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Imperial Formations and Ethnic Diversity: institutions, practices, and *longue durée* illustrated by the example of Russia¹

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Abstract

In the present essay I will examine the complex relations between imperial formations and ethnic diversity, illustrated by the example of Russia. The focus will be on state institutions and practices of rule of *longue durée* that may be typical of the tension-laden relationship between ethnic minorities and multinational states, and thus of immediate relevance for the present as well. The essay begins with a brief review of recent debates on the *imperial turn* and Russia's 'postcolonial' heritage. Then the "particularistic arrangements of rule" identified by Adeb Khalid with regard to Soviet Central Asia will be discussed in some detail, using the example of the eastern Siberian Buryats and the Kalmyks of southern Russia. It will become apparent that the imperial formation of institutions is characterised by historical continuity. In the concluding remarks, I will suggest some new perspectives with regard to a more comprehensive and comparative approach.

¹ The present working paper is the English translation of a revised, updated, and enlarged version of a public lecture held before the Faculty for Philosophy of the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg on 17 December 2014, entitled: "Imperiale Formationen und ethnische Diversität: Institutionen, Praktiken und Longue Durée am Beispiel Rußlands". I gratefully acknowledge the comments and suggestions of Lale Yalçın-Heckmann, Brian Donahoe, and Bettina Mann, who reviewed an earlier version of this paper.

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Imperial Formations and Historical Path Dependencies

If we look at the subject under discussion from the perspective of a non-historicising approach, our first impression may be that the governance and situation of contemporary Great Powers – such as Russia or China – have little in common with the guiding principles and influencing factors of former epochs. After all, if we compare the respective economic and political position of these two nations in postsocialist times with that in the era of New Imperialism between ca. 1860 and 1914, it becomes apparent that their political importance has undergone a diametric reversal. Such narrow approaches to historical epochs, however, have been increasingly challenged in the course of the last ten years or so in debates on the imperial dimensions of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, and more recently due to the normative force of the factual that was evident in the crisis in the Crimean and Eastern Ukraine.

Condensed to what has become known as the *imperial turn*, the controversy between those who rather stress the uniqueness and otherness of particular formations (Mark Beissinger, Aleksei Miller, Terry Martin) and those who insist on the significance of cross-epochal legacies for imperial formations gained substantial momentum due to investigations focussing on Russia as a multinational state that have considerably widened our understanding of the complex relationships between the state and nationalities. Here, the influence of the imperial heritage has been thoroughly and repeatedly addressed by scholars from the perspective of social, cultural, and constitutional history with regard to both transitions, both from the Russian Empire to the Soviet Empire and from the Soviet Union to the Russian Federation. Examples include Carsten Goehrke's *Strukturgeschichte Rußlands* (2010), Vladimir Shlapentokh's study of the Yeltsin era (1996), and Hans-Joachim Torke's *Staatsbedingte Gesellschaft im Moskauer Reich* (1974). Research on historical path dependencies gained particular momentum due to studies that addressed *Rußland als Vielvölkerstaat* – the title of a book by Andreas Kappeler which was published in German in 1992 and translated into English in 2001 – as well as debates on the *imperial turn* including those in *Kritika*, a leading journal of Russian and Eurasian history and culture.

Thus, in the comments on the course taken by this debate, this journal called upon students of the subject “to concentrate more on the forces holding the tsarist empire together for so long and, by the same token, of the long-term challenges and continuities affecting the multinational Soviet Union” (David-Fox, Holquist, Martin 2006: 707). By this, the editors refer to trans-epochal cohesive forces – the resources of imperial longevity, so to speak, on which multinational empires are dependent particularly in times of social upheaval, such as those witnessed by Russia in the years 1917 and 1991. On the one hand, we may thus argue that structures of long duration are at work in these contexts and that this assumption is of some theoretical relevance for the analysis of contemporary nation-building processes as well. Even if we take a sceptical stance towards the ‘continuity-of-empire’ hypothesis because – as Mark Beissinger (2006: 297) suspected – it “essentializes Soviet Empire”, the general powerful impact of trans-epochal path dependencies can be neither truly denied nor underestimated. Hence, Jane Burbank was right when calling upon scholars “to focus on the structure of states, rather than their names” (2007: 77). On the other hand, perceiving the Soviet Union “as a radically new imperial project”, as Aleksei Miller has proposed in his book on *Romanov Empire and Nationalism* (2008: 215) following Terry Martin (2001), also seems to be a misconception and misleading. The Soviet Union project may have been radical in its design and implementation. But is this also true for its imperial agenda, expansion, and institutional

consolidation? Probably less so. We can rather assume that the phenomenon of the Soviet multinational state is by no means self-explanatory and, by the same token, also that of the Russian Federation.

However, what are the possible structures of *longue durée* – the habitus – to which imperial formations can resort in order to integrate the societies they comprise, in spite or even because of the latter’s ethnic, religious, and socio-cultural heterogeneity? To answer this question, it is indeed worth looking into a couple of factors: the *ancien regime*’s practices of rule; the consistency of the strategies of *divide et impera* – which became increasingly refined from the mid-19th century onward – with regard to class, religious affiliation, ethnicity, and regional provenance; and in addition, of course, the empowerment of bureaucratic agencies in the context of social protest, for example by the *Decembrists* and *Narodniki*.

