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### JOURNALISM IN CONTEXT OF BOLSHEVIK POLICY OF AUTONOMIZATION OF THE NORTH CAUCASUS

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#### Abstract

After the October 1917 revolution, the leading instrument of ideological support for the dictatorship of the proletariat in the Russian national regions was the local press controlled by the Bolshevik Party. The processes of strengthening Soviet power in the North Caucasus were difficult due to the fact that socialist ideas of the mountaineers were unknown and incomprehensible. Through the local press, the Bolsheviks promoted the right of nations to self-determination in order to enlist sympathies of the mountain peoples. The genesis of the journalism system of the national regions of the Russian Federation has been studied. Works on the North Caucasian press history should be generalized. A holistic view of the trends in the development of journalism should be developed and features of the national media systems should be identified. In the scientific literature on the development of Soviet press of the North Caucasian national autonomies, the theses formulated in the conditions of the ideological dictate of the Communist Party still prevail. The contribution of regional journalism to the formation of the Stalinist totalitarian regime is understudied. At the present stage of historical journalism, it is necessary to rethink conclusions about the Soviet past. The article attempts to reveal features of coverage of the Bolshevik nation-building policy in the North Caucasian regional press on the basis of a critical understanding of published scientific literature, archival materials, regional newspapers and magazines.

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*Keywords:* Bolshevik national policy, journalism of the North Caucasus



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## 1. Introduction

During the proletarian revolution, the Bolsheviks paid special attention to the national question, because the fate of Soviet power depended on the support of numerous nationalities of Russia. Having proclaimed the right to self-determination and equality of all nations, the Bolsheviks imagined their implementation in a specific way: decisions are made only by a pro-Bolshevik-minded stratum of society.

The Leninist party exploited the desire of oppressed peoples for independence. The party used all administrative mechanisms and resources to strengthen its power. The press was seen as the most effective tool spreading the communist ideology among the population of national regions. "The fundamental principles of journalism as a system used to achieve the main goal of state administration were created in the first years of the Bolshevik period ..." (Toboltseva, 2004, p. 73).

Issues on the national identity were ignored in the conditions of the communist authoritarian regime. There was a stereotype about the support of the national outskirts of the former tsarist empire provided to the Bolshevik party. The main argument for this thesis is the content of local print media, monopolistically controlled by one ruling party.

Meanwhile, the specific problems of formation of the press system in the republics of the North Caucasus, its features, the contribution of the national press to the administrative-command system have not yet been generalized in literature. In the international scientific community, this topic has not been developed yet. Most of the works were written during the Soviet period under the conditions of ideological monopoly and are characterized by a one-sided pro-communist approach, ignoring non-Bolshevik publications. Even studies of the perestroika and post-Soviet periods have these shortcomings. Conclusions drawn by Ahmedov and Kamalov (2006), Khuako (1991) repeat the theses characteristic of Soviet science. The studies by Karazhaeva (2003), Magulaeva (2010) and Tekeyeva (2003) were conducted in modern conditions, but the authors are not always consistent in criticizing the Bolshevik approaches of the regional press. The task of revising the ideological clichés about the triumphal march of Soviet power in the North Caucasus is urgent.

The relevance of the study of the authoritarian state model is due to the fact that in modern Russian society there is a trend to enhance state control over the media. The Russian media are becoming more and more uniform and unipolar, which was typical of Soviet journalism. These tendencies are more pronounced in the national republics.

## 2. Problem Statement

The problem of refuting the concept of universal support of mountaineers of the North Caucasus provided to Soviet power is still urgent. To solve it, new approaches to the study of complex processes of autonomization of national regions in line with the formation of a totalitarian communist regime are required. An attempt to identify the role of regional Bolshevik journalism in the propaganda of the Soviet nation-building policy has been made.

