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Issues of Education and National Culture in the Work of North Caucasian Deputies of the State Duma of the Russian Empire (1907–1912)

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Abstract

The objective of the study is to analyze the activities of the North Caucasian deputies of the third-convocation State Duma of the Russian Empire in addressing issues of education and national culture. The people's deputies were focusing on the most relevant and vital questions of the Russian reality: democratization of political life, the problem of national and religious relations, education and enlightenment, as well as many others. The role of North Caucasian deputies in the consideration of draft laws on the development of national education and the empowerment of indigenous languages of the region is defined. The analysis of the transcripts shows that the people's deputies constantly paid attention to the violation of the civil rights of the local population and discrimination on religious and national grounds (in particular, the prohibition of local judicial proceedings in the native language). In the State Duma of the third convocation, the North Caucasian deputies were able to amend the law "On the Transformation of the Local Courts", according to which judges were obliged to speak local languages (the law was approved by the Emperor on June 15, 1912). They also supported bills on the development of teaching in local languages, on the establishment of national and religious equality, on the development of culture and school management.

After analyzing the materials and sources, the author comes to the conclusion about the high activity of the deputies in the elaboration of religious bills, as well as in solving the problems of national culture and education. However, the establishment of the June 3rd model of formation of the Duma led to ignoring the need for representation of the outskirts of the Empire in the all-Russian Parliament, which, in turn, brought about the stagnation and subsequent collapse of the entire political system.

Keywords: State Duma, Russian Empire, national question, national culture, education, North Caucasian deputies.

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1. Introduction

Russia had historically been formed as a complex state in the national, religious, civilizational, cultural and social/political aspects. Peoples, cultures, and religions had to share administrative and territorial boundaries confining large areas. The main efforts of the national government were focused on maintaining the unity and integrity of the country.

In the late Imperial period, St. Petersburg faced the task of uniting the society on the basis of the empire ideology, which led to the development of the idea of forming cultural and linguistic unity with the explicit dominant positions of the Russian language and culture as the basis for the formation of a common Imperial supranational identity (Kanukova et al., 2019: 2425-2433; Kobakhidze, 2016: 5)

Since the existence of national and regional peculiarities in all life aspects was a major obstacle to the implementation of this task, the government was forced to modernize basing on russification, which in those conditions meant not creating advantages and privileges for Russians, but first of all, systematization and unification of management, and integration of all ethnic groups to form a unified nation of Russia.

The objective need to adapt the outdated state system to the new conditions was shaped by the modernization of the Imperial political and economic system. The reforms of the autocratic political system of the Russian Empire, which were carried out in 1905-1906 by the pragmatically thinking part of the Russian ruling elite, opened up new opportunities for the constitutional development of the country and the formation of civil society. The Manifesto of October 17, 1905 proclaimed the creation of the State Duma in Russia, the first all-imperial election representative institution. It also transformed the State Council and established a joint Council of Ministers. The Manifesto, along with guarantees of civil rights and freedoms, gave an impetus to the creation of regional public and political organizations, the formation and reinforcement of national consciousness and the national political elite of the peoples of Russia. The North Caucasus was no exception to the rule. Under the slogan of constitutional dialogue with the authorities, the local political elite sought to develop their own behavior strategy. The establishment of the State Duma allowed the peoples of the North Caucasus to hope for the possibility of an open national-level discussion of issues relating to acute socio-economic, legal, religious and ethnic/cultural problems, which was becoming more relevant by the day, bringing the intensity of political tension in the region to a critical mark.

Analysis of the political and legal aspects of the State Duma and its impact on the economic, religious and cultural life of the peoples of the Caucasus and Russia as a whole is very relevant, as it allows to recreate a more complete picture of the transformations that were taking place in the region.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. The most important source were the published materials of the State Duma: verbatim records of the meetings, reports of deputies' speeches, collections of documents on the meetings and committees of the Duma.

2.2. The main research methods will be the principles of historicism and objectivity, which are based on the knowledge of things and phenomena in their formation and development. This approach seems promising, as it implies the possibility of avoiding unilateralism and bias in the evaluation of historical events. For the research of the verbatim transcripts of the state Duma meetings, the method of content analysis was used.