As is generally known, the tools for shaping the Empire were sharpened by an import of ideas from the West, as well as by the general, scientific, and – to a much lesser degree – economic progress and an unshakable belief in the ability of the state to control the individual. This was accomplished – though not exclusively – by means of the disciplines of public administration and political science, statistics and linguistics, censuses, and ethnic mappings used to create new classifications and categorisations. From the very beginning and for a long time, the Bolsheviks simply adopted well-tested strategies which they subsequently calibrated and enhanced by means of more efficient procedures and apparatuses of control – a process aptly termed “conceptual conquest” by Francine Hirsch (2005: 8). As far as the more than 100 officially recognised nations and nationalities of the Russian Empire were concerned,³ the people’s commissars could, therefore, draw on the experiences of a tsarist colonial administration whose methods merely needed to be adapted to the challenges of modern times.

One example for administrative techniques is the model of a tripartite classificatory division of ethnic groups into *brodyachie narody* (lit. ‘wandering peoples’, which can be assumed to refer to hunters and gatherers), *kochevye narody* (lit. ‘nomadic peoples’, which referred to transhumant pastoralists) and *osedlye narody* (‘sedentary peoples’). This model was introduced by Governor General Mikhail Speransky as early as in 1822 in the course of his administrative reforms in Siberia. As a matter of fact, it was the result of an early reception of the three-stage model of the emergence of civilisation during and by the enlightened absolutism of Catherine the Great. At a later time, this model could be effortlessly integrated into the Marxist-Leninist ideological model of progress within an evolutionary history of humankind. The eurocentric stance of Nikolai Jakovlev, a linguist and professor at the Moscow-based Institute of Oriental Studies, is completely in line with that evolutionary pattern: in 1926, he stated that “the most distinguishing feature of the Oriental peoples [...] is their comparative remoteness from European culture” (1925/26: 480). It is telling that he classified the peoples of the Soviet orient into three groups according to supposed stages of development: five peoples with a “comparatively developed national culture” – that is, Georgians, Armenians, Azeri, Uzbeks, and Tatars – 44 peoples with “only emerging national development of their own”, and 51 “still lacking” that type of development. For example, he erroneously writes of the Buryats and Kalmyks (probably because of insufficient knowledge about them) that they exemplify those oriental peoples which “up to now had a very limited priestly

³ On the arbitrariness of ethnic categorizing and the drop from 196 to 105 nationalities according to the censuses of 1926 and 1939 see Simon 1986: 35, Schorkowitz 2001: 15, and Hirsch 1997; cf. Hofmeister 2014.

literature [and] are currently de facto in a process of establishing their national culture more or less by themselves” (Jakovlev 1925/26: 475–476).

As far as Russia is concerned, empire building, colonial expansion, and modern nation building are a triad whose early stage began arguably as early as in the late 16th century when the Moscow-based state (Muscovy) pushed east and conquered the Tatar khanates of Kazan‘, Astrakhan‘, and Sibir‘ (the Crimean khanate being not on the agenda, yet). However, the foundation for an imperial *mission civilisatrice* was not laid until the end of the Great Nordic War (1700–1721), Russia’s entry into the system of Major Powers in early modern times – to quote Klaus Zernack (1994) – and the proverbial opening of the window to Europe by Tsar Peter, the great moderniser (Manz 2003: 91). As has been pointed out by Dietrich Geyer in his seminal study on imperialism, the empire emerged due to the “continental expansion of the tsarist might which, by subjugating non-Russian populations, constituted colonial power relations sui generis” (1977: 14). None other than Lenin pinpointed the interdependence between colonial expansion and imperial formation, and specifically their impact on the state subjects, by coining terms such as “tsarist prison of the peoples” and “Great Russian chauvinism” (Lenin 1974 [1922]). However, Russia did not consolidate its position as a modern Great Power until after 1917 – or, *de facto*, after 1945. In that process, it did not only hold on to essential structures of the continental colonial empire in redesigned form, but also to traditional practices of rule, including “rude methods of exploitation and oppression” (Geyer 1977: 254). Hence, any analysis of the imperial constituents needs to take both formations into account. In the introduction to the book with the suggestive title *Ethnic Politics after Communism* edited by Zoltan Barany and Robert Moser, the connection between the two formations is poignantly summarised by Robert Suny, who points to the crucial dilemma of the Soviet nationalities issue: “how to maintain a great state in the territory of the former Russian empire and to recognize the right to national self-determination for the dozens of peoples who now lived under their rule?” (Suny 2005: 3).

As becomes apparent, the above already addresses phenomena of a *longue durée* that might be termed “transcontinuities” because they focus on “elements [...] which survive revolutionary alterations and always re-emerge, albeit perhaps under a different name and guise, whatever social ruptures may occur” (Schlee 2002: 266). After all, the impact of the colonial-imperial heritage of tsarist autocracy did not only affect the political and economic agendas of Soviet communist times; it is still at work today, though in transformed and updated ways. The striving of many Soviet republics for independence, which emerged during the early years of Mikhail Gorbachev’s reforms and was to a large extent characterised by fundamentally anti-imperial attitudes, is part of that heritage. The same is true of the postsocialist nation building processes in general, whose ethnopolitical conflicts have been dominating our debates about safety and stability in Caucasia and Central Asia since 1988 (Schorkowitz 2010: 139–140). The degree to which Russian politics can still be legitimised by historicising invocations of a ‘past greatness’ becomes apparent from Russia’s recent discourses about both the so-called ‘near abroad’ and the demise of the former superpower. In a speech before the Duma in April 2005, Vladimir Putin called that demise “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century” (*Ukrainskaya Pravda Online* 2005). That influence of the past on present policies also became apparent during the intervention in Georgia in August 2008 and, subsequently, the annexation of Crimea in March 2014. In December 2014, Crimea was declared a sacred (*sakral’noe*) place by Mr. Putin who, in his annual state-of-the-

nation speech, compared the peninsula with the temple mount in Jerusalem (Putin 2014).⁴ From an imperial perspective, this logic results from the fact that the Baltic States, Belorussia, Ukraine, as well as all eight republics of Central Asia and South Caucasia have left the formation and become, *cum grano salis*, independent. The only still existing remnants from a colonial past are Siberia and the Far East, Karelia, the Volga region with its Tatar, Finno-Ugric, and Kalmyk speaking populations, and North Caucasia. Nevertheless, these still make the Russian Federation a multinational state.