### **3. Research Questions**

The research subject is activities of the Bolshevik Party in using the journalism system of the North Caucasus as an important tool in implementing the authoritarian communist regime in the region. The materials are publications of North Caucasian journals on the problems of national autonomies, archival documents, studies on the history of North Caucasian media during the Bolshevik authoritarian regime.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the present study is to identify features of press propaganda of the Bolshevik nation-building policy on the example of the North Caucasus regions.

### **5. Research Methods**

The principle of historicism is used to identify the relationship and interdependence of social processes and local media in specific historical conditions. The method of a content analysis of regional publications is also applied.

### **6. Findings**

The slogan about the right of nations to self-determination was a bait at the initial stage of the Bolshevik partocracy, veiled with the epithet "proletarian". This is evidenced by the national program developed by Lenin (1970a). "The proletarian party is striving to create a larger state, because it is beneficial for the working people, it seeks to bring nations closer together and further merge ..." (Lenin, 1970a, p. 198). Avtorkhanov (1988) characterizes this policy as two-faced. Lenin's merits are "the anti-national interpretation of the right of peoples to self-determination and the masterful use of the national question for strategic purposes" (p. 11). The main condition for the successful implementation of the Bolshevik program of creating a unitary state was the establishment of Soviet power. The task of the party was to win over the masses of the national borderlands and through the strengthening of local party cells to extend the dictatorship of the partocracy throughout the country. And the slogan about the self-determination of nations was used as a diversion. "Granting this right to undeveloped peoples is more than dangerous" (Latsis, 1992, p. 74).

Such a cynical policy could not have been successful without manipulating the mass consciousness and serious ideological support. That is why the press was assigned a special role in the development of revolutionary processes in the national outskirts due to the fact that the ideas about socialism were not understood by the illiterate local population. It was the national press that became the center around which the pro-Bolshevik forces of national minorities rallied. Newspapers and magazines inspired the masses with the idea that only Soviet power would give them true freedom. G. Lagutin recalled that in 1917–1919 all the newspaper speeches "were aimed to awaken the revolutionary consciousness of the masses" (as cited in Groznenskiy rabochiy, 1922).

It must be admitted that this propaganda of the Soviet press helped to attract part of the population of the national outskirts to the side of the Soviet regime, although the statements about universal support to the Bolsheviks' national policy in the North Caucasus were sheer bluff. The official newspaper of the People's Commissariat for Ethnic Affairs wrote that "the Kabardians, Ingush, Chechens ... declared a holy war on all enemies of the working people ... The population of the North Caucasus is imbued with love for Soviet power" (*Zhizn' natsional' nostey*: 1918, December 22). And the North Caucasian regional Bolshevik newspaper Sovetsky Yug claimed that the congress of the Chechen poor in Grozny unanimously adopted a resolution in support of Soviet power (*Sovetskiy Yug*: 1920, October 1). The similar clichés were used in each issue. Meanwhile, the Grozny Bolsheviks in Chechnya were supported only by a small group of armed mountaineers under the command of Aslanbek Sheripov.

In the Bolshevik newspapers and magazines, cases of dissatisfaction with the party's policy of socialist construction and mass anti-Soviet protests were ignored. The dictatorship of the Bolshevik partocracy was established. A society which can be considered as the initial model of an authoritarian system characterized by rigid centralism, forced labor and its militarization was formed. In the absence of a solid social support, the authorities resorted to terror and violence methods. The party-command dictatorship headed by a narrow group of people was consolidating in the country, which gave reason even to old party members to reproach Lenin for seizing "power" (Toboltseva, 2004). The proletarian "autocracy" arose in Russia; Lenin was a recognized leader.

At the initial stage, the activities of the Bolshevik Party aimed to create the statehood of the former oppressed nations in the form of autonomization seem forced. This is confirmed by the formal approach of the new government to nation-building. In the North Caucasus, ethnic groups identifying themselves as one people, having one language, were divided, while the unrelated ones, on the contrary, were artificially united. The Adygs lived in three different regions. At the same time, the Turkic-speaking Karachais and Balkars were included in the region with the Circassians and Kabardians belonging to the Circassians. These facts allow us to conclude that the slogan proclaimed by the Bolsheviks about the equality of nations was aimed at manipulating the mass consciousness.