3. Discussion

In general, there are no special works devoted to the study of this problem. However, in historical literature, some aspects of this problem have been considered in the context of the study of other issues.

From the array of published works (more than 1,000 publications) on the process of understanding the relevant problems of Russian reality, it is necessary to mention the works of following prominent figures: V. N. Kokovtsov (Kokovcov, 2004), P. N. Miliukov (Miljukov, 1990), as well as witnesses and participants of many political events of the early 20th century, which has recreated the atmosphere that prevailed in the society of the time: A. A. Kizevetter (Kizevetter, 1907), D. N. Shipov (Shipov, 2007), A. Tyrkov-Williams (Tyirkova-Vilyams, 2007) and others.

Against the background of the mass politization of society that arose in connection with the first Russian revolution, the discussion in the State Duma of various aspects of the national, religious issue led to the publication of reflections on the debate in the Tauride Palace by S. Budilovich (Budilovich, 1907), G.A. Evreinov (Evreinov, 1908) and others.

Events related to national relations problems, understanding the needs of different ethnic groups, the choice of the most appropriate methods and forms of resolving the national issue explain the interest of specialists. A number of monographs, such as the ones by V. S. Dyakina (Djakin, 1998), I.E. Dunyushkin (Dunjushkin, 2003), A.A. Chemakin (Chemakin, 2018), etc., are aimed at overcoming the gap in this issue.

The need to rethink the political process in the Russian Empire in the early 20th century, the place and role of the State Duma brought about a number of new publications by V. Shelokhaev (Shelohaev, 1983), A.V. Gogolevsky (Gogolevskij, 2002), V.A. Demin (Demin, 1996), S.V. Darchieva (Darchieva et al., 2017), A.A. Kerimov (Kerimov, 2018). Early 20th century, which was incredibly rich in outstanding events, was a time of radical changes not only in the lives of the peoples of the Russian Empire, but also on a global scale. Therefore, this period in the political history of Russia draws the attention of foreign historians, such as A. Kappeler (Kappeler, 2000), M. Matthews (Matthews, 1994), E. Thaden (Thaden, 1990) and others.

4. Results

On April 27, 1906 the State Duma began its activity in the Russian Empire. The historical purpose and the main task of the Duma were to help the country out of the deepest economic, political and interethnic crisis. An objective assessment of the events that actually took place in the country was expressed by the historian and deputy of the Constitutional Democratic fraction, Alexander Kiesewetter: "It is still possible to rule over Russia using just the military force without the Duma; but it is impossible to govern Russia, i.e. regulate the life processes of a great country in a legitimate way, without the Duma" (Kizevetter, 1907: 194).

However, the Duma was established by those who were not really interested in its efficient functioning. The first two Dumas could hardly have any influence on the government policy, for the Council of Ministers only reported to the Emperor; besides, the Duma's legislative competence was blocked by the conservative upper chamber (State Council), the Emperor's right of veto. Besides, it could be overruled by emergency legislation. Yet these Dumas were an important forum for political debate. The land issue was brought to the fore of all the Duma debates, while specific national issues only became the subject of discussion sporadically. Such matters were the subject of Duma debate as equal rights for ethnic minorities, schooling in their native languages, freedom of religion, the responsibility of officials for the pogroms and many more.

The events that took place in Russia in relation to the dissolution of the second Duma and the change of the electoral law, are referred to as Coup of June 1907 by historians. The Emperor had every right to narrow and expand the rights and institutions he himself had granted to the country. However, the new law on elections, which got promulgated on the following day, clearly violated the constitutional provision that prohibiting to use Article 87 for "modifying the regulations on elections to the Council or the Duma" (Pajps, 2005: 249). To circumvent this restriction, amendments to the electoral law were made through the issuance of an Imperial Proclamation, as required for matters of vital national importance.