How, then, do imperial formations deal with ethnic diversity in administrative, juridical, and cultural terms? What are the institutional responses to the dilemma outlined by Suny? In the following, I will go into some detail to address these issues, and introduce what might be called the ‘Russian tradition’ in contrast to comparable formations in other continental multinational states, such as Qing China, the Ottoman Empire, and the Habsburg Empire.

Imperial Agencies and the Challenges of Ethnic Diversity

The origins of this ‘Russian tradition’ predate the reign of Peter the Great and began with the establishment of the Ambassadorial Chancellery or Office of the Exterior, the *Posol’skii prikaz*, which from 1549 onward was in charge of managing the relations of Muscovy with the potentates of Europe and Asia and concluding cross-national treaties. The routine of that office, which “was fully equipped with all the tricks and techniques of steppe diplomacy” (Vásáry 2005: 29), becomes apparent from inventories of the gifts and instructions provided to outbound ambassadors, standardised lists of answers to questions they might be asked by the other side, and official diaries of delegations returning to Russia. However, the office did not only represent Moscow’s interests towards the Ottoman, Persian, and Chinese Empires. It also controlled the subordination of rulers in the Caucasian or Siberian periphery who allegedly appealed for protection. Out of the 766 ambassadorial books that have survived in the Central Russian State Archive of Ancient Documents, 156 relate to peoples and dominions that were foreign at the respective time and were subsequently either conquered or otherwise integrated into the tsarist colonial administration. They include the khanates of Crimea, Bukhara, and Khiva, which did not become part of the Russian Empire until 1774, 1868, and 1873, respectively (Rogozhin 1993: 192).

In the course of Tsar Peter’s reforms, the Ambassadorial Chancellery merged in the Collegium of Foreign Affairs in 1718. The latter was renamed Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1802 and had a separate Department of Asian Affairs (*Departament aziatskikh del*) which, in turn, was outsourced as an independent Asian Department in 1819 – from 1797 onward. Apart from this, a teaching department of Oriental languages, which existed until 1893, emerged in the Foreign Office in 1823, and an Asian Committee was created in 1820 independently of that department (Amburger 1966: 116–129). However, the abovementioned Asian Department continued to be the leading institution which, as is emphasised by Michael Khodarkovsky (2009: 159), became “de facto Russia’s Colonial Office” and was the central coordinating agency of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with regard to all issues concerning the Orient until 1917.

Simultaneously with the development of that agency, however, the progressive expansion in Siberia, Caucasia, and Central Asia spawned the continuous emergence of new territorial

⁴ On hierotopies, i.e. ‘holy places’, an increasingly fashionable subject in Russia’s historiography today, see Lidov 2009.

administrations; this resulted in a high degree of diversity in the layout of legal and cultural forms of autonomy, and gave rise to precisely those “particularistic arrangements of rule” described by Adeb Khalid (2007: 117) as being a characteristic feature of Soviet Central Asia. This development is easier to understand if we keep in mind that the ethnic groups and peoples were first potential, then actual subjects, and as such underwent several transitions. The indigenous self-administrations or so-called Steppe Dumas and their autonomy, which was first generously granted and subsequently more and more restricted, were not permanently under the control of either the Asian Department or the military administration that often followed. Instead, they came *pari passu* under the authority of civil institutions of the governorate administration as the frontier advanced. Consequently, it was up to each ministerial bureaucracy to develop new competency in its dealings with foreign cultures and the ‘Other’. This resulted in diverse and sometimes quite competing integration strategies, alliances, and enmities: the Most Holy Governing Synod, for example, was cooperating with the Ministry of Education for the purpose of implementing national ideas of orthodox-Christian missionary work and cultural Russification, but their efforts were often foiled by the Imperial Academy of Sciences and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which pursued interests of their own. The Ministry of State Domains, in turn, watched closely over the intactness of the tsars’ land property, which became increasingly coveted by both the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of the Interior in the course of the abolition of serfdom. From 1832 onward, the latter ministry operated the Department of Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Confessions and, therefore, was in close contact with the Synod with regard to issues of Muslim, Buddhist, and other non-orthodox religious communities.

This is why the Buryats living in the Baikal region, for example, witnessed six fundamental administrative reforms, which diverged widely with regard to the right of self-determination, within just one century. First, the Steppe Duma system was established in 1822 through Speransky’s *Inorodtsy* statute; its sound regulations in terms of autonomy were repeatedly invoked by the Buryats when they took a stand against restrictions imposed in later times. In the 1890s, that system was followed by the controversial *volost’* administration which, in turn, was replaced by the *zemstvo* administration in the early twentieth century. The *volost’* reform had an impact on administration, jurisdiction, spatial order, and the land property situation of the Steppe Dumas and clan administrations. It created new territorial-administrative districts, the so-called *volosti*, put the latter’s administrative and legal bodies largely under the control of the Russian farmer superintendents, and was implemented against the will of the Buryats from 1904 onward. In those places where it was actually enforced, it put an end to the self-administration Siberian peoples had enjoyed since 1822. Hence, the secretary of the ministerial committee, Anatolii Kulomzin, could note with evident pleasure in 1901 that “there is no doubt that the measure taken has already been very successful, as it has shattered the self-confidence of the Buryats of Irkutsk” (Schorkowitz 2001: 74). In late fall of 1916 and under the pressure of increasing burdens of war, the government eventually began to realise that it was dependent on the compliance of all Eastern Siberian groups – peasants, Cossacks, merchants, industrialists, and *inorodtsy* (*allogenes*, ← Greek: *ἀλλογενής*, *allogenēs*) – and held out the prospect of more rights of self-administration to be granted in the near future. As is generally known, that move came too late, because the Provisional Government already decreed universal suffrage and the introduction of the *zemstvo* state constitution in June 1917. This included a territorial-administrative and fiscal reform with limited rights of self-determination as well as local responsibilities related to food supply and public order. The

