of the Narkomnats. In addition to seven functional departments (print, education, labor, agriculture, forests, legal, and military), the commissariat comprised a department for Bashkirs and one for the Caucasus and Turkestan.[45] The lack of a Tatar department reflected the tacit agreement that the Tatars, who were both politically highly mobilized and well represented in positions of authority within the commissariat, were

[41] Sara Barbieri. National Minorities in Post-revolutionary and Soviet Russia (1917–1932): Theoretical Framework and Institutional Arrangements / PhD dissertation; Università della Republica di San Marino, 2011.

[42] Narodnyi komissariat po delam natsional'nostei: Otchet o deialtel'nosti 1 noiabria 1917 goda – 20 iiunia 1918 goda. Moscow, 1918. P. 5. There appears to have been some confusion about the terms "department" and "commissariat," with the latter signifying more important national organs within Narkomnats, such as the Evkom or the Muskom.

[43] Narodnyi komissariat po delam natsional'nostei: Otchet. Pp. 5–6.

[44] Ibid. P. 5 (emphasis added).

[45] Ibid. P. 8.

understood to be its main concern. The presence of a *regional* department (for the Caucasus and Turkestan) in an otherwise national (Tatar-Bashkir) commissariat is noteworthy because it represented an inversion of the usually assumed Soviet hierarchy of territoriality over personality. That said, the Bashkir department was called on to pave the way for the creation of a Tatar-Bashkir Republic, which ultimately resulted in the establishment of the Bashkir Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic in March 1919. But the department's immediate task was to defend "the exclusively Bashkir cultural-economic and political interests."[46] This brief – like that of the Muskom overall – bore all the hallmarks of non-territorial autonomy.

Sultan-Galiev's abovementioned and ultimately futile appeal to the Soviet government in October 1918 was prompted by an attempt by Stalin, then the people's commissar for nationalities, to limit the extraterritorial powers of the central national commissariats and their regional departments by strengthening the control of local soviets over them. Until then, regional departments had been under the direct and exclusive control of their central counterparts, such as the Muskom. Now, these departments were supposed to be replaced with weaker national sections that were part of (and partially controlled by) provincial executive committees of local soviets – the so-called Gubispolkoms.[47]

Sultan-Galiev hoped to shield the Muskom from these changes. He insisted that the Narkomnats must be built on "the principle of cultural-national autonomy for the proletariat of … [Soviet] nations" and that this principle was manifested in the creation of "permanent and unified organs of the cultural-national autonomy of the nation," that is, "the national commissariats and their regional branches."[48] In explicitly Austro-Marxist terms, Sultan-Galiev asserted that institutions of national-cultural autonomy, such as the Muskom, were not a provisional concession to the last vestiges of national difference, but the permanent accommodation and institutionalization of this difference on a non-territorial basis.[49]

To Sultan-Galiev, the Narkomnats was no less than the "centralized state apparatus of the cultural-national autonomy of the nations inhabiting the RSFSR" – an institution that combined central state control over the national commissariats with "the principle of proportional representation

[46] Ibid. P. 10.
[47] Ot narodnogo komissariata po delam natsional'nostei // Zhizn' Natsional'nostei. 1918. December 15. No. 6. P.
[48] Sultan-Galiev. Izbrannye trudy. P. 156.
[49] Ibid. P. 156.

of the proletariat of individual nations."[50] In the same Austro-Marxist vein, he argued that the collegium of the Narkomnats should consist of delegates of the national proletariats represented at the Narkomnats and "elected by the national sections of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets."[51] This was a vision of a Narkomnats functioning as a central government organ of national-cultural self-government proportionally elected by the national curiae or sections of the workers of individual nations. What Sultan-Galiev proposed – and what in part already existed – was proletarian non-territorial national autonomy.

The Subversion and Co-optation of Non-Bolshevik Non-territorial Autonomy Arrangements and Demands

Before 1917, the Bolsheviks had dismissed national-cultural autonomy as a nationalist aberration of their non-Russian political rivals on the left, "including the Bundists, the liquidators in the Caucasus, and the conference of Russian national parties of the Left-Narodnik trend," as Lenin wrote in 1913.[52] After 1917, the Bolsheviks went on to co-opt the ideas of their rivals and – in cases where the latter had already begun setting up non-territorial autonomy institutions in the wake of the February Revolution – to substitute these with Soviet organs that were non-territorial in all but name. An important prerequisite for this process of co-optation was the transmission of knowledge about non-territorial autonomy in Russia via Jewish socialist parties. Activists of the Jewish Socialist Workers Party, such as Haim Zhitlowsky and Mark Ratner, had edited the translations of the key Austro-Marxist writings and crucially influenced the national program of the Socialist Revolutionaries. The Jewish Labor Bund, by far the strongest Jewish socialist party, and its main ideologues – Vladimir Medem, Vladimir Kossovski, and Maria Frumkina (Esther Frumkin) – strongly influenced both currents of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party. While the Mensheviks progressively took over the Bund's cultural-national autonomy project, the Bolsheviks fiercely opposed the Bund as political rivals.[53] But they, too, were influenced by Bundist

