

Russian Perspective on Eurasia in a Changing World Order

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Abstract

The world at large is on the edge very complex and complicated world with new understanding of ideologies, new version of foreign or external affairs of different partners. This is a New World. For Russia, as well as for India, or for China necessary to understand and even accept that each of them is not only one or main actor in Eurasia. Perhaps it holds true for other countries all around the World, even for the United States whose field of the interests is the whole world or for Britain. New players arise and old ones long for a new fair relations. The crisis spreads on different levels - local, bilateral, regional, global - acting as a factor in the next stage of turbulence of international relations and world politics. At the same time, for the XXI century it is the longest period of strict confrontation, affecting the basics and principles of post-bipolar world order. There is the option that the future of Eurasia will be determined by the new configuration of the world order and the results of Russia's confrontation with the US/NATO.

1. Introduction:

Russian authorities and society are trying to formulate a strategy of development for Russia in these new circumstances, confront with western narratives and stereotypes about the Russian past, character of state and people and relations with neighbors. One of the widespread western narrative on current situation is about the 'return of historic lands', where «all historical claims are bunkum anyway», as historian Timothy Snyder has noted, criticized «Putin's 'history-based' assertions» (Snyder, 2022). It really looks as «imperial mindset», but honestly speaking not Russian, but British.

Russians commentators suspect that all this «struggle with Russian imperialism» (see for example, Nixey, 2022) is a fig leaf for neocolonialism, where Russians feel themselves and own country as a target and source of resources. The Russian public narrative dominated by themes of the protection Russia and Russians, their rights, including the right to use their native language, political and economic freedom on global level and anti-colonial struggle and solidarity. By the way historical background has a sense indeed. Not just historical significance of formation and collapse the states and borders but the politics of memory as well.

First of all, though it is difficult to talk about ethnicity in Russian Empire, in the records there was no questions on ethnic origin, only language and denomination. Most people did not know about their ethnicity before 1926, when Soviet authorities started their population census according Bolshevik's understanding of national question.

Main principles of internal policy for Russian Empire were conservation of former order of management, denomination, common laws, and cultural traditions, accomplishing this by cooperation with local elites. The Revolutions of 1917th and the overthrow of the monarchy under the slogan of a democratic republic raised questions of the future structure of the country. The Bolshevik Party chose Federalism as a way of solution of 'national question' through granting of autonomies and formation of Federation then. The mainly concern was about the nature of the constitution of the future state and in particular the coexistence in the country of different nationalities. Lenin, who in theory had rejected federalism, and there were discussions about influence of American Federalism, at the time of drawing up the first Constitution of 1918 had to face the need to accept it in practice. (Montani, 1988, p.163)

In fact, he himself wrote a Declaration, then included in the Constitution, in which he states that: "The Russian Soviet Republic is founded on the basis of a free union of free nations, as a federation of national Soviet republics". If the first years of Soviet power became the period of the collapse of a unified statehood, then after the Civil War and Military Communism in the early 1920s there are on the one hand, an objective socio-economic and political conditions for unification were formed; on the other hand, a subjective understanding of the need for unification processes arose among the leaders of the Soviet state, in particular the leaders of the Communist Party of Bolsheviks were supposed to head this process. In 1920 Lenin repeatedly expressed the idea of the need "... strive for a more and closer federal union ...". As noted by

Soviet researchers "... essentially it was a brilliant idea of the formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics ...". (Yakubovskaya, 1972, p.21)

When a few years later the need arose to revise the constitutional text, Lenin apparently wanted to introduce further protection to safeguard the national minorities, partly because of the contrasts he had had with Stalin, who according to Lenin had exaggerated in his manifestation of "Great Russian chauvinism". (Ibid)

Stalin from his side presented the so-called autonomation plan. The provisions of the plan were the unification of all Soviet republics in the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) based on autonomy. That is, the further development of Soviet statehood was to be carried out within the framework of one state by the means of autonomation of new entities that were supposed to be part of the RSFSR on an autonomous basis.

The highest authority and administration in the state became the All -Russian Central Executive Committee, the Council of People's Commissars, and the Council of Labour and Defence of the RSFSR. It should be noted that the project drawn up by I.V. Stalin, was approved by the members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan and Armenia. However, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia spoke out against the main ideas of the project, saying that it is currently possible to unite in the framework of economic issues and general areas of politics, but with the simultaneous preservation of all attributes of the independence of the republics. Association in the form of autonomation was premature from the point of view of members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia. (Byushkina, 2022, p.84) Historians write about scandals in the Georgian Central Committee, which also contributed to the hardening of the autonomization plan.

In December 1922 the Soviet Congresses in Republics supporting Lenin's plan and finally December 30, 1922, the First Congress of Soviets approved The Declaration and Treaty on the Formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and created the Union of Soviet Socialistic Republics - USSR. The Russian State System - Free Union of Nations, Russian Socialists Federal Soviet Republic, where were not entity for the 'Titular Nation' – no possibility to create the national autonomy for Russians. The main concept - Russians can realise their national rights through Russian Socialists Federal Soviet Republic, which includes other ethnic autonomies. Bolshevik leader stressed that RSFSR just one republic among others equal republic, but there was sort of 'positive discrimination' for Russians as a requital for Tsarists epoch.