remaining three administrative reforms, whose emergence and quick succession were due to the revolutions of 1917 and the long turmoil of civil war, concerned the Buryat National Committee, the Buryat People's Duma, as well as the Buryat-Mongol Central Executive Committee of 1923.

About in the same period, a civil administration – whose name changed repeatedly – emerged among the Kalmyks living between the River Don and the Caspian Sea. However, it did not quite produce the diversity of institutions found among the Buryats, because the *volost'* reform had not been implemented in southern Russia until 1910, that is, at a late point in time, and the *zemstvo* administration was not able to establish itself in the few months preceding the turmoil of the revolution. National representative bodies, comparable to the National Committee and the People's Duma of the Buryats, were non-existent, even though a Central Committee for the administration of the Kalmyk people was established in March 1917. The dependencies in Astrakhan' were, after all, different from those on the Baikal and much more pronounced. It is true that the Kalmyk khan had become politically upgraded during the rule of Tsar Paul (1796–1801), with the result that the Kalmyk people was detached from the control of the governorate administration and put under the authority of the Collegium of Foreign Affairs. As early as in 1803, however, the Kalmyk administration came under the control of the Astrakhan' military governor again, because the commander of the Caucasus region and Georgia had been put in charge of the governorate the year before. While the Kalmyk administration was nominally under the authority of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs until March 1824 and subsequently – after the reform of 1825 – of the Ministry of the Interior, the dominating agency was in fact the military administration due to the Caucasus front and the neighbouring Cossack forces. When the Kalmyk administration was reformed once more in 1834 and reassigned to the Ministry of the Interior, the entire local and Ulus administration still remained under the control of the Astrakhan' military governor. As a matter of fact, military influence decreased only gradually in the wake of the general provincial reform of 1837. From then on, the Kalmyk administration remained under the authority of the Ministry of State Domains for 65 years and then was once again ceded to the Ministry of the Interior in 1902.

While both peoples bore quite a burden in building the empire by providing military and Cossack services, they did not really profit from the many reforms, because the latter were by no means *eo ipso* liberal or progressive: above all, they established the hegemony of Russian administrative and legal regulations, and consolidated that dominance in the everyday life of the indigenous peoples. The *Inorodtsy* statute of 1822 and the *volost'* reform in East Siberia at the end of the nineteenth century, as well as the many reforms implemented by the Kalmyk administration, gave rise to structural changes that resulted in a weakening of the self-administrations and the replacement of indigenous legal systems. This happened despite the fact that the double legal citizenship was – paradoxically – a convenient practice for the local Russian authorities: it left the settlement of everyday legal squabbles to autochthonous jurisdiction while, at the same time, asserting the state's claim to supremacy in legal matters especially with regard to criminal law (e.g. treason, homicide, and insurrections). The reforms, which were often passed in response to virulent antagonisms between central institutions of the empire, facilitated the state's missionary and settlement policies and thus accelerated the process of state-driven assimilation. Among the Kalmyks, that process took place under the changing guardianship of competing ministries, while it unfolded without major external influence among the Buryats under the central administration of the Siberian Committee and the local governors.

These links between institutional change and continuity of rule, as briefly outlined above with regard to the Buddhist Mongols within Russia, can be easily substantiated in the various political fields of economy and law, education, and religion. In addition, it would be easy to outline analogous processes serving the formation of imperial practices of rule with regard to the Turk-speaking Muslims living in the empire, such as the Volga Tatars or the Bashkirs of the southern Ural region, the latter of whom were permanently obliged to render military service and had a canton administration specifically created for them by Tsar Paul in 1798, as well as the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly established ten years earlier. By the same token, however, these forms of colonial order can be summed up – following Michael Hechter (1999) – under the aspect of *internal colonialism*, whose general characteristic in Russia was the gradual homogenisation of ethnic diversity. The multinational empire was indeed striving for cohesion and unification, yet at the cost of forced assimilation, which basically implies integration based on sameness, not on diversity (cf. Schlee 2013: 2).

From ‘Particularistic Arrangements of Rule’ to the Centralising State and Nation Building

At this point, however, I would like draw attention to another, equally important problem posed by the ‘particularistic arrangements of rule’. As the empire put the standardisation of its ethnic-cultural diversity on its agenda, it needed to do away with the simultaneous existence of various imperial structures of administration and decision-making that had developed over time. This compulsion to centralise processes, government agencies, structures, and legal practices increased noticeably towards the end of the nineteenth century; at the same time and in opposition to this development, there was an increase in the national protest of indigenous peoples, and the latter’s calls for institutionalised structures of self-administration grew louder. Remarkably, these processes of imperial modernisation gained momentum not least due to the indigenous elites, whose traditional co-optation became transformed into political instrumentalisation towards the end of the century. While the traditional services of non-Russian elites as feudal proxies, Cossack military units, or frontier guards were still in demand, the importance of these roles began to wane; instead, the elites became providers of knowledge both for academic Oriental studies and the cultural mediators of Russia’s imperial expansion in Asia. Their increasing importance becomes apparent from the fact that representatives of the Buryats, Kalmyks, Kazakhs, Tatars, and Bashkirs – among others – were already elected members of the first and second State Dumas of 1906 and 1907, in spite of the general persistence of restrictions in terms of social class, gender, age, and degree of acculturation.