[50] Ibid. P. 157.
[51] Ibid.
[52] V. I. Lenin. Kriticheskie zametki po natsional'nomu voprosu [1913] // V. I. Lenin. Polnoe sobranie sochinenii. Vol. 24. Moscow, 1973. P. 135.
[53] Kuzmany. Vom Umgang. Pp. 223–237; Roni Gechtman. Jews and Non-Territorial Autonomy: Political Programmes and Historical Perspectives // Ethnopolitics. 2016. Vol. 15. No. 1. Pp. 66–88.

thinking on national autonomy, as becomes apparent when reading an article published in the official mouthpiece of the Narkomnats *Zhizn' national'nostei* (the Life of the Nationalities) in December 1918. Titled "The Education of National Minorities," it set out the rationale behind the creation of a Department for the Education of National Minorities at the People's Commissariat of Education (Narkompros) of the RSFSR.

Its author was Semen Dimanshtein, a long-serving Bolshevik and a figure through which many threads of non-territorial Soviet nationalities policy passed. Between 1917 and 1920, he effectively, albeit intermittently, led the Narkomnats and its Jewish commissariat, the Evkom, as well as the Jewish Section of the Bolshevik Party, the so-called Evsektsiia.[54] The article walked a tightrope between condemning cultural-national autonomy and proposing its partial appropriation. While it sought to calm skeptics that the time of the bourgeois and nationalist "theory of 'cultural-national autonomy'" was well and truly over, it also suggested that Marxists ought to approach the issue pragmatically and ask themselves "whether we need … a purely 'cultural-national autonomy.'"[55] Dimanshtein went on to present a surprisingly sympathetic analysis of the Bund's demand for native-language schooling for national minorities and cautiously advocated its integration into Bolshevik nationalities policy, reminding readers that this was not unprecedented: "One should not forget that the national program of the 'Bund' was included in our minimum program."[56] Agreeing with the Bund's view that the central government and the Narkompros alone were incapable of tackling the issue of education in languages other than Russian, Dimanshtein called for the creation of a Department for the Education of National Minorities. Comprising an equal number of representatives from the Narkompros and the Narkomnats, it would provide additional expertise to better adapt minority schooling "to the way of life of each people." He explained that each of the national commissariats of the Narkomnats would be furnished with "a Cultural-Educational Department working specifically with its own nation" and that representatives of each nation would have "the decisive voice in matters concerning exclusively [their] nation" in the new department's governing body.[57] He did not call this ar-

[54] For Dimanshtein's role at Narkomnats, see Smith. Bolsheviks. P. 23.

[55] Prosveshchenie natsional'nykh men'shinstv // Zhizn' national'nostei. 1918. December 22. No. 7.

[56] Prosveshchenie natsional'nykh men'shinstv (Okonchanie) // Zhizn' national'nostei. 1918. December 29. No. 8.

[57] Ibid.

rangement a form of national-cultural autonomy or a type of educational autonomy on a non-territorial basis. But it would have been recognizable as such to anyone familiar with the subject. It certainly would have been water to the mills of those "eminent comrades" who only a few months earlier had – in Dimanshtein's own words – "accused me of wanting to create a new Bund within the Party, when I first outlined the form of the new [Jewish party] sections."[58] In an attempt to dispel this accusation, Dimanshtein insisted that the Evsektsiia was "not a special party as such, but a part of the Communist Party" and that its commitment to Yiddish was entirely pragmatic and not a nationalist or religious fetish.[59] None of this could disguise the fact, however, that the Jewish party sections – just like the Department for the Education of National Minorities – represented the integration of Bundist demands for a degree of national (Jewish) and non-territorial cultural autonomy.

The Department for the Education of National Minorities that eventually took shape was a central government organ with jurisdiction over the educational affairs of national minorities throughout Soviet Russia. It maintained subdepartments at the "regional [*oblastnykh*], provincial, and district [levels] … in places where national minorities exist."[60] Its institutional network privileged nationality over territory and quickly proliferated. In March 1920, for example, within the department's division for adult education, a Commission for the Elimination of Illiteracy was set up under the leadership of Sofia Dzerzhinskaia.[61] This commission then created national sections and national subdepartments at the central and local level and financed the distribution of almost two million copies of adult-education textbooks among Turkic-speakers ("Muslims"), Jews, Mordvins, Latvians, Armenians, Kalmyks, and Kazakhs.[62] Any national section or subdepartment involved in this effort was merely one of a myriad of different national sections, departments, and subdepartments tucked away in the labyrinthian

[58] David Shneer. Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet-Jewish Culture, 1918–1930. Cambridge, 2004. P. 29; G. V. Kostyrchenko. Tainaia politika Stalina: Vlast' i antisemitizm. Moscow, 2004. Pp. 60–61.

