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# SOVIET BUILDING PECULIARITIES IN CHECHNYA IN FIRST HALF OF XX CENTURY

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# Abstract

The paper studies the peculiarities of the establishment of the Soviet power in Chechnya. Its chronology covers the period from 1920 to 1924. With the end of the civil war, it was natural that in the first place the competent governing bodies had to be established. There was a complex problem, since the revolution system of the state regulation had formed under specific conditions. First, there was post-war time; second, the concerned territory was one of the most deficient—in terms of almost all aspects—peripheries of the former Tsarist Russia. The leaders of the Bolsheviks were orienting their commissaries to take into account the combination of the factors following from these circumstances. The subject of the study lies in the discovery of the main regularities of establishment and development of the Soviet power in national regions of Russia (in Chechnya). The political system of Soviet Chechnya was formed in hard conditions. It was the period when the elections for local Soviets were run in Chechnya; and the transition from emergency government to elected one was made. Such processes of Soviet building indicate a gradual solution of the problems connected with the strengthening of local Soviet authorities and extensive involvement of highlanders into their formation and operation.

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Keywords: North Caucasus, Chechnya, war, political, government.



## 1. Introduction

Soviet building is a complex process of new political system formation destined to provide effective functioning of the government everywhere in the state.

The practical implementation of this comprehensive task is known to be triggered by the October Revolution of 1917, which resulted in the establishment of the Soviet power. The struggle for its establishment lead to grand-scale civil war. After it ended, the victors—leaders of the proletarian revolution—promptly started extensive formation of the political system of the new government. In Chechnya, as in many other national Russian regions, this problem was solved in several stages using different tactics and forms of revolutionary institutional hierarchy. We believe, these historical aspects require more profound analysis and comprehensive evaluation.

#### 2. Problem Statement

We deem the problem of Soviet building in Chechnya to be of appreciable scientific and practical importance. The investigation of this issue helps creating more comprehensive and objective image of complex and controversial political life of Chechen people, show substantial efforts of the central power implementing in the beginning of Soviet building the most optimal concept of economical, political and cultural development of the region making it a national autonomy as a part of geographically united Soviet state in the 1920s.

#### 3. Research Questions

The subject of the study lies in the discovery of the main regularities of establishment and development of the Soviet power in national regions of Russia (in Chechnya).

### 4. Purpose of the Study

The work is aimed at the study of Soviet political system formation in Chechnya.

#### 5. Research Methods

The methodological foundation of the research is a seamless combination of retrospective and logical approaches to the problem under study. The authors followed the principles of historical science: scientificity, objectiveness and historism that envisage the study of any phenomena and historical event in specific historical conditions and connections, which should be based on the facts and demands persistent adherence to the logic of the system analysis of facts, chronologically sequent study of the event, objective unprejudiced investigation into the problem.

#### 6. Findings

In the spring of 1920, the combined forces of the Red Army and local Soviet-oriented forces liberated Chechnya from Denikin's occupation. Local centers of counter-revolution were suppressed. However, the situation in the region remained to be extremely complicated. The political situation— controversial, unpredicatable and ready to explode at every moment—was aggravated by social and