There was thus a combination of two factors: on the one hand, an increasing participation of indigenous elites – who were quite adept in using their limited share in power to expand national autonomy – in processes of decision making taking place in central institutions; on the other, the concentration – deemed necessary from an imperial perspective – of competencies, which had been gained in parallel, in the various imperial governmental agencies. Given this combination, it is not surprising that a new central agency was established that took both aspects into account. In the wake of the February Revolution of 1917 – *nota bene* amidst the revolutionary turmoil that immediately preceded the epochal caesura – a so-called Nationalities Department was in its initial stages in the Provisional Government as early as in summer: the *Natsional’nyi otdel*, which was “in charge of all national groups that are part of the Russian state” (Schorkowitz 2001: 415). The department was to be under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior and was supposed to

support the Provisional Government in its legislation and administration by giving guidance and information in political, cultural, and social matters of the various nationalities. For that reason, the Buryat National Committee had been explicitly called upon in early October to take part in the upcoming constitutional assembly. The succeeding, short-lived Provisional Siberian Government of Tomsk continued to explicitly integrate national representatives into governmental responsibilities after the Bolsheviks had seized power. By creating a Nationalities Council that was on the same level as the Financial and Military Councils, it intended – by its own account – to address the “very diverse needs of the various cultures of the Siberian peoples in a differentiated and competent manner” (Schorkowitz 2001: 415). In late December 1917, the Buryat National Committee was again invited to participate in the formation of a Nationalities Council.

It is, therefore, quite evident that the great national crisis – sparked by the advance of the victorious Bolsheviks into the southern and eastern parts of the empire – worked as a catalyst in abolishing antiquated forms, or creating new forms, of integration and administration. By courting the national elites and complying with their expectations for self-determination, the *ancien régime* undertook every effort to open up new resources of allegiance. In its endeavours to strengthen the imperial cohesive forces, it did not differ much from the Bolsheviks. The latter, however, were much more skilful in making immediate use of these forces after having established a separate central agency in late October already: the People’s Commissariat of Nationalities headed by Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhughashvili, better known by his alias: Stalin.

This was a new and very important type of agency, being an institutionalised assembly at ministry level in which the nationalities of the state in *statu nascendi* painstakingly discussed short-term political issues of autonomy and made preliminary decisions in close consultation with the other resorts. Nevertheless, the priorities of the People’s Commissariat took a different course at an early time. While the protection of “national minorities on the territory of other nationalities” and the encouragement of “fraternal cooperation among the nationalities and tribes” (Schorkowitz 2001: 415) were part of its most important statutory tasks, the very necessity to settle all controversial issues resulting from the so-called ‘national conflict situation’ made the agency into the decisive authority in disputes that arose in regions with heterogeneous populations, and the main focus was on safeguarding territorial claims and protecting territorial integrity. Indeed, the actual purpose of the People’s Commissariat was not to support the peoples in their processes of gaining independence, but to guide them on their way to a Moscow-oriented quasi-independence and to integrate, in that process, the national elements into the newly emerging state community. The tsarist dynasty was disintegrating, but the imperial formation continued to exist in the shape of the Party’s novel rule. As the People’s Commissariat remained tied to that specific purpose, its own dissolution was just a matter of time, too. By order of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, the Commissariat was liquidated in July 1923. The laconic reason given was that it had fulfilled its actual task “in the preparations for the formation of national republics and territories, as well as in their incorporation into a union republic” (*Sobranie zakononii i rasporyazhenii rabochago i krest’yanskago pravitel’stva*, No 66, Article 639, 7. 7. 1923). *E pluribus Unum*, the Russian way, and *mission accomplished*, so to speak.

If we take, last but not least, a look at the second epochal caesura that happened in twentieth-century Russia, we see – not surprisingly – a renaissance of exactly the same state institution at the time when the demise of the Soviet Union was imminent and the *RSFSR State Committee for Nationalities Issues* was established as late as November 1989 under Mikhail Gorbachev. Standing

in the tradition of Stalin's People's Commissariat, that committee was in charge of working against the collapse of those mechanisms that had ensured the cohesion of the multinational state for 70 years, and of settling the ethno-political conflicts at the imperial 'rupture lines' in the interior of the country. It was soon expanded to cover the entire union and renamed *USSR State Committee for Nationalities Issues*, and again the state felt compelled to pit a shadow ministry of sorts against budding aspirations for autonomy (Spisok 2013).

The agency was repeatedly renamed in the time that followed, and its area of responsibility was considerably broadened in some respects – for example, as early as January 1994, when the State Committee became the *Ministry of the Russian Federation for Nationalities Issues and Regional Politics*, which was renamed *Ministry for Nationalities Issues and Federal Relations of the Russian Federation* in March 1996. While President Putin abolished that office by decree in October 2001, the government immediately appointed Vladimir Zorin as new *Minister of the Russian Federation*, thus establishing a provisional portfolio that was in charge of nationalities policies and existed until 2004 (see appendices I and II). The degree to which the government still adheres to the strategy of managing ethnic diversity, as well as to the traditional forms of autocratic centralism, becomes apparent from the establishment of the *Council for Intra-National Relations under the President of the Russian Federation*. Based on a decree passed in May 2012 (see appendix III), the Council was created in June of the same year, and its professed goal is the “formation of one sole political nation” (Zorin 2013: IX). Finally, as if more evidence for the ‘continuity-of-institutions’ hypothesis would be needed, a *Federal Agency for Nationalities Issues* was founded in late March 2015 (see appendix IV), led by Igor Barinov, a long-serving KGB officer (Khodarkovsky 2015).