[59] Shimon Dimanshteyn. Idishe kumunistishe sektsyes // Der emes. 1918. September 12. No. 15. P. 1.

[60] S. V. Mironenko. Arkhiv noveishei istorii Rossii. Seriia "Publikatsii". Vol. 12: Kul'tura, nauka i obrazovanie, oktiabr' 1917–1920 gg. Protokoly i postanovleniia Narkomprosa RSFSR. Part 2: Ianvar'–dekabr' 1919 g. Moscow, 2016. P. 54.

[61] Vo vse p/otdely otdela prosveshcheniia natsional'nykh men'shinsvt Narkomnats, March 18, 1920 // GARF. F. 1318. Op. 22. D. 44. L. 35.

[62] Ibid.

structures of various Soviet institutions. If looked at in isolation, they were merely a minuscule part of the Soviet approach to national minority education. However, when seen as part of a wider network of national organs at the Narkompros, the Narkomnats, and within the party, this approach amounted to a form of non-territorial accommodation of national diversity, the cumulative effect of which went far beyond distributing math manuals to Latvians and Kalmyks.

The Bolshevik strategy of co-option and subversion was of course not limited to the Bund. A closer look at Sultan-Galiev's earlier-mentioned appeal to Sovnarkom is evidence of the same process. It makes apparent that the Muskom and its regional network were, at heart, substitutes for rivaling national organizations of Muslim cultural-national autonomy, which has also been argued by Irina Nam in her book on minority autonomy movements in Siberia and the Far East between 1917 and 1922.[63] In particular Sultan-Galiev's account of the Muskom's genesis showed that its rise heralded not the end of non-territorial Muslim national autonomy, but merely a change of its political allegiance.

Sultan-Galiev's appeal to Sovnarkom made no secret of the Muskom's origins as a substitute for extant rivaling organizations of Muslim autonomy. He recounted that in the wake of the February Revolution "Russian Muslims established organs of cultural-national autonomy" such as "the All-Russian Muslim national council [*milli shuro*] and its regional departments," the national parliament [*milli Mejlis*] of the Muslims of Inner Russia and Siberia in Kazan, and other organs in "regions inhabited by Muslims, such as Turkestan, the Caucasus, and Crimea."[64] The Muskom "emerged as a counterweight" to these entities, Sultan-Galiev argued.[65]

Sultan-Galiev's vision of Muslim unity through national-cultural autonomy was essentially a more strictly proletarian mirror image of what his onetime patron and subsequent rival, the prominent Ossetian Menshevik and co-organizer of the All-Russian Congress of Muslims, Ahmed Tsalikov, had called for at that congress in May 1917.[66] According to Tsalikov, "Cultural-national autonomy of the Muslims of Russia" was the only guarantor of

[63] Irina V. Nam. Natsional'nye men'shinstva Sibiri i Dal'nego Vostoka na istoricheskom perelome (1917–1922 gg). Tomsk, 2009. P. 195. See also Irina Nam. Non-Territorial Autonomy in Russia During the Revolution and the Civil War // Nations and Nationalism. 2025. https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.13085.

[64] Sultan-Galiev. Izbrannye trudy. P. 158.

[65] Ibid. P. 159.

[66] Ibid. P. 10.

their "cultural and political unity."[67] Sultan-Galiev, too, sought to preserve a degree of Muslim cultural and political unity by non-territorial means. Speaking in Moscow in December 1920, he pointed out that where once the "entire territory inhabited by Turko-Tatar peoples was covered by a network of *milli shuro*s," the establishment of the Muskom meant that soon "the entire Volga region was being covered in a network of provincial and district Muslim commissariats."[68] Politically, the replacement of *milli shuro*s with Muslim commissariats was undoubtedly a major change, but structurally, it was not. Both represented a non-territorial form of national self-rule.

Non-territorial Autonomy Arrangements of the Party: The National Sections of the Russian Communist Party

Before the October Revolution national party cells had already existed on the local level to agitate the local non-Russian working masses and later to export the Bolshevik Revolution to nation-states in the making, such as the independence-seeking Baltic states. Structurally, the national sections were integrated horizontally on the territorial level and vertically on the ethnonational level. This meant that the national sections in a specific town were part of the agitprop departments of the local party organization. At the same time, they had to follow the directives of the central offices of their respective national sections in Moscow.[69] Most of the national sections of the national minorities in western regions of the RSFSR, such as Estonians, Poles, and Germans, were quickly and more thoroughly integrated into the local agitprop departments. The Jewish and Muslim sections remained fairly independent for longer, which was tolerated by the party as long as they did not seek to create party structures separate from the RKP(b).[70]

The Jewish sections and their central office, the Evsektsiia, were the most stable and independent of all national sections and continued to function until 1930. This was surprising given that the lack of Jewish Bolsheviks eager and qualified to work with the Jewish masses in Yiddish

[67] Iskhakov. Velikaia rossiiskaia revoliutsiia. P. 131. For more on the debate between the delegates at the First All-Russia Muslim Congress in May 1917 over Muslim autonomy in a new Russian state, see Elizabeth Bospflug. The Muslim "Federalist Debate" in Revolutionary Russia // Ab Imperio. 2017. Vol. 18. No. 1. Pp. 131–162.