In the early 1920s, foundations of the national policy were created. The state was formed as a system of hierarchically ordered national entities. The national outskirts of Russia were at different levels of social, economic and cultural development. For example, in the North Caucasus, peoples with different levels of development lived together. If in Ossetia, Dagestan and Kabarda, there were feudal relations, in Chechnya and Ingushetia, the patriarchal-clan system prevailed.

The uneven development of national regions created difficulties for building the national statehood, which was of paramount importance for strengthening the dictatorship of the Bolshevik partocracy. The Bolsheviks proceeded from the fact that the forms of a state structure of national minorities would depend on the level of their social, economic and cultural development. It was assumed that ethnic groups would not have equal rights in state building. This is evidenced by the division of peoples into titular nations and national minorities, which Stalin cynically called "fluid national groups" (Stalin, 1947). The peoples of the North Caucasus were included in these groups.

On the other hand, the Bolshevik Party wanted to unify the state building policy in the national regions: the Bolshevik party organizations were subordinate to the Central Committee. The various forms

of the national state structure of the peoples of Russia (federation, autonomy, national administrative formations) differed from each other, but in fact they were varieties of a single dictatorship of Bolshevism.

The press was an active conductor of the national policy of the CPSU (b). The activities of the press included a whole range of issues: promotion of the Leninist-Stalinist nationality policy, the Soviet state model, assistance in creating state institutions, training national personnel, etc. The nation-building process in the North Caucasus was difficult and had a number of features that were reflected in the national party-Soviet press. First of all, most of the local peoples had never had their own statehood. In the North Caucasus, there were no personnel for the state apparatus. Most of the peoples of the region did not even have their own written language, which made it difficult to conduct propaganda in local languages.

The local press played a positive role in eliminating the cultural backwardness of the national borderlands, which was the most important prerequisite for the creation of statehood in the national areas. However, the solution to this problem was fraught with enormous difficulties. In the North Caucasus, due to the large number of peoples and severity of interethnic relations inherited from tsarism, the national question was most confused.

The regional magazine "Revolution and Highlander" wrote: "Soviet construction in the national regions of the North Caucasian Territory was difficult" (Revolyutsiya i gorets, 1928). In March 1917, the Cossack chieftaincy created a military government, and in May the mountain peoples established their own government. Meanwhile, these state formations arose on an anti-Bolshevik platform, they were called counter-revolutionary in Soviet propaganda. The mountain government sought to separate the region from Russia.

However, contrary to the proclaimed right to self-determination, the Bolshevik Party could not recognize the Terek region as a democratic federation. In January 1918, at the first congress of the peoples of the Terek region, the mountain and Cossack governments were united. The anti-Soviet position gave way to the Bolshevik one. The delegates spoke out in support of the Soviet regime; the local Bolshevik press introduced principles of the Lenin's national policy into the consciousness of the mountain masses (Lenin, 1970a).

The congress decided to proclaim the Terek Autonomous Soviet Republic, "established on the basis of a free union of nations" (Narodnaya vlast', 1917). In the Terek Republic, there were the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies (in the proletarian districts of Grozny and Vladikavkaz) and People's Soviets.

The Terek Autonomous Republic existed for about a year. In February 1919, Denikin occupied the North Caucasus. Under these conditions, in some regions of the North Caucasus, local anti-Soviet formations headed by Prince Nukh-Bek Tarkovsky, imams Nazhmudin Gotsinsky, Uzun-Khadzhi Saltinsky, and General Mikail Khalilov were created. The Mountain government, which emigrated to Georgia, also took an anti-Bolshevik position. The White Guard authorities fought against Bolshevism using military and propaganda methods. In October, the newspaper "Dagestan" was established by the order of N. Tarkovsky. In March 1919, the "Bulletin of the Mountain Republic" declared itself an organ of the peoples of the North Caucasus opposed the Bolshevik government and the Volunteer Army. The