According to the explicit government mandate, the *Council for Intra-National Relations* – which is equipped with considerable expert knowledge – is committed to the idea of an “All-Russian civil nation” (*obshcherossiiskaya grazhdanskaya natsiya*), as well as to the construction of a “Russian identity” (*rossiiskaya identichnost'*) – a project that is also pursued by some of the country's leading ethnologists and historians (Zorin 2013: IX–XI). The ideal outcome of that endeavour is the “Russian citizen” (*Rossiyanin*) linguistically derived not from an ethnic (*russkii*) but from a territorial notion (*rossiiskii*) – a construct which, ironically enough, is reminiscent of another patriotic project of recent times: the Soviet people and the Soviet person (man).

The post-Soviet transformation of the revived People's Commissariat from an instrument originally serving integration into a tool for (at first Soviet, and now Russian) nation building becomes apparent here, and is roughly mirrored in the succession and replacement of officials. Initially, in July 1991, President Yeltsin brought in Galina Starovoitova, a highly respected ethno-sociologist, as presidential advisor in issues of transnational relations. However, she was soon dismissed. In November 1992 – after a brief intermezzo by the ethnologist Valerii Tishkov – the advisory office was taken over by Sergei Shakhrai, an expert in constitutional law and native of Simferopol, who headed the Russian delegation in the negotiations with Ukraine on the status of the Black Sea fleet. Starovoitova, who was later assassinated being the first in a continuing row of political assassinations (Politkovskaya, Nemtsov), was fired because she had obviously taken the talk about a democratic fresh start and advocacy of the autonomy-hungry parts of the federacy too literally. Shakhrai, however, did not last long either. He was accused of holding too many offices at once, and many representatives of Ukraine, Bashkortostan, Tatarstan, and Yakutia felt offended by his hard line. In May 1994, he was replaced by the Cossack and heavyweight boxing champion Egorov, who was responsible for the military escalation in Chechnya and infamous for his

confrontation policy. The succeeding ministers included Ramazan Abdulatipov (a philosopher who was later to become president of Dagestan), then the party historian Vyacheslav Mikhailov, and the historian and political scientist Vladimir Zorin who has, in addition, been assistant director of the institute of ethnology and physical anthropology of the Academy of Sciences since 2009, and who was – last but not least – followed most recently by Igor Barinov who obviously qualified as a commander of the well-known Alpha Group (*spetsgruppya "A"*), an elite unit of Russia's special forces.

Conclusion

Given the most important points summarised above, I hope to have illustrated that contemporary Russia is a multinational state too, featuring decidedly trans-epochal path dependencies and all the resulting consequences in terms of choosing strategies of integration. In that context, the strengthening of social and ethno-national cohesive forces is of particular importance anytime, not just in times of social upheaval or imperial changes of power, because – contrary to autocratic concepts of order – ‘unity in diversity’ cannot be decreed *par ordre de Mufti*. It needs to be constantly and persistently re-negotiated in the arena of political opinion-making and against the backdrop of cultural change which, after all, always generates new identifications and relationships. I think that this balancing act is a typical feature of the tense and always shifting relations between ethnic minorities and the state in imperial formations. In any case, attempts to enforce imperial unity by means of cultural assimilation and procedures of denationalisation bring only fleeting success, and past efforts in that direction have usually spawned various forms of circumvention or resistance.

The imperial formations of the country, which were represented in historical succession by the Romanov dynasty, the Communist Party, and eventually today's technocrats of the ‘vertical of power’, had their origin in the encroachment of the Moscow state first on the Tatar-Muslim khanates on the Volga, then on Siberia. With further expansion in the nineteenth century and the subjugation of the peoples of Caucasia and Central Asia under various forms of colonial order, these regions had already been witnessing the emergence of ‘particularistic arrangements of rule’ in tsarist times. These arrangements were not overcome and standardised until long after the October Revolution – some may even say, until Stalin's deportations. The initially mentioned Russian tradition can thus be best described as a process comprising three basic developments: first, the transformation of indirect forms of rule into direct ones; second, a gradual homogenisation of ethnic diversity by means of a government-controlled approximation to pan-imperial models of identification, that is: the Tsar and his faithful subjects – the Soviet People's Leader (*vozhd' sovetskogo naroda*) and the New Soviet man (*novyi sovetskii chelovek*) – the People's Leader (again?) and the Russian citizen (*Rossiyanin*); and third, the standardisation of ‘particularistic arrangements of rule’, combined with the abolishment of parallel structures of decision-making – in a word: centralisation.

Since the Qing Empire has been addressed before, together with the Ottoman and the Habsburg Empire, as being a potential and promising model for comparison let me – in lieu of conclusion – very briefly come back to the example of China (for a more detailed analysis, see Schorkowitz forthcoming). Not surprisingly, there is a difference between the Chinese and Russian traditions, even though the formation of both empires in early modern times was founded on land-based,

continental colonialism. By expanding into Siberia in the early seventeenth century, the Romanovs created the basis for Russia's subsequent presence in Asia. The Manchus, in turn, created an empire in China to which they added the peoples of Inner Asia over the course of 150 years – first in an alliance, then in rivalry with the Mongols. As has already been mentioned, a continental type of colonialism became decisive for the formation of space and structures in both cases. However, the Chinese tradition is characterised by the fact that a central colonial agency, the *Lifanyuan*, was established as early as 1638. The *Lifanyuan* was not only permanently available until the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1912, but also continues to exist today – in the form of successor agencies – both in the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China. In the case of China, the colonial agency was more directly and strictly tied to the imperial court. This prevented the emergence of the diversity of administrations, institutions, and structures of decision making produced by Russia. Forms of indigenous self-administration were always comparatively underdeveloped; the transition from indirect to direct forms of rule was less pronounced. As the degree of autonomy granted was already lower when Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet, and East Turkestan were incorporated into the empire, the subsequent curtailment of that autonomy was less obvious than in Russia. While a disintegration of imperial unity, as witnessed by the Soviet Union at the end of the twentieth century, did not happen in China, the latter is nevertheless still a multinational state featuring both similar and different continuities of *longue durée* as compared to Russia. In any case, the trans-epochal long-term effects of internal colonialism are arguably a feature shared by both these imperial formations.