[68] Sultan-Galiev. Izbrannye trudy. Pp. 305, 308.

[69] Sharapov. Natsional'nye sektsii RKP(b). Pp. 251–255.

[70] Victor Dönninghaus. Minderheiten in Bedrängnis: Sowjetische Politik gegenüber Deutschen, Polen und anderen Diaspora-Nationalitäten 1917–1938. Munich, 2009. Pp. 278–286.

seriously hampered their establishment in 1918.[71] But it reflected the fact that Soviet Jews were the largest national group to remain unterritorialized, receiving the fig leaf of the Birobidzhan autonomous Jewish district only in 1934.[72]

The personnel in the Evkom and the Evsektsiia central office largely overlapped, as the differentiation between state and party organs was weak under Soviet rule. More unusual was the fact that the Jewish commissariat and section included Jewish activists who were socialist but not Bolshevik (or had newly joined the Bolsheviks), crucially from the Bund and the Fareynikte, a merger of the aforementioned Jewish Socialist Workers Party and other socialist parties with a strong focus on non-territorial autonomy.[73]

This influx of Jewish socialists to the Bolshevik party significantly increased after the splits within the Bund and the Fareynikte in 1919. The breakaway Kombund and Komfareynikte eventually joined the RKP(b) in 1921. While these parties had to abjure the commitment to non-territorial autonomy, their members did not change their convictions overnight.[74] A telling case is that of Maria Frumkina (Esther). A leading figure within the Kombund and a member of its central committee, she took to the pages of a Yiddish newspaper published in Minsk to make the case for her party to join the Bolsheviks: "Whatever happens to the name of the Bund, to the form of the Bund … Bundism will live as long as the Jewish proletariat lives … [it] will be triumphant![75] Esther became a leading activist in the Evsektsiia before falling prey to Stalin's purges in the late 1930s, when

[71] Börries Kuzmany. Die Neuerfindung des Judentums: Der Aufbau einer sowjet-jüdischen Nation im Spiegel jiddischer Parteiorgane (1917–1922) // Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas. 2005. Vol. 53. No. 2. Pp. 248–250.

[72] On the establishment of Jewish national autonomy in Birobidzhan, see Antje Kuchenbecker. Zionismus ohne Zion. Birobidžan: Idee und Geschichte eines jüdischen Staates in Sowjet-Fernost. Berlin, 2000.

[73] Boris Zinger and Lilia Belenkia. Stages in the Formation of Policy on the Jewish Question in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 1917–28 // Shvut: Studies in Russian and East European Jewish History and Culture. 1996. Vol. 3. No. 19. Pp. 112–146.

[74] Henry Abramson. A Prayer for the Government: Ukrainians and Jews in Revolutionary Times, 1917–1920. Cambridge, MA, 1999. P. 149; Mordechai Altshuler. The Attitude of the Communist Party of Russia to Jewish National Survival, 1918–1930 // YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science. 1969. No. 9. Pp. 68–86.

[75] Tsu unzer diskusye // Der veker. 1921. February 18 (cited in Gitelman. Jewish Nationality. P. 209).

she was branded a bourgeois nationalist.[76] But even in the politically more pluralistic climate of the early 1920s, former Jewish socialists tended to conceal the intellectual origins of their support for separate Jewish institutions. When the ex-Bundist Abram Merezhin argued in favor of the needs of "exterritorial national minorities" in 1923, he also made sure to distance himself from the "supporters of Otto Bauer's theory."[77]

Important studies of recent decades have analyzed how Jewish activists fostered a Yiddish school system, promoted theater and film productions, and spurred the publication of newspapers, journals, and books in the name of the Bolshevik ideology.[78] All of them correctly anchor these cultural efforts in the Soviet policy of indigenization but tend to conflate that policy with the creation of national territorial units, even though indigenization was underpinned by the personality principle. In Belarus, for example, it did not mean Belarusianization for national minorities, who were targeted with separate indigenization drives.[79] The aim was to foster a new communist elite among non-Russians. Admittedly, territorialization was often the default option. But in many cases, the national sections of the RKP(b) took over. This applied to the scattered Jewish population as well as to those members of other nationalities who lived outside their respective national republics, which in the case of the Tatars or Germans amounted to more than

[76] Suzanne Sarah Faigan. An Annotated Bibliography of Maria Yakovlevna Frumkina (Esther) / PhD dissertation; Canberra: Australian National University, 2018. Pp. 3–19; Börries Kuzmany. Marija Frumkina (Esther) und die nationale Frage in Russland // Christoph Augustynowicz, Dietlind Hüchtker, and Börries Kuzmany (Eds.). Perlen geschichtswissenschaftlicher Reflexion: Östliches Europa, sozialgeschichtliche Interventionen, imperiale Vergleiche. Göttingen, 2022. Pp. 31–38.