economical complications. Disorganization, poverty and severe diseases were everywhere. Another complication was that the population of Chechnya was almost completely illiterate and did not speak Russian; they were not prepared to instantly understand and accept the mottos of the Bolsheviks and promptly find bearings in current situation. The public mind anxiously realized the destructive consequences of revolutionary demolition of state and social system and those of the civil war. All these factors-objective and subjective-necessitated immediate establishment of an optimal state government, a power mechanism as a key element and the basis of future political system of the new society (Bugaev & Alkhastova, 2014; Alkhastova, 2016; Tufanov, ZolotarevGulyak, Kravchenko, & Guzynin, 2018). On October 24, 1919, by the decree of All-Russian Central Executive Committee (VTsIK) the revolutionary committees (Revcoms) were established (Bugaev & Alkhastova, 2014). It was stated that they are "formed for persistent defense against the enemy and support of the revolutionary order: 1) on territories liberated from the enemy, 2) on the frontline and 3) in the rear (Bugaev & Alkhastova, 2014). The main tasks of the revcoms were the countrywide support of the revolutionary order, necessary help to locals and restoration of economy, creation of conditions for establishment of local authorities on the basis of wide public will. The decree noted that "when possible to shift to normal establishment of local authorities, the decree of central power in locations liberated from the enemy arranges the elections for the Congresses of Soviets or for Soviets which executive committees (after their election) receive all powers, inventory and duties from revolutionary committees (Bugaev & Alkhastova, 2014; Elbuzdukaeva, 2015). On March 31, 1920, the Revolutionary War Council of the Caucasus front "to restore the Soviets power on North Caucasus", has established North Caucasus Revolutionary committee (Kuban, Black Sea region, Stavropol government, Terek region and Dagestan) composed of: Ordzhonikidze (chair), Kirov and Poluyan (deputies), Mdivani, Stopani, Narimanov and Seid-Gabiev (members) (Soviet Archive, 1920, F. 64, reg. 1, d. 15, p. 16.). At the same day, new Revcom has issued order No. 1 "to recreate party communist organization on North Caucasus" and established the Party bureau composed of CC RCPb member I. T. Smilg (chair), Kirov and Mdivani (members) (Soviet Archive, 1920, F. 64, reg. 1, d. 15, p. 16). However, in early April 1920, to govern all the party work and control the execution of directives of CC RCPb and Soviet Government, the resolution of CC RCPb Plenum as of April 8, 1920 has established the Caucasus bureau of CC RCPb (Bugai, 1977). At the same time, the Terek regional revcom was created chaired by a member of the Revolutionary Military Council of Caucasus front V.M. Kvirkeliya. The representative of Chechnya in the revcom was Tashtemir Elderkhanov (Bugai, 1977). Thus, the central Soviet power gradually moved closer to subordinate territories. However, this solutions did not completely satisfy the Revolutionary Military Council of the XI army, which commandment believed that it was this army that crushed (arguably) anti-Soviet forces on North Caucasus. That is why they insisted on active participation in the formation of local authorities. It is highly likely that this circumstance promoted the governmental resolution (June 22, 1920), which was delivered on June 26, 1920 by the secretary of the Council of People's Commissars Fotiyeva to G. Ordzhonikidze. The content of her telegram was categoric: "The overseen Caucasus Revcom must be disbanded. The general administration of Soviet building and economic affairs will be performed by the Labor Army of North Caucasus (Soviet Archive, 1920, F. 64, reg. 1, d. 15, p. 20). Thus, the Council of People's Commissars and Council of Labor and defense of RSFSR have created Red Labor Armies under a pretext of support to authorities of, in modern language, problematic regions "abounding with raw

materials, fuel, food products", which the North Caucasus belonged to at that time. Taking into the account the strategic importance of Grozny oil-industry region, the city of Grozny-the center of "extraction of highly anticipated and demanded by the republic liquid fuel"-was chosen as the place of permanent basing of the headquarters of the Caucasus Labor Army. The assigned HQ commander was I. V. Kosior. He was also "the chair of Grozny Oil Administration" (Bugaev & Alkhastova, 2014). The official main task of the Labor Army was to "facilitate the extraction and transportation of oil and restoration of production fields and transport (railroad)" (Bugaev & Alkhastova, 2014). However, in fact the Army command was not limiting themselves only by these tasks. After some time they transformed into some kind of governing body increasingly often interfering into purely civil issues. In particular, the army commander I. V. Kosior was giving categorical orders to both officers of city administration and Chechnya Administration, which often lead to serious confusions. The issues of formation of local authorities were discussed by the delegates of the Chechen people convention which opened in Grozny on April 3, 1920. S. Kirov addressing the delegates has highly praised the contribution of the Chechens to the defeat of counter-revolutionary forces (Soviet Archive, 1920, F. 80, reg. 4, d. 1, p. 2). Talking about nearest tasks, the delegate of V.I. Lenin noted that "Here came the moment we all fought for: the government of people forever, everything is in the hands of the working class. The oppressed people got the opportunity to build their lives as they want... We need to destroy in the mountains all counter-revolutionists and misfits: bandits and outlaws. The electorate power will come when Chechnya becomes organized; now the Revcom should be assigned, but it will be composed of the Chechens only. These are the instructions of the central power not only relating to you, but to other just liberated nations as well. The Revcom established here will be a sound power with unlimited rights. Follow the instructions of your Revcom." (Soviet Archive, 1920, F. 80, reg. 4, d. 1, p. 3). Later, over the telephone call Kirov said to Ordzhonikidze: "The Kozacs are definitely giving troubles; they were especially discouraged by your and my speeches in Chechnya and Ingushetiya, in particular the issue of land and weapons" (Soviet Archive, 1920, F. 80, reg. 15, d. 3, p. 1). The Chechnya Revcom was "assigned... from among five persons, who were exclusively Chechens" headed by Tashtemir Eldarkhanov. The new authority "received the order to establish hard revolution order..." in Chechnya. His bosses were to "provide the project and materials on the land issue just in one week" (Soviet Archive, 1920, F. 80, reg. 15, d. 3, p. 1). Despite all the objective difficulties and lack of specialists capable of leading the revolutionary transformations, the administration of the Chechnya district has formed 35 local revcoms in the shortest time. The local party building issues were solved by a separate sections approved by the Organisation bureau of RCPb of Grozny district (Bugai, 1977). Under new conditions, when the struggle against counter-revolution forces was won, V.I. Lenin understood that internal policy should be pursued, including national one that was completely focused on the task of converging and further consolidating peoples formerly included into the Tsarist Russia and now following the way of socialistic transformations. "This, said I. Stalin, necessitates the establishment of definite relations and bonds between the center and periphery of Russia, providing close and unbreakable union between them." (Gatarova, Kosheleva & Rogovaya, 2005). In this connection V.I. Lenin paid careful attention and gave specific aid to national peripheries including southern near-border regions, in particular, North Caucasus, the military and political stability of which had exceptional importance, especially in current international conditions. Simultaneously, party building was launched. On May 25, 1920, a session of the Politbureau of CC RCPb