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Appendices:

Appendix I: Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii: voprosy struktury federal'nykh organov ispolnitel'noi vlasti [Ukas from the President of the Russian Federation: structural questions regarding federal institutions of the executive].

Appendix II: Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii: o ministre Rossiiskoi Federatsii [Ukas from the President of the Russian Federation: on the minister of the Russian Federation].

Appendix III: Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii: ob obespechenii mezhnatsional'nogo soglasiya [Ukas from the President of the Russian Federation: on the securing of intra-national harmony].

Appendix IV: Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii: o federal'nom agenstve po delam natsional'nostej [Ukas from the President of the Russian Federation: on the Federal Agency for Nationalities Issues].



У К А З

ПРЕЗИДЕНТА РОССИЙСКОЙ ФЕДЕРАЦИИ

Вопросы структуры федеральных органов исполнительной власти

В целях совершенствования структуры федеральных органов исполнительной власти, а также в соответствии со статьей 112 Конституции Российской Федерации и Федеральным конституционным законом «О Правительстве Российской Федерации» постановляю:

1. Упразднить Министерство по делам федерации, национальной и миграционной политики Российской Федерации.

2. Передать Министерству внутренних дел Российской Федерации функции упраздняемого Министерства по делам федерации, национальной и миграционной политики Российской Федерации в части, касающейся реализации миграционной политики.

3. Внести в Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 17 мая 2000 г. № 867 «О структуре федеральных органов исполнительной власти» (Собрание законодательства Российской Федерации, 2000, № 21, ст. 2168; № 39, ст. 3856; № 49, ст. 4799) и в структуру федеральных органов исполнительной власти, утвержденную этим Указом, следующие изменения:

а) пункт 6 Указа изложить в следующей редакции:

«6. Установить, что Председатель Правительства Российской Федерации имеет пять заместителей, в том числе заместителя Председателя Правительства Российской Федерации – Министра промышленности, науки и технологий Российской Федерации, заместителя Председателя Правительства Российской Федерации – Министра сельского хозяйства Российской Федерации и заместителя Председателя Правительства Российской Федерации – Министра финансов Российской Федерации.»;

б) из раздела II «Федеральные министерства» структуры федеральных органов исполнительной власти слова «Министерство по делам федерации, национальной и миграционной политики Российской Федерации» исключить.

4. Правительству Российской Федерации:

распределить в месячный срок между Министерством иностранных дел Российской Федерации и Министерством экономического развития и торговли Российской Федерации часть функций упраздняемого Министерства по делам федерации, национальной и миграционной политики Российской Федерации;

обеспечить в соответствии с законодательством Российской Федерации проведение ликвидационных процедур и предоставление высвобождаемым на основании настоящего Указа сотрудникам льгот и компенсаций;

представить в месячный срок предложения о внесении соответствующих изменений в акты Президента Российской Федерации о федеральных органах исполнительной власти, руководство деятельностью которых осуществляет Президент Российской Федерации;

привести свои акты в соответствие с настоящим Указом.

5. Главному государственно-правовому управлению Президента Российской Федерации внести в 2-месячный срок предложения о приведении актов Президента Российской Федерации в соответствие с настоящим Указом.

6. Настоящий Указ вступает в силу со дня его официального опубликования.



Президент
Российской Федерации В. Путин

Москва, Кремль
16 октября 2001 года
№ 1230

https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Список_министров_национальной_политики_России#cite_ref-15

(original source no more available online, cf. <http://base.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc;base=LAW;n=33653;fld=134;dst=100009;rnd=0.004824914728973284>)

Appendix II



УКАЗ

ПРЕЗИДЕНТА РОССИЙСКОЙ ФЕДЕРАЦИИ

О Министре Российской Федерации

1. В соответствии с пунктом «д» статьи 83 Конституции Российской Федерации назначить Зорина Владимира Юрьевича Министром Российской Федерации.
2. Настоящий Указ вступает в силу со дня его подписания.



Президент
Российской Федерации В.Путин

Москва, Кремль
6 декабря 2001 года
№ 1411

11205на

https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Список_министров_национальной_политики_России#cite_ref-15

(original source no more available online, cf. <http://poisk-zakona.ru/145797.html>)



УКАЗ

ПРЕЗИДЕНТА РОССИЙСКОЙ ФЕДЕРАЦИИ

Об обеспечении межнационального согласия

В целях гармонизации межнациональных отношений, укрепления единства многонационального народа Российской Федерации и обеспечения условий для его полноправного развития **п о с т а н о в л я ю:**

1. Администрации Президента Российской Федерации совместно с Правительством Российской Федерации:

а) до 1 июня 2012 г. - подготовить предложения об образовании при Президенте Российской Федерации совета по межнациональным отношениям;

б) до 1 декабря 2012 г. - разработать и утвердить Стратегию государственной национальной политики Российской Федерации.