[77] Stat'ia sekretaria Tsentral'nogo Biuro evreiskoi sektsii pri TsK RKP(b) A. N. Merezhina "O tezisakh t. Stalina (k 12-mu parts''ezdu)" 5 aprelia 1923 g. // V. P. Dmitrenko and A. P. Nenarokov (Eds.). Natsional'nyi vopros na perekrestke mnenii: 20-e gody. Moscow, 1992. P. 139.

[78] Shneer. Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet-Jewish Culture; Anna Shternshis. Soviet and Kosher: Jewish Popular Culture in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939. Bloomington, 2006; Gennady Estraikh. Soviet Yiddish: Language Planning and Linguistic Development. Oxford, 1999; Jeffrey Veidlinger. The Moscow State Yiddish Theater: Jewish Culture on the Soviet Stage. Bloomington, 2000; Elissa Bemporad. Becoming Soviet Jews: The Bolshevik Experiment in Minsk. Bloomington, 2013; Andrew Sloin. The Jewish Revolution in Belorussia: Economy, Race, and Bolshevik Power. Bloomington, 2017; Maryna Batsman. Bolsheviks' Great Expectations: Sovietizing Jews in the Ukrainian Province, 1919–1930 / PhD dissertation; Florence: European Universtiy Institute, 2019.

[79] Per A. Rudling. The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism, 1906–1931. Pittsburgh, 2015. Pp. 142–159.

half the population. A report by the German Central Bureau at the Council of National Minorities at the Commissariat for Education (Sovnatsmen Narkompros RSFSR) dating from November 1922 stressed the challenge of reaching through its network of sections a "German population [that is] spread across all the areas of the RSFSR," and whose number "outside of autonomous regions and republics is about 1,000,000."[80] The national sections followed cultural guidelines developed by their central offices and were applied to all members of a given nationality irrespective of the territorial unit they lived in.

The Evsektsiia is one example of early Soviet non-territorial autonomy arrangements within the party, the Musbiuro (the Central Bureau of Muslim Communist Organizations) is another. Admittedly, the replacement of Sultan-Galiev's independent Muslim Communist Party by the Musbiuro in November 1918 was a setback for Muslim autonomy within the party.[81] It was created under Stalin's direction in the hope that it would prove a more compliant tool for placating Muslim irritation at Russian chauvinism.[82] Like its counterpart in the state apparatus, the Muskom, the Musbiuro was a Soviet adaptation and subversion of earlier, ideologically and politically less obedient organizations built around the personality principle. Soviet scholarship explained the Musbiuro's creation by suggesting that the Central Committee "tolerated the existence of an extraterritorial Central Bureau [Musbiuro] for as long as national republics and oblasts with the relevant party organizations had not yet been created."[83] Whatever the reason may be, in practice, at least until 1920 the work of the Musbiuro's national sections "was territorially unconstrained" even in areas with the Turkic-speaking majority in the Volga-Urals region, Central Asia, and the Caucasus.[84]

As the number of Turkic-speaking ("Muslim") autonomous socialist Soviet republics, such as the Bashkir, Tatar, and Turkestan ASSRs, grew post-1918, fewer and fewer Muslim national sections continued to function in the territorially unconstrained manner. Placed under the authority of the relevant republican communist parties, they were left in charge only of people living outside "their" national territorial unit.[85] But national sections

[80] O deiatel'nosti tsentral'nogo nemetskogo biuro pri Sovnatsmene NKP za poslednie 10 mesiatsev s 1/1 po 1/10 1922 g. // RGASPI. F. 17. Op. 60. D. 996. L. 53, 55.
[81] Sharapov. Natsional'nye sektsii RKP(b). P. 89.
[82] Shoshana Keller. The Central Asian Bureau, an Essential Tool in Governing Soviet Turkestan // Central Asian Survey. 2003. Vol. 22. No. 2–3. P. 282.
[83] Sharapov. Natsional'nye sektsii RKP(b). Pp. 184–185.
[84] Ibid. P. 77.
[85] Ibid. Pp. 183–188.