The law On Elections of June 3, 1907 reduced the number of members of the Duma by 82 deputies (from 524 to 442), one of its goals being a radical limit to the representation of national regions. The Manifesto on the dissolution of the State Duma and the change in the order of elections of June 3 read: "The State Duma, which has been established in order to strengthen Russia, should also be Russian in spirit. Other ethnic groups, which are part of our power, should have representatives of their needs in the State Duma, but not by so many people as to give them the opportunity to be the arbiters of purely Russian issues. In the same peripheral regions of the country, where the population has not achieved a sufficient level of civil development, elections to the State Duma should be temporarily suspended" (Kalinychev, 1957: 273).

As a result, according to the electoral law on June 3, 1907, the representation of Polish provinces in the III and IV Dumas decreased by 23 mandates (from 37 to 14), the Caucasus lost 19 of 29 seats (with only 10 left), the representation of Siberia and the Far East decreased by 7 seats (from 21 to 14), and of the 23 deputy seats for Central Asia and Kazakhstan, only 1 remained for the

Ural Cossacks ([Demin, 1996: 14](#)). The following North Caucasian deputies took part in the work of the third State Duma: Mr Pokrovsky from Terek Region, Kuban Region and the Black Sea Province (member of the RSDLP); Mr Tikhonov was elected to represent the Terek Cossacks (Octobrist resigned for health reasons in 1908, replaced by Mr. Lisichkin), Mr Bardige (Constitutional Democrat, Head of the Cossack group in the Duma). The representative of the Dagestan region and the Zakatala district in the Duma was Mr. Gaidarov (Social Democrat, who later joined the Muslim fraction). ([Boiovich, 1913](#)).

Thus, among the 4 Duma deputies from the Caucasus, two belonged to the left wing, one was a Constitutional Democrat, and the remaining one was an Octobrist. In general, Octobrists and those who shared their beliefs had a majority in the Duma: 154 of the 442 mandates. The right wing and the Nationalists obtained 147 seats, the Constitutional Democrats, 52 seats, and more than 40 non-partisan deputies adjoined them. The Social Democrats were represented by only 19 deputies. Such a composition of the Duma split it into two blocs - the right/Octobrist wing and the Octobrist/Cadet one, depending on the position the Octobrists, being the leading fraction. Over the five years of its work, the Third Duma considered and approved more than 2,000 bills, most of which were current laws.

A significant decrease in representation from the peripheral regions of Russia in the Duma of the third convocation under the electoral law on June 3, 1907 practically deprived the North Caucasian deputies of the opportunity to influence the course of the Duma debate. In order to be heard, the deputies who represented non-Russian ethnic groups and regions in the State Duma adopted new tactics. They used the discussion of issues and bills launched by the government and major fractions as a platform to express their positions, strived to make as many amendments, proposals and requests as possible. For example, the members of the Muslim fraction, Khas-Mamedov, Gaidarov, Enikeev and the Social Democratic Party deputies: Saghatelyan, Pokrovsky II, Chkheidze criticized the government's national policy when discussing the estimates of the Ministry of Public Education ([Gosudarstvennaja дума..., 1909: 2448-2452, 2574-2588](#)). It was the state of education that remained one of the acutest problems that directly affected the interests and rights of all the ethnic groups.

When discussing the estimated budget of the Ministry of Public Education for 1908, Mr Chkheidze, in particular, pointed out the following data. In the North Caucasus, one primary school should fit in 3,000 Russians, 4,800 Georgians, 5,400 Armenians, 17,300 Azerbaijani and 11,400 highlanders. The urgent tasks of expanding the sphere of education of the peoples of the Caucasus were justified by Deputy Khas-Mamedov. According to him, in the Baku Province with 774,000 Muslims there were only 37 primary schools with the capacity for 1,690 children in total, and in the Elisavetpol Province with 526 thousand Muslims, there only were 47 schools with 2,200 students. In the 20 years of existence of the Erivan Seminary, only 40 Muslims graduated from it. No primary school for Muslims had been established by the government ([Gosudarstvennaja дума..., 1909: 2515-2530](#)).