2. Правительству Российской Федерации совместно с органами государственной власти субъектов Российской Федерации обеспечить:

а) до сентября 2012 г. - подготовку согласованных с Российской академией наук, заинтересованными общественными объединениями и религиозными организациями предложений по формированию перечня книг, в том числе по истории, литературе и культуре народов Российской Федерации, рекомендуемых школьникам для самостоятельного прочтения (перечень «100 книг»);

б) до ноября 2012 г.:
разработку комплекса мер, направленных на совершенствование работы органов государственной власти Российской Федерации по предупреждению межнациональных конфликтов, включая создание эффективных механизмов их урегулирования и проведение



системного мониторинга состояния межнациональных отношений, а также на активизацию работы по недопущению проявлений национального и религиозного экстремизма и пресечению деятельности организованных преступных групп, сформированных по этническому принципу;

введение обязательного экзамена по русскому языку, истории России, основам законодательства Российской Федерации для трудящихся-мигрантов, за исключением высококвалифицированных специалистов;

в) до декабря 2012 г. - подготовку и представление в установленном порядке проектов нормативных правовых актов, направленных на усиление административной и уголовной ответственности за нарушение требований миграционного законодательства Российской Федерации.

3. Настоящий Указ вступает в силу со дня его официального опубликования.



Президент
Российской Федерации В.Путин

Москва, Кремль
7 мая 2012 года
№ 602



УКАЗ

ПРЕЗИДЕНТА РОССИЙСКОЙ ФЕДЕРАЦИИ

О Федеральном агентстве по делам национальностей

В целях совершенствования структуры федеральных органов исполнительной власти, в соответствии со статьей 112 Конституции Российской Федерации и Федеральным конституционным законом от 17 декабря 1997 г. № 2-ФКЗ "О Правительстве Российской Федерации" **п о с т а н о в л я ю:**

1. Образовать Федеральное агентство по делам национальностей.

2. Установить, что Федеральное агентство по делам национальностей осуществляет следующие функции:

а) выработка и реализация государственной национальной политики, нормативно-правовое регулирование и оказание государственных услуг в сфере государственной национальной политики;

б) осуществление мер, направленных на укрепление единства многонационального народа Российской Федерации (российской нации), обеспечение межнационального согласия, этнокультурного развития народов Российской Федерации, защиты прав национальных меньшинств и коренных малочисленных народов Российской Федерации;

в) взаимодействие с национально-культурными автономиями, казачьими обществами и иными институтами гражданского общества;

г) разработка и реализация государственных и федеральных целевых программ в сфере межнациональных отношений;

д) контроль за реализацией государственной национальной политики;



е) осуществление государственного мониторинга в сфере межнациональных и межконфессиональных отношений;

ж) профилактика любых форм дискриминации по признакам расовой, национальной, религиозной или языковой принадлежности;

з) предупреждение попыток разжигания расовой, национальной и религиозной розни, ненависти либо вражды.

3. Установить, что:

а) руководство деятельностью Федерального агентства по делам национальностей осуществляет Правительство Российской Федерации;

б) руководитель Федерального агентства по делам национальностей назначается на должность Правительством Российской Федерации.

4. Передать Федеральному агентству по делам национальностей:

а) функции Министерства культуры Российской Федерации по выработке и реализации государственной национальной политики и нормативно-правовому регулированию в сфере защиты прав национальных меньшинств и коренных малочисленных народов Российской Федерации, реализации этнокультурных потребностей граждан, принадлежащих к различным этническим общностям, по обеспечению эффективного использования субъектами Российской Федерации и муниципальными образованиями средств государственной поддержки, предусмотренных на этнокультурное развитие народов Российской Федерации, а также иные функции в указанной сфере деятельности;

б) функции Министерства юстиции Российской Федерации по выработке и реализации государственной политики и нормативно-правовому регулированию в сфере взаимодействия с казачьими обществами.

5. Внести в структуру федеральных органов исполнительной власти, утвержденную Указом Президента Российской Федерации от 21 мая 2012 г. № 636 "О структуре федеральных органов исполнительной власти" (Собрание законодательства Российской Федерации, 2012, № 22, ст. 2754; № 27, ст. 3674; 2013, № 12, ст. 1247; № 26, ст. 3314; № 30, ст. 4086; № 35, ст. 4503; № 39, ст. 4969; № 44, ст. 5729; 2014, № 12, ст. 1261; № 14, ст. 1608; № 20, ст. 2496; № 37, ст. 4934, 4935), изменение, дополнив раздел III "Федеральные службы и федеральные агентства, руководство деятельностью которых

осуществляет Правительство Российской Федерации" после слов "Федеральное агентство научных организаций" словами "Федеральное агентство по делам национальностей".

6. Правительству Российской Федерации:

а) утвердить положение о Федеральном агентстве по делам национальностей;

б) установить предельную численность работников Федерального агентства по делам национальностей и фонд оплаты труда указанных работников;

в) обеспечить непрерывность осуществления передаваемых Федеральному агентству по делам национальностей в соответствии с настоящим Указом функций Министерства культуры Российской Федерации и Министерства юстиции Российской Федерации;

г) предусмотреть сохранение кадрового потенциала Министерства культуры Российской Федерации и Министерства юстиции Российской Федерации в целях реализации передаваемых Федеральному агентству по делам национальностей в соответствии с настоящим Указом функций этих министерств;

д) обеспечить решение организационных, финансовых, материально-технических и иных вопросов, связанных с реализацией настоящего Указа.

7. Настоящий Указ вступает в силу со дня его подписания.



Президент
Российской Федерации В.Путин

Москва, Кремль
31 марта 2015 года
№ 168