took place. The participants were V. Lenin, I. Stalin, L. Trotskiy and other supreme leaders of the Soviet state. Among other key issues they considered those "On the administration of party work on North Caucasus" and "On organization of Soviet power on North Caucasus" (Soviet Archive, 1920, F. 17, reg. 3, d. 82, p. 4). They resolved to create a Central Committee Bureau on the North Caucasus, "while preserving its name as Caucasus Peripheral Committee (Soviet Archive, 1920, F. 17, reg. 3, d. 82, p. 4). It included: Beloborodov, Ordzhonikidze, Kirov, Mdivani, Arakhelashvili, Narymanov, Nazaretian (Soviet Archive, 1920, F. 17, reg. 3, d. 82, p. 4). It was noted that the new bureau "should manage the work of those communistic party organizations that comprise the RCP" (Soviet Archive, 1920, F. 17, reg. 3, d. 82, p. 4). Smilga, Kirov, Vladimirskiy and Milyutin were assigned to prepare the suggestions on the organization of the Soviet power on the North Caucasus and submit them for consideration of the subsequent session of the Politbureau (Soviet Archive, 1920, F. 17, reg. 3, d. 82, p. 4). On June 18, 1920, the Politbureau reviewed the North Caucasus issues and resolved "to disband the North-Caucasus Revcom". The general administration of Soviet building and economic affairs was assigned to the Labor Army of North Caucasus. It also managed Kuban and Stavropol governments, Terek, Dagestan and Don regions (Soviet Archive, 1920, F. 17, reg. 3, d. 89, p. 6). On September 14, 1920, on the session of Politbureau of CC RCPb, which included Lenin, Stalin, Krestinskiy, Bukharin and other state governors, Stalin and Frumkin reported on the sentiments of Caucasus highlanders (Soviet Archive, 1920, F. 17, reg. 3, d. 108, p. 1). The decree adopted after the detailed discussion of this exceptionally complex issue confirmed the "decree of the CC on allotting the land from that of Cossack villages to the Chechens". Together with that it was adopted to "take the strongest measures to provide them freedom of actions and creation between them and Russian population right relations on the basis of total administrative autonomy" (Soviet Archive, 1920, F. 17, reg. 3, d. 108, p. 1). The detailed "definition of these measures" was planned to be discussed in a wider format, on a plenary meeting of the CC. Moreover, the Politbureau session participants recognized the necessity of "the trip of comrade Stalin to Caucasus for administrative detailed determination... of policy on Caucasus in general, and regarding the highlanders in particular". He also received the authority of the Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary representative of RSFSR (Soviet Archive, 1920, F. 17, reg. 3, d. 108, p. 1). On September 18, 1920, a plenary session of the Terek regional party committee took place, where the issue on the political position in Terek region and on the work among highlanders was heard. Its participants defined as the primary task the enhancement of political work that should be at all times be carried out with due consideration of local peculiarities. It must had been especially taken into account that "the elements of family life, patriarchal structure, plentiful religious prejudices, absence of the proletariat give no basis for implementation of ... communistic program" (Soviet Archive, 1920, F. 64, reg. 1, d. 116, p. 18-19). Thus, the local Bolsheviks again paid attention to specific (objective) conditions that should be considered when solving the problem of engaging highlanders into active Soviet building. However, even on the first session of the eastern folks that took place in early September of 1920 in Baku, the delegates anxiously talked about the style and methods of the work of Party and Soviet officials, especially of those detached to national regions from the center, do not comply with local specific reality. These circumstances inevitably caused complex collisions between the representatives of the central power and local population. Considering these and other factors that severely complicated the sovetization of former national peripheries, eastern in this case, the Politbureau of CC RCPb on October 14, 1920 has recognized "necessary to establish autonomies