The disputes about the territorial arrangement of the USSR did not end with its declaration, precisely because of the oddities with the status of Russians. In February 1923, the People's Commissar for Nationalities, Joseph Stalin, sent his thoughts to members of the Politburo about the future Constitution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Formally, the union agreement was not even put into effect. Therefore, party leaders only discussed the general view of the new state, which they recently created (and which should be reflected in its basic law).

One of the issues that Stalin proposed to discuss is

how exactly the republics will be included in the Soviet Union. The fact is that in addition to Ukraine and Belarus, the Soviet Union was formed by two federations in 1922. One of them was the RSFSR (which at that time included the autonomies of Central Asia and Kazakhstan), as well as the Transcaucasian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic, which united Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. Accordingly, the question arose whether the autonomous republics of the federations should also join the Soviet Union on their own and be the parts to the Soviet Union Treaty, as Ukraine and Belarus. Stalin mentions that "this issue is now intensively debated among the eastern nationalists and partly among Georgians. » The People's Commissar for Nationalities himself mentions that the inclusion of autonomous republics directly in the Soviet Union has its advantages, because simplifies the structure of the new state. However, if such a decision is made, then a poorly solvable dilemma arises - what to do with the Russians.

As Stalin explicitly say the autonomies directly entering to the Soviet Union destroys the RSFSR, since this "obliges us to create a separate Russian republic, what lead us to great organisational restructuring." At the same time when creating such kind of Russian republic from different autonomous republics, the main cities with the predominant Russian population will have to be excluded and generally seriously redraw the boundaries of republics.

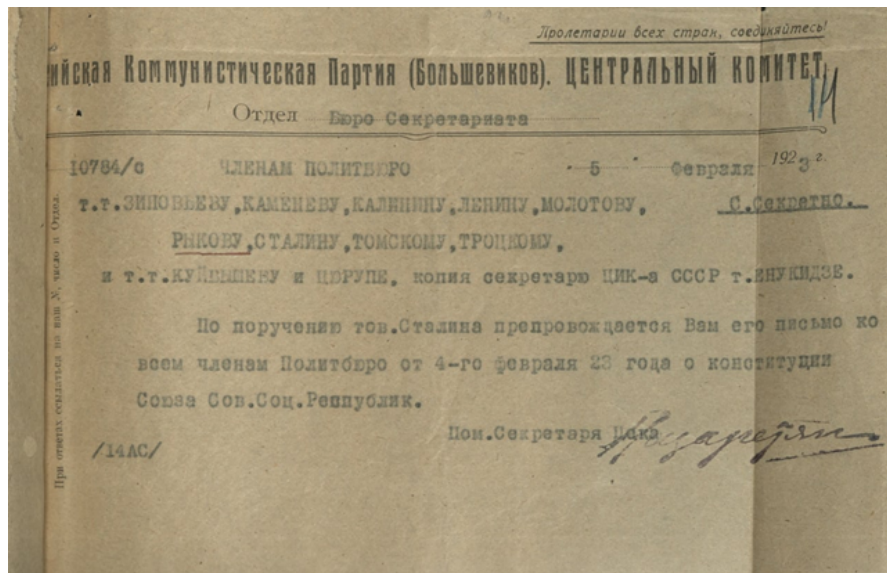
Stalin criticized the plan of federalization perhaps on reasons his own plan of autonomization was rejected. According to his plan the Ukraine, Belorussia and Transcaucasia join in Russian Federation as autonomies. The pragmatic reasons were - these Republics less developed and have relatively small population. The Majority of Communist Party leaders in National Republics were against the propose (especially Ukraine and Georgia) as a reestablishment of «Great Russia» on Socialist basis. Partly, discussion as a reflection of inter-Party power play. Similar opinions were expressed by members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus and Ukraine. Consequently, the Stalinist autonomization plan was doomed and did not have political prospects in the early 20s.

In fact, Stalin explained to the members of the Politburo that the Soviet Union cannot be arranged simply and harmoniously since the Russians have nowhere to determine. Finally, for the first time on the territory of Russian Federation «essentially Russia» was separated with very flexible borders in future. The RSFSR remained in the Soviet union with a huge territory with numerous autonomies, which could not be distributed somehow differently simply because then it would really have to seriously formalize the status of Russians in the USSR (but later some national autonomic republics separated)..