continued to get involved in minority affairs within their respective Soviet republics. In the Azerbaijan SSR, for example, representatives of the Jewish, Greek, German, and Iranian sections of the Central Committee of the Azerbaijan Communist Party (AKP[b]) teamed up with the plenipotentiary of the Narkomnats RSFSR in the republic, Efim Gerasimov, to criticize Azerbaijan's track record on minority rights.[86] During a meeting in Baku in July 1921, Gerasimov listened to a litany of complaints from representatives of the national sections. For example, a certain Ismailov from the Iranian section claimed that the Armenians were being overlooked, with "no schools … established [and] teachers … not being paid."[87] Gerasimov did not mince his words when he argued that although "Azerbaijan is regarded as autonomous and independent," nationalities policy was ultimately the prerogative of the Narkomnats RSFSR, which he described as "a supra-state organ" for whose work "there are no borders between Soviet states."[88] Belittling his Azeri hosts as "natives [*tuzemtsy*] [who] … still need the material and spiritual help of the politically, economically, and culturally more developed Russian nation," he presented the Narkomnats and himself as extraterritorial and anational (*vnenatsional'noe*) arbiters, who sought to ensure that no "dominant nationality [*narodnost'*] … forgets about [the needs] of other national minorities."[89] Gerasimov's language, attitude, and understanding of the extraterritorial powers of the Narkomnats as Moscow's representative in Azerbaijan were blatantly imperial, which was duly recognized by Stalin, who sacked Gerasimov several weeks later.[90] However, Gerasimov's rhetoric also conveyed an extraterritorial minority rights regime based on the cooperation of the national sections of the Azerbaijani Communist Party with the Narkomnats RSFSR.

Non-territorial Autonomy Arrangements and Imperial (Dis)integration: The Narkomnats and the Musbiuro in Turkestan

Contrary to what Bolshevik polemicists have said about cultural-national autonomy, non-territorial autonomy is not so much an ideology as an admin-

[86] Protokol soveshchaniia po delam natsional'nykh men'shinstv v polnomochnom predstavitel'stve RSFSR po natsional'nym delam pri pravitel'stve ASSR, July 18, 1921 // GARF. F. 1318. Op. 23. D. 13. L. 297–304ob.
[87] Ibid. L. 300ob.
[88] Ibid. L. 301ob.–303.
[89] Ibid.
[90] T. Iu. Krasovitskaia. Natsional'nye elity kak sotsiokul'turnyi fenomen sovetskoi gosudarstvennosti (oktiabr' 1917–1923 g.). Moscow, 2007. P. 376.

istrative tool. This is borne out by the experience of the Turkestan ASSR, where non-territorial autonomy arrangements acted as instruments both for and against the republic's integration with the RSFSR.

The Turkestan Commissariat for National Affairs (Turkomnats) was established in May 1918 as an organ of the state (the Turkestan ASSR).[91] The Central Bureau of Muslim Communist organizations of Turkestan (Musbiuro) was founded in March 1919 as a party organ.[92] Initially, both were created as vehicles for Muslim emancipation in the face of the exclusionary politics of local Russian and European settlers, who dominated the Tashkent soviet.[93] But relations between them soured as the Musbiuro used this anti-colonial (and increasingly Turkist) agenda to strive for greater independence from Moscow and to marginalize and ultimately abolish the Turkomnats in the autumn of 1919. Both the Turkomnats and the Musbiuro were built around the personality principle, with each maintaining a network of national organs throughout Turkestan – "departments" within the Turkomnats and "sections" within the Musbiuro.[94] The Turkomnats defined itself in August 1918 as "the representative and defender of the interest of the customary and social life of individual nations." Similarly, the Musbiuro's national sections were open "to all members of the Communist Party belonging to a given nation."[95]

Their shared anti-colonial agenda notwithstanding, the increasingly confident Musbiuro soon became ever more critical of the perceived failure of the Turkomnats to be sufficiently inclusive of Muslims.[96] Politically more powerful, the Musbiuro achieved the abolishment of the Turkomnats at the

[91] N. T. Bezrukova et al. (Eds.). Pobeda Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii v Uzbekistane: sbornik dokumentov. Vol. 2. Tashkent, 1972. P. 545.

[92] M. P. Georgadze. S"ezdy sovetov Soiuza SSR, soiuznykh i avtonomnykh sovetskikh sotsialisticheskikh respublik: sbornik dokumentov: 1917–1937. Vol. 1. Moscow, 1959. P. 371.

[93] Adeeb Khalid. The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia. Berkeley, 1998. Pp. 287–288; Adeeb Khalid. Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR. Ithaca, NY, 2016. Pp. 107–108.

[94] Bezrukova. Pobeda Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii. P. 421.

[95] Turar Ryskulov. Revoliutsiia i korennoe naselenie Turkestana. Part 1: 1917–1919. Tashkent, 1925. P. 124.

[96] The Musbiuro's statute – accepted by the First Regional Conference of Muslim Organisations of the RKP in Turkestan in May 1919 – gave it the right to supervise whether the Turkomnats and its branches "correctly implement the communist program with respect to Muslim organizations." Polozhenie o Turkestanskom kraevom biuro musul'manskikh organizatsii RKP // Musbiuro RKP(b) v Turkestane: 1, 2 i 3 Turkestanskie kraevye konferentsii RKP, 1919–1920 gg. Tashkent, 1922. P. 20.