in forms corresponding to the specific conditions for those eastern nationalities that have no autonomous institutions..." (Soviet Archive, 1920, F. 17, reg. 3, d. 115, p. 2-3). Thus, the ethnic problem was one of the main directions of the internal policy of immature Soviet power, and the central power initiated the process of establishment of national sovereignty on the principles of autonomy (Tufanov, 2018; Khlynina, 2005). From that moment on, changes the tactics of the Soviet political system formation in the regions of compact living of highlanders, including the Chechens. On November 17, 1920 the session of Terek region folks asserted the autonomy of Gorskaya (Highlander) Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (GASSR). On January 20, 1921, the VTsIK RSFSR has adopted the decree on formation of GASSR as a part of RSFSR, which included Chechnya, Osetiya, Ingushetiya, Balkariya, Karachay and living between cossacks and nonresidents. Grozny and Vladikavkaz were included as independent administrative units (Bugaev, 2014; Kazharov, 2018). However, GASSR persisted no so long. On September 21, 1921, Kabarda left the republic; in early 1922, Balkariya and Karachay did the same. Thus, the disintegration of GASSR started which ended in July of 1924. On November 30, 1922, the presidium of VTsIK decided to exclude "Chechnya from Gorskaya republic into autonomous region with the residence in Grozny, not including Grozny itself into the Autonomous Chechen region (Krinko, 2014; Kokorkhoeva, 2016). On January 4, 1923 the session of VTsIK presidium considered the issue of external boundaries of Chechen autonomous region and separation of Grozny as independent entity. Additionally to its decree as of November 30, 1922 on the formation of Chechen autonomous region, VTsIK decided that: a) the boundaries of Chechen autonomous region should be regarded as the boundaries of Chechen district of Autonomous Gorsk Socialist Soviet Republic including Petropavlovskaya, Goryachevodskaya and Ilyinskaya villages and Sarakhtinskiy farmstead of Sunzhensk district; b) the transfer of territories should be finished by February 1, 1923 through appropriate procedure of NKVD; c) the issue of the boundaries of Grozny segregated as a special entity should be solved by the VTsIK Commission composed of the representatives of VTsIK, Narkomnats and Kraieconomsovet of South-Eastern Russia. The personal assignment of Commission members should be entrusted to VTsIK secretariat; d) oblige the commission during the performance of the personal assignment, on the one hand, to provide maximum unity of oil facilities and enterprises located directly in Grozny, and on the other hand, to provide maximum protection of interests of Chechen autonomous region (Record, 1924a, p. 3). On July 29, 1924, the Ist session of Soviets of Chechen autonomous region took place in Grozny (Record, 1924b, p. 32.). This event laid foundation for a new stage in the formation of Soviet political system in Chechnya, the stage of its radical transformation. The session was opened by Tashtemir Eldarkhanov. The forum working organs included Eneev Magomet, Deich Yakov and others. The honorary chair was A.I. Mikoyan. The honorary presidium member was E.G. Yevdokimova (Record, 1924b, p. 35-36). For the sake of political activation of highlander massed, the Chechen Regional Revcom at the preparation stage according to the clause 57 of RSFSR Constitution (as of 1918) set maximum representation quota: one deputy from every 500 citizens for district-level Soviet sessions and from every 1000 citizens for regional sessions. As a result, the number of session delegates amounted to 373 persons. The age distribution of the delegates was as follows: 2 younger than 20, 33 persons from 20 to 25, 104 persons from 25 to 35, 95 persons from 35 to 45 and 87 persons older than 45; in terms of social status: 2 workers, 302 farmers, 39 officers; in terms of party membership: 35 communists, 20 Komsomol members; in terms for literacy: 133 literate and 240 illiterate persons (Record, 1924b, p. 32). The report