It must be emphasized that the pathos of the creators of the USSR, Lenin and comrades was expressed in the fight against Great Russian chauvinism, as a legacy of Tsarism and imperialism, the workers solidarity, and the opportunity to leave the Soviet Union as a guarantee against this chauvinism. (Lenin, 1970, p.349-350)

Lenin has stressed the necessity of "... creating a big state by rapprochement and merging of nations, through the free, brotherly Union of the laboring masses of all nations ...". (Lenin, 1969, p.168)

Thus, the position of the Bolsheviks on the national issue



Letter of Stalin. State Archive of Russian Federation. *А Р Ф, Ф. Р-5446. Он. 55. Д. 36*
(<https://m.polit.ru/article/2022/12/14/docstalin/>)

has a pronounced class character, as well as anti-imperial. They insisted on granting the widest rights to the peoples of the so-called national outskirts, which, according to the Bolsheviks, were subjected to political, national, religious and class discrimination in the pre-revolutionary period. (Byushkina, 2022, p.85)

Further development of federalism in the USSR was enshrined in the 1936 Constitution. There were allocated from the RSFSR and created as new state formations the Kazakh and Kyrgyz republics: former Kazakh Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and Kirgiz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. The Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic reformed to three new Republics - Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. So, in 1936 USSR includes 11 Republic, and the territory of RSFSR (Russia) was reduced (to Central Asian Republics, to Belorussia)

As a rule, the process of Sovietisation of national, ethnic elites went in all new Soviet Republics. During the creating of the Soviet Union, the peoples that gained statehood might institutionalize their ethnicity, which led to the exclusive role of the local elite. The selection system and practice of ideological and political training and career growth of managers was built and everywhere the new party apparatus is deeply rooted. (Amanzholova, 2019, p.118-201) Even the names of people of new Republic sometimes were accepted during the first years of Soviet Union. Until the mid-1920s, in public and the official sphere of the Soviet state, there was a transition from the use of the ethnonyms of Kyrgyz-Kaiseki and Kyrgyz to the self-title - Kazakhs. The final change occurred in 1936, when the politonym "Kazakh SSR" was established. (Ibid.)

The soviet authorities pressed towards the managerial logic of combining political engineering with impulses of the emerging ethno-national identity. The formation of statehood of the Soviet type in the republics suggested not only a fundamental change in the political class and elite, but also the creation of a new system of political and civilian institutions and values (including socio-economic preferences), as well as cultural and educational

priorities. As the historian Amanzholova describes this, on the example of Kazakhstan - the Soviet project was not externally imposed for Kazakh society.

The culture of power, the practice of management and the political class of the Kazakh SSR had deep foundations in its ethnicity and social space. "The Soviet past is an integral part of the whole history of Kazakhstan and the Kazakh people, and 'Sovietness' in its Kazakh version became not only a project, introduced from above, but also a combination of properties, perceived and built into the ethnical, social and cultural landscapes by the efforts of all groups of the society, where the elite was a delegated collective actor». (Amanzholova, p. 413)

Bolsheviks not only created the republics, but also ceased their existence. That was time of high level of creativeness in state building. But one case surprisingly plays a crucial role in nowadays conflict. We are talking about the Donetsk-Krivorog Soviet Republic (DKSR), which was proclaimed in Kharkov on February 12, 1918, as autonomy as part of the RSFSR. Later, the DKSR was liquidated, and its territory was included in the Ukrainian SSR.

Famous Poster «Donets Basin - the Heart of Russia» 1921

In the modern confrontation of Ukraine (which breaks ties with the Soviet past) and the republics of Donbass (Donets Basin), the latter call themselves the historical successor of the DKSR.

The collapse of the Soviet Union was not a peaceful process despite a wide-spread belief in Western narrative. So, neither it was the desire or decision of the people of Soviet Union. The Soviet authorities conducted the Plebiscite on continued existence or disbanding of Soviet Union on 17 March 1991, majority of population (76,4%) voted FOR existence or continue of Soviet Union. But national elites, leaders of Soviet Republics pursued of personal power and opportunistic incentives behind led the country to the brink of ruins. On 8 December 1991, Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian presidents signed the Belovezh Accords.



The agreement declared the dissolution of the USSR by its founder states (denunciation of the Treaty on the Creation of the USSR) and established the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Representatives of another founder of USSR - Transcaucasian SFSR did not participate in the denunciation of the agreement, no one from the region - Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan. The dissolution of the Soviet Union was a sort of surprise or even shock for most part of leaders and authorities in former Soviet Republics.

The destroy of the Soviet Union caused a wave of the breakups on the territory of Russia and other Republics, growth of terrorism, forcible migration, and military conflicts. Over the past three decades, the space of the former USSR has repeatedly become the object of numerous scientific, expert, and political discussions regarding the expediency and validity of its allocation as a separate region. (Belashchenko, Sikirazh, 2022, p.34)

From the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis (2014), the opinion has repeatedly circulated that this conflict could become decisive for the future dismantling of the post-Soviet space or, at least, radically affect its transformation (Kuklina, 2015, p.63)

The modern crisis grew up from the expansion of NATO, which began in the late 1990s, creating hotbeds of tension around the perimeter of national and strategic borders of Russia, active US penetration into the region using the technologies of "color