Eighth Congress of Soviets of Turkestan in Tashkent in October 1919.[97] The charge leveled against the Turkomnats was telling: "In the light of the internationalist slogans of Soviet rule, the existence of separate institutions that seek to protect separate nationalities, is simply out of the question."[98] The delegates obviously had a point. However, the same critique was fully applicable to the Musbiuro and its national sections.

Turar Ryskulov, one of the Musbiuro's most prominent members, had set out the non-territorial and anti-colonial rationale behind the creation of its national sections in June 1919. He argued that national self-determination meant allowing "the peoples of the East" to "organize their own national proletarian unions [*ob"edineniia*]" in the form of national sections, which need to be set up "everywhere – in auls, kishlaks, and districts" to reach a "population [that] is scattered throughout the whole region [*krai*]."[99] These national sections were established at party committees across Turkestan with the same rights as party cells. And unlike the latter, they were directly subordinate to their respective local Musbiuros.[100] They were quite obviously separate institutions that provided forms of autonomy to separate nationalities on a non-territorial basis.

Throughout 1919, Ryskulov's advocacy for a Musbiuro with strong extraterritorial powers turned into a nationalist call for greater territorial autonomy for Turkestan within the RSFSR. In January 1920, the Musbiuro passed a resolution declaring Turkestan "a National Soviet Republic, where the self-determining and indigenous people is the Turkic people … [and where] territorial autonomy … and national composition coincide."[101] This conflation of nation and territory bore the exclusionary hallmark of the principle of territoriality. But even for this Turkic national republic the Musbiuro envisaged the use of national party sections to facilitate the merging of its various Turkic peoples (Tatars, Kirgiz, Uzbeks, etc.) into one Turkic nation and even to encourage the incorporation of Turkic peoples from outside the RSFSR into Turkestan.[102] In other words, non-territorial autonomy arrangements had briefly become part of a Turkist push for a more autonomous Turkestan within the RSFSR.

[97] Bezrukova. Pobeda Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii. P. 373; V. G. Chebotareva. Narkomnats RSFSR: svet i teni natsional'noi politiki 1917–1924 gg. Moscow, 2003. Pp. 733, 752.
[98] Georgadze. S"ezdy sovetov Soiuza SSR. P. 391.
[99] Ryskulov. Revoliutsiia i korennoe. P. 122.
[100] Rezoliutsiia konferentsii o musul'manskikh natsional'nykh sektsiiakh pri komitetakh partii // Musbiuro RKP(b) v Turkestane. P. 23.
[101] Telegramma Eliavy v TsK, January 28, 1920 // RGASPI. F. 122. Op. 1. D. 31. L. 3–3ob.
[102] Ibid.

Just like Sultan-Galiev's vision of the Muskom as the guarantor of All-Muslim cultural-national autonomy, Ryskulov's path from a de facto autonomous and extraterritorial Musbiuro to a Turkic Soviet Turkestan did not come to fruition. Ultimately, the breaking of Alexander Dutov's Orenburg blockade by the Red Army in October 1919 ended Turkestan's period of de facto independence from Moscow that had lasted since March 1917. In February 1920, Moscow reestablished control through the appointment of a Turkestan Commission (Turkomissiia). In June, a Politburo resolution defined Turkestan as an autonomous part of the RSFSR and recognized Kazakhs, Uzbeks and Turkmens as its Indigenous peoples.[103] In September, the Turkestan government created "national departments for the Russian population and other groups at all institutions."[104] And in December, national sections for Kazakhs (still called Kirgiz), Uzbeks, and Turkmens were created at Turkestan's Central Executive Committee (TurkTsIK).[105] In May 1921, the idea of reestablishing the Turkomnats was first raised but rejected.[106] When the issue was voiced a second time in the summer by the plenipotentiary of the Narkomnats RSFSR in Turkestan, Semen Dimanshtein, it was again met with resistance, this time from Nazir Tiuriakulov, who had replaced Ryskulov at the helm of the TurkTsIK. Tiuriakulov and other Muslim communists continued to resist Moscow-backed non-territorial arrangements.[107]

Ultimately, the Turkomnats was reestablished in August 1921 as the Turkestan People's Commissariat for Nationalities (Turnarkomnats) complete with four national departments for the Kazakhs, Turkmens, Uzbeks, and "national minorities for all remaining nations." Dimanshtein set out the mission statement for the new commissariat. He stressed that these "departments should enjoy a significant degree of independence because they personify [their respective] nations." The document painted a picture of a Turkestan that was the exact opposite of the one that had been evoked in the earlier-mentioned Musbiuro resolution. Where the latter had spoken of a Turkic national republic in which "territorial autonomy … and national composition coincide," Dimanshtein described Turkestan as "an exceptional republic of [often dispersed] nationalities," where "the national and the territorial principles do not fully coincide."[108] He argued that this exceptional

[103] Khalid. Making Uzbekistan. Pp. 111, 113–115.
[104] Georgadze. S''ezdy sovetov Soiuza. P. 432.
[105] Ibid. P. 466; Chebotareva. Narkomnats RSFSR, P. 753.
[106] Chebotareva. Narkomnats RSFSR, P. 753.
[107] Ibid. P. 754.
[108] Stalin v. Narkomnats, August 30, 1921 // RGASPI. F. 558. Op. 1. D. 5636. L. 26.

diversity called for an institution capable of fulfilling "the special task of adjusting the state organs to the exclusive needs of each nation separately."[109] Not only was this institution, the Turnarkomnats, non-territorial by design, it was also unmistakably Austro-Marxist in spirit, perhaps unsurprisingly, given Dimanshtein's track record in Bolshevizing Bundist policies.