When the Third Duma was discussing the bill on primary schools proposed by the October majority, Deputy Khas-Mamedov, a member of the Muslim fraction, opposed the suggestion to study ethnic languages in schools only if possible. It should be noted that the decision on granting the right of cultural self-determination was quite a sensitive issue for the Union of October 17. In their understanding, native languages could not be compulsory because of the diverse national composition of students and the possible reluctance of students and their parents to learn them. Deputy Khas-Mammadov referred to this argument as unconvincing. With the compact settlement of national groups, it is possible to open separate schools for them, and parents should not be against their children's learning their native languages ([Kavkazskie deputaty..., 1912: 70-78](#)).

The North Caucasian deputies considered the introduction of education in each group's ethnic languages to be the most important aspect of the government's national policy. Deputy from the Dagestan region, Mr Gaidar, noted that the Committee's bill was aimed at transforming primary schools into Russification policy agents. He clarified that the official state language could never be preferred over the "natural"/"mother" one, as it was done in the project. The Deputy suggested that the primary language of instruction should be the mother tongue, while the Russian language should be introduced into the school curriculum as a separate subject only after the students had reached a certain level of literacy in their native languages.

The bill was criticized for an understandable reason: the language being the basis for the development of any national culture, the formation of the nation, the way of communication within the country. In addition, the task of forming a liberal worldview assumed close attention to the school teaching organization, with the language being the main tool of educational influence.

Speaking from the Duma rostrum, Deputies Saghatelian and Pokrovsky II emphasized the regressive nature of the project, and its chauvinistic orientation. And Deputy Chkheidze pointed out that the call-outs of the majority of deputies on "indigenous dominance" were aimed at the fragmentation of Russia and incitement of ethnic groups against each other. He stated the objective patterns of natural voluntary assimilation of the peoples of the Empire of the Russian language and their rapprochement with the Russian people.

Speaking of the need for the development of national culture, Deputies Pokrovsky II and Gaidarov consistently promoted in the Duma the idea that "at school, the native language and the Russian language are not the same thing." They considered the empowerment of indigenous languages in the region and the development of national education to be the major priorities. The desire to neutralize the national identity of the peoples of the North Caucasus and create a single national-cultural type based on the model of the prevailing Russian nation led to the reduction of the existing ethnic schooling in the province and the actual prohibition of teaching in the locals' native languages. Russian was the language of instruction in 1,928 primary schools out of a total of 2,086, according to the report of the Trustee of the Caucasian school district of 1903, and only in 158 schools Russian was allowed to be taught using the ethnic languages ([Miropiev, 1905: 225-226](#)).

Such a school policy caused a sharp negative reaction among the population of the North Caucasus and greatly aggravated the confrontation between the peripheral regions and the center, which can be clearly illustrated by the Duma discussions on the problems of public education of the "non-Slavic" population of Russia.

During the discussion in the Duma, the Octobrists added that "in areas with non-Russian population that has their own writing systems, schools in the local languages are premitted to be established" ([Gosudarstvennaja дума..., 1910: 1236-1237](#)).

That was followed by a list of ethnic groups that fell under the article. The Muslim fraction amended it to replace the word "Tatar" with "Muslim", justifying this by the fact that all Muslim peoples of Russia spoke different dialects of the same Turkic language and have a single Arabic script. The amendment of the Muslim fraction was not approved in the Duma, but the addition of the Octobrists was adopted.

The draft laws "On the introduction of universal primary education in the Russian Empire" and "On primary schools" with significant amendments and additions were adopted by the Third Duma, but failed the approval of the State Council. Thus, the Russian Empire adopted no law on universal primary education. Of all the major draft laws on public education, the only one that actually got approved by the State was the one "On Higher Primary Schools" ([Musul'manskie deputaty..., 1998: 98](#)).