on international and internal state of the Soviet republic was made by A.I. Mikoyan. The delegates carefully listened to the report of the head of periphery party organization. His direct participation in the forum was very important primarily because thus they could have face-to-face communication with a senior government official. There were a lot of problems accumulated in the region. Delegate Yagya Ibragimov welcomed A. Mikoyan as a highly esteemed guest and asked him "... in the name of great for Chechnya moment of harvesting the fruits of revolution ... release from arrest Ali and Omar Mitaev" arrested by OGPU organs in spring of 1924. This request was supported by almost everyone. A.I. Mikoyan "clarified that the arrest of Mitaev... was due to governmental reasons of GPU" and "promised to bring to corresponding bodies... the request of the Session" (Record, 1924b, p. 37-38; Magamadov & Meskhidze 2011). The key item on the forum's agenda was the report of Regional revcom "over the time of its existence" (1922-1924). The reporter was the chair of Chechen Revcom Tashtemir Eldarkhanov. He paid a peculiar attention to the issues that should be solved to strengthen the Soviet power in Chechnya. Namely he noted successful struggle against banditism, both criminal and political (up to 60 bandits were exiled, 200 horses confiscated, up to 500 bandits were arrested) (Record, 1924b, p. 37-38), creation of competent militia, both in center and in the provinces; opening of schools and hospitals, children campus for orphans of revolutionists died in Chechnya; wide road building campaign, etc. (Record, 1924b, p. 40). However, the work of T. Eldarkhsnov and regional Revcom was seriously criticized. In particular, the delegates noted the "absence of power in mountain Chechnya, uneconomical spending of budget, hesitant struggle against banditism...", "inadequate recruitment", etc. (Record, 1924b, p. 60). In general, the work of Chechnya Revcom was considered satisfactory. Over the four years after establishment of Soviet power in Chechnya, such measures were obviously not implemented (due to a combination of circumstances and reasons), which could radically change the social and political situation. Undoubtedly, the tangible results were provided by the offensive struggle of corresponding forces with banditism and other forms of counteraction to sovetization. In general, in the considered period, there were many problems in Chechnya that required prompt and emergency measures. Thus, in late July-early August of 1924, the whole power of Chechen autonomous region was taken by Soviets. The administrative body of Chechnya became the Executive Committee (Ispolkom) formed by elections. This qualitative transformation of the key element of the forming political system (actually its basis) was, from our perspective, the result of a tactical maneuver of peripheral and central authorities.

### 7. Conclusion

The present investigation has yielded a range of following justified conclusions. First, the study allowed considering in details the complex process of soviet building in Chechnya in early 1920s. Second, the work (prepared on fundamental principles of scientificity, objectiveness and honesty) makes its contribution to objective scientific study of Chechen people history, Russian-Caucasus relations, national and federative policy of Soviet state in Chechnya in 1920s. Third, despite certain mistakes and flaws, Soviet central and local authorities were conducting reasoned national and federal policy that facilitated the strengthening of Soviet power in Chechnya. Fourth, the provision of autonomies to aboriginal people of North Caucasus, including Chechnya, became some sort of pinnacle of the national policy of the Bolsheviks, which lead to strengthening of their power in national peripheries. Fifth, one of the most

important tasks of Soviet building on North Caucasus in 1920s was the creation of effective Soviet party apparatus. Party government believed that such efficiency could be achieved by class-based approach when forming its cadres and banning of socially foreign elements (kulaks, Islamic church, etc.). Sixth, the elections of 1924 in Chechnya for local Soviet became a historical event; it transformed the emergency government into elected one, which laid the basis for a new stage in formation of Soviet political system in Chechnya, the state of its radical transformation.

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