Early Soviet non-territorial autonomy arrangements in Turkestan took divergent political trajectories. Both the Turkomnats and the Musbiuro began as tools for greater Muslim inclusion and regional integration with the RSFSR based on the personality principle. The Musbiuro's increasingly Turkist tendencies ultimately led it onto a path toward greater territorial autonomy for Turkestan (albeit with non-territorial elements). Lastly, the reestablished Turnarkomnats of 1921 stood for yet another non-territorial arrangement for Turkestan – one that was less Turkist and aimed at closer integration with the RSFSR and thus both more imperial and, ironically, more permissive of national diversity within Turkestan.

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As we have seen, non-territorial autonomy arrangements were an integral part of early Soviet rule. As an administrative tool, they were reconcilable with varying political agendas and with both a centralist and federalist state design. They posed no obstacle to political, administrative, and economic centralization and could even be conducive to the centralizing and imperial tendencies of Soviet state-building. At the same time, they could be harnessed for an agenda aimed at a looser imperial integration with the RSFSR.

One might be tempted to dismiss early Soviet non-territorial autonomy arrangements as purely ornamentalist, their practical significance being severely limited by the structural constraints of the Soviet political system. But the same could be said about Soviet territorial autonomy. The extent of any Soviet autonomy arrangement depended on the political and military context as well as on its proponents' position in the political hierarchy.

Soviet non-territorial autonomy arrangements were not merely a temporary aberration from an otherwise territorial Soviet nationalities policy that lasted until 1930, at least in the case of the Jewish people. Rather than disregarding them as mere antecedents of the territorial autonomy to come, they need to be taken seriously in an open-ended revolutionary context, where they allowed the Bolsheviks to gain support among key national

[109] Ibid.

minorities, such as Jews and "Muslims," among whose elites demands for cultural-national autonomy were particularly widespread.

Writing in Vienna in 1913, Stalin was uncompromising in his defense of the principle of territoriality: "There is no middle way – principles triumph, they do not 'compromise,'" he trumpeted.[110] And yet a compromise between the principles of personality and territoriality was precisely what the Bolsheviks relied on when faced with the challenge of building a state and a party that were at once centralized and capable of accommodating demands for greater national autonomy. Esther was right in her prophesy that Bundism would be triumphant. And Stalin was proved wrong. Principles had been compromised. Territoriality had given ground to personality.

SUMMARY

The article challenges the conventional understanding of the early Soviet nationalities policy as primarily territorial, arguing that non-territorial (personal) national autonomy arrangements were a significant and integral aspect of the Soviet policy at least until the mid-1920s. The Bolsheviks, despite theoretically favoring territorial autonomy, implemented non-territorial government and party structures to manage national diversity. These arrangements, often inspired by Austro-Marxist ideas, provided cultural and sometimes material support to specific nationalities regardless of their geographic location. Through case studies of the Jewish Evsektsiia and the Muslim Muskom in Turkestan, the article illustrates how these non-territorial approaches served various political agendas, ranging from securing central control to facilitating greater regional autonomy before territorialization became dominant. Ultimately, the piece contends that early Soviet nationalities policy was a pragmatic blend of territorial and personal principles, with non-territorial national autonomy playing a crucial role in the Bolsheviks' efforts to build a centralized yet diverse state.

Резюме

Статья пересматривает общепринятое представление о раннесоветской национальной политике как преимущественно территори-

[110] Stalin. Sochineniia. Vol. 2. Pp. 366–367.

альной, демонстрируя значимость мер в области нетерриториальной (персональной) национальной автономии для советской национальной политики, по крайней мере, до середины 1920-х годов. Несмотря на поддержку принципа территориальной автономии в теории, на практике большевики внедряли и нетерриториальные структуры управления национальным многообразием. Демонстрируя влияние идей австромарксизма, они оказывали культурную, а иногда и материальную поддержку определенным национальностям независимо от их географического положения. На примере еврейской Евсекции и мусульманского Мускома в Туркестане статья показывает, что эти нетерриториальные подходы могли преследовать разные политические цели, в диапазоне от усиления контроля центра до повышения региональной автономии. В статье делается вывод о том, что раннесоветская национальная политика прагматично сочетала принципы территориальной и персональной автономии, причем последняя поначалу играла решающую роль в усилиях большевиков по созданию централизованного государства, обеспечивающего национальное разнообразие.