newspaper supported the Denikin's government, "which aimed to cure Russia of a terrible disease - Bolshevism" (*Vestnik Gorskoy respubliki*, 1919)". There were more than a hundred printed editions of the White Guard (Katkov, 1977). Meanwhile, the White movement was not supported by the population of the North Caucasus. The slogan "For a Great, United, Indivisible Russia!" frightened off the national outskirts. The Bolsheviks promised the nationalities to give the right to self-determination. According to Bazanov (2018), one of the reasons for the defeat of the whites in the Civil War was the lack of thought-out ideological work. "The whites did not use the methods of mass propaganda, whereas the Bolsheviks did it. They promise to give land to peasants, factories to workers, and peace, freedom and prosperity to each citizen. ... The whites did not have censorship, they restored order in the conquered territories" (p. 15).

Therefore, detachments of pro-Soviet local peoples waged a partisan war against Denikin's people. In addition, the Bolsheviks persuaded religious leaders to oppose Denikin's army. On April 1, 1920, G.K. Ordzhonikidze reported: "The liberation from the Whites of the North Caucasus, Kuban, Stavropol, Black Sea, Terek and Dagestan regions has become a fait accompli" (as cited in Magulaeva, 2010, p. 72). The Soviet government mercilessly cracked down on local leaders and religious leaders who had helped them to win.

In the conditions of the Civil War, the foundations of Soviet republics and regions of the North Caucasus were laid. After the restoration of Soviet power, the North Caucasian peoples began to build national states and state associations. The local party-Soviet press became a tool of propaganda of the Bolshevik nationality policy.

The local press played an important role in the development of the state structure of the North Caucasian peoples. "It was necessary to create a system of management, which would not contradict the basic principles of the Soviet Constitution, violate national and everyday habits and customs of the mountaineers, and give them the opportunity for the original cultural and political development" (*Sovetskiy Yug*, 1920, p. 9). However, such slogans were not supported.

Since the first days, the state form of the dictatorship was revolutionary committees. This was due to the complex situation and severity of the class struggle. The revolutionary committees were appointed by the higher authorities, they were aimed to strengthen the dictatorship of proletariat. The Regional Revolutionary Committee created on March 31, 1920 was headed by Sergo Ordzhonikidze.

In the early twenties, the Dagestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was established. The regional newspaper "Soviet Yug" published a page dedicated to the autonomy of the peoples of Dagestan. The readers welcomed the formation of the DASSR (*Sovetskiy Yug*, 1920).

In summer of 1920, the press of the North Caucasus discussed the problem of nation-building of the peoples that were part of the Terek region. The local press conducted propaganda during the preparation for the congress of the Terek peoples. In the speeches of the "Soviet South", a large-scale propaganda of significance of the congress was conducted, the tasks were explained. The newspaper called to elect representatives dedicated to the liberation of workers (*Sovetskiy Yug*, 1920), that is, the Bolsheviks. On November 17, 1920, at the congress of the Terek peoples, the Autonomous Mountain Socialist Soviet Republic was established. It included the peoples of the North Caucasus: Chechens, Ossetians, Ingush, Kabardians, Balkars, and Circassians.

The newspaper Krasny Trud published in Grozny identified the tasks of the Mountain Republic: "The development of the media, schools, theaters, clubs and cultural and educational institutions in their native language" (Krasnyy trud, 1921). The Mountain Republic promoted the achievements of Soviet power, presented as the greatest achievement of the Bolshevik national policy. "The mountaineers should create a new culture" (Kommunist, 1921), wrote the newspaper Kommunist, published in Vladikavkaz, in those days.