Another problem raised by the deputies from the North Caucasus was the violation of the civil rights of the Muslim population, discrimination on religious and national grounds. The discrimination was obvious when it was forbidden to conduct local judicial proceedings in the local ethnic groups' languages. All the deputies advocated protecting the religious identity of the Muslims of the North Caucasus and preserving their daily life and ethnic characteristics. Deputy Gaidarov, in particular, during the discussion in the Duma of the draft law of the Ministry of justice on the local court emphasized: Prince Baryatinsky's words that "it is necessary to consider governing the mountaineers as their conquest", is still valid for the authorities even 50 years later. Nevertheless, in order not to incite nationalism, all ethnic groups need to have equal rights, including in the language of legal proceedings ([Caucasian deputies, 1912: 64](#)). In the Third State Duma, the deputies managed to amend the law on the election of the Chairman of the magistrates' court and the need for judges to speak local languages (the law was approved by the Emperor on June 15, 1912).

The development of interethnic relations and interaction of the local population with the authorities in the Caucasus was no less complicated and contradictory. They also came to the attention of Russian parliamentarians.

North Caucasus representatives gave numerous examples of the difficult socio-economic situation of the local peoples, their political and cultural disenfranchisement, and ongoing ethnic conflicts. Such a situation in the Caucasus had been brought about by many factors, and, as rightly noted by the deputies from among the Social Democrats and the Constitutional Democrats, it required a wide range of specific measures to settle it. This included rational land management on the ground, including *zemstva*, full satisfaction of cultural, national and religious requests, the abolition of exceptional provisions and emergency measures in the management of the Caucasus. "The Caucasian population can neither be swept off the face of the earth, as Deputy Markov advises us, nor managed according to the old system," Peter Milyukov, leader of the Constitutional Democrats, emphasized (*Kavkazskij zapros...*, 1909: 79).

The Duma Committee proposed a system of socio-economic and cultural measures to meet the basic needs of the peoples who inhabited the region, staff replacement in the administration, as well as separating the Terek and the Kuban regions to form an independent administrative-territorial unit. It was obvious to the parliamentarians that the ethnic, religious, cultural and economic aspects of the situation in the Caucasus should be carefully taken into account, and that a careful and well-thought-out system of gradual measures needed to be developed to approve the "honest and conscientious cooperation" of the population with the authorities (*Zorin et al., 1999: 128-145*).

However, it should be noted that, due to the scale and cultural and linguistic heterogeneity of the Russian Empire, the priorities of the national government in the Caucasus were associated with the acquisition of loyalty, expressed "in orientation to the imperial center as a priority source of cultural images and influences" rather than with the achievement of complete assimilation and the assertion of a common identity for the entire population (*Miller, 2006: 67*). The Empire itself adapted to the "peripheral" realities rather than adapting them to a single management standard. The pragmatic ideologists of government policy understood that the multi-faceted, centuries-old ethnic and cultural world of the Caucasus was just not capable of becoming 100 % Russian. It could be turned into an integral part of the Russian Empire, but it would always require a special approach and special care.

The analysis of the facts proves that the Russian national policy on the eve of World War One remained very inconsistent and ambiguous. The monarchy often sought the answers to the questions of the new era, however, in older recipes. Nevertheless, it proved itself unable to pursue any coherent policy without undermining the basis of its own existence.

5. Conclusion

Despite the short historical period of activity of the State Duma, it had an impact on the development of political culture and public education in the country. Millions of people gained the right to vote, which allowed them to feel their involvement in public affairs. The development of the legislative process, when the preparation and adoption of laws ceased to be limited to professional bureaucrats, with more and more people getting gradually involved in the discussion of draft laws, was an inevitable consequence of political changes in Russian society.

The North Caucasian deputies of the State Duma were primarily focused on vital issues of Russian reality: development of education, democratization of political life, the problem of ethnic and religious relations and many others. The elected representatives advocated for the development of national education and the empowerment of indigenous languages in the region. They constantly drew attention to the violations of civil rights and discrimination on religious and national grounds (in particular, the prohibition of teaching in schools in the local languages). The North Caucasian deputies of the third-convocation State Duma supported bills on the development of teaching in local languages, on the establishment of national and religious equality, on the development of culture and school management. The use of this experience can undoubtedly contribute to the solution of the tasks that the Russian government is facing in the field of education and language construction at the present stage.

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