The body of the regional committee of the RCP (b) and the Central Executive Committee of the Mountain ASSR was Gorskaya Pravda, which played an important role in the implementation of the national policy in the North Caucasus. Gorskaya Pravda regularly published articles on the problems of nation-building in the region, covered the work of the Soviet authorities, criticized those who did not follow the party line. "The situation in our rural cells and districts is quite serious," reports Gorskaya Pravda in 1922. – "There is no work in Chechen and Ingush districts" (Gorskaya Pravda, 1922). Gorskaya Pravda helped to strengthen the dictatorship of the Bolsheviks.

Soviet construction in the republics of the North Caucasus was hampered by the fact that their economies were destroyed by the civil war. In Chechnya, 20 auls were destroyed, there were 25 thousand street children, the region lost 30 percent of the population Lenin (1970b) was interested in the situation in the region. On April 25, 1920, he telegraphed: "I authorize you to announce to the mountaineers that I promise to send financial assistance through the Council of People's Commissars. Give them up to 200 million..." (Lenin, 1970b, p. 109).

An important milestone in nation-building in the country was the creation of the USSR in 1922. In accordance with the Constitution, the new state formation was supposed to ensure the equality of all the republics that entered the union. Also, autonomy was granted to small peoples who did not yet have their own independent statehood. It was from these positions that the propaganda of the USSR was carried out in the press, including the local one. Thus, the press of the North Caucasus published numerous materials in which it was emphasized that the formation of the USSR creates favorable conditions for the development of the process of nation-state building. "Wide paths of development are opening up for all Soviet peoples ..." (Nefterabochiy, 1923) – wrote the Grozny newspaper "Nefterabochiy" in those days.

In 1922–1924 a new stage of the national-state development of the North Caucasian regions began. The historical task of the Mountain ASSR as a single autonomy of mountain peoples was to combine their economic resources, restore the national economy, strengthen ties between the regions and thereby prepare the conditions for creating national autonomous formations of mountain peoples. The peoples of the North Caucasus expressed a desire to create their own national state formations. The press of the Mountain ASSR supported this movement. Gorskaya Pravda (1924) published collections of letters from readers who supported the development of the national statehood of each people.

The government of the RSFSR separated autonomous regions of the peoples of the North Caucasus from the Mountain ASSR. "An independent national statehood of all autonomies was created. The periodicals described how difficult and ambiguous that time was ... The headlines of newspapers reflected feelings of the peoples of the North Caucasus, who acquired their national statehood" (Tekeyeva, 2003). On December 10, 1922, Gorskaya Pravda published the Government's decision on the formation of the Chechen Autonomous Region. Soon the newspaper published an article, which touched

upon the problems of formation of the region, the historical path of the Chechen people. The propaganda of the Soviet system was conducted. "The declaration of Chechnya as an autonomous region is the best indicator that only workers and peasants' government is capable of providing small backward peoples with the right to life and development" (Gorskaya Pravda, 1923). Following Chechnya, other regions became independent autonomies, and the Mountain Republic was abolished.

All local Bolshevik publications expressed satisfaction with the decision of the Soviet state. Gorskaya Pravda (1924), reporting wrote that speeches of all delegates "expressed confidence in economic and cultural progress of Ossetia". The Ingush newspaper "Serdalo" supported the government's decision. The article analyzed activities of the GASSR, its contribution to the development of the peoples of the North Caucasus, and welcomed the formation of the Ingush Autonomous Region (Serdalo, 1924).

The process of nation-building encountered problems that were not typical of the central regions. In the national regions, there was no industrial proletariat, and the cultural and educational level was low. The positions of the clergy and elders were strong. As a result of the 1920 elections, a strong anti-Bolshevik stratum appeared in the Soviets of Chechnya. Local councils turned out to be unacceptable to the new government in terms of their composition. The very first attempt to express the will of the people was nipped in the bud. The Bolshevik government rejected the proclaimed slogan about the self-determination of nations. The newspapers wrote that this "initiative" belonged to the "working masses". Thus, Gorskaya Pravda (1921) published a letter from the Komsomol members of Chechnya, who demanded to replace the reactionary Soviets with revolutionary committees.

On September 10, 1921, the Soviets were dissolved and revolutionary committees were created. At the beginning of 1922, new elections were held under the leadership of the revolutionary committees. The District Congress of Soviets elected a new executive committee of the Chechen District. However, although the anti-Bolshevik stratum was reduced, they remained under the influence of the clergy. In this regard, the need to dissolve the Soviets arose. In 1922, the executive committees of Chechnya and Ingushetia were abolished and replaced by revolutionary committees.

These facts emphasize the severity of the situation in the region. The Bolsheviks used the press as a military tool. The newspapers Serlo and Grozny Rabochy launched a campaign to slander Sheikh Ali Mitaev. He influenced the mountain peasantry, had his own Sharia regiments, that is, he had real power. The local party-state elite was forced to reckon with him, and he was included in the Chechen Revolutionary Committee. At the same time, the local press criticized his activities. A. Mitaev became one more victim of the Soviet regime. He was killed on April 18, 1924 in accordance with the instructions of the Bolshevik leadership. The religious factor did not fit "into the plans and scenarios of Sovietization of mountain regions (Bugayev, 2019). The murder of a religious authority sparked outrage among the local population. However, the regional newspapers wrote that the working mountaineers supported the removal of Ali Mitaev from power.

Central and regional party publications directed the activities of local editorial offices in order to discredit those who did not agree with command-administrative methods in nation-building, imposing forms and methods that were unpopular among the mountaineers. "Under the influence of socio-political deformations, they issued directive publications. Following the example of the Bolshevik Press magazine, which was particularly successful in its efforts to substantiate and implement the "principle"

“revolutionary Bolshevik vigilance”, the regional magazine “Revolution and Highlander” blamed the national press for not improving the Soviet apparatus. It was argued that “in this apparatus there is a lot of alien, class-hostile” (Khuako, 1991, p. 183).

However, the influence of religion and Sharia – a set of legal laws based on Islam – was so strong that could increase anti-Soviet sentiments among a large part of the population. Therefore, in some North Caucasian regions, Sharia courts were retained. The propaganda campaign against Sharia was conducted, and the most active representatives of the clergy were subjected to repression. The decree of the Chechen Organizing Bureau of the RCP (b) of December 9, 1925 indicated the need to "discredit the institute of Sharsuds in the eyes of the population".

Of course, the local press was at the forefront of the fight against the Sharia movement. The pages were filled with publications about facts of alleged fraud by the leaders of Sharia courts, fabrications about the "anti-state" activities of local councils, which consisted of religious leaders, educators. Newspapers and magazines helped to justify the actions of the authorities to Sovietize the state power. The Sharia courts were abolished in Chechnya, Dagestan, Kabarda, Karachay-Cherkessia and other national regions. In the second half of the 1920s, the command and control system of management prevailed. The pages of newspapers and magazines were filled with publications about the “happy life of highlanders” grateful to the Soviet regime. The reality was far from the idyllic picture painted by the Bolshevik press.

The first North Caucasian press created when establishing the proletariat dictatorship by the military methods allowed the party to form a local press system as an important segment of the Bolshevik partocratic regime.

## 7. Conclusion

The Bolshevik policy of autonomization of small peoples as a program to overcome the backwardness of the outskirts of Russia was aimed at preserving the identity of nationalities, developing the Marxist ideology, erasing the national identity and forming a single socialist community.

The press turned into an instrument for propagating the ideas of socialism, played a significant role in strengthening the dictatorship of the Bolshevik Party, forming an authoritarian regime. The press was used to discredit religion, eradicate national traditions and customs, and transform society into an obedient mass. The theses of the Soviet historical and journalistic science about the mass character of periodicals, their high efficiency in spreading the Marxist ideology among the highlanders were not real. The North Caucasian Bolshevik publications of the first years of Soviet power were not regular. Due to their atheistic orientation, they were ignored by the population, whose religiosity level was very high. This allows us to conclude that local Soviet journalism did not enjoy either trust or authority in the mountain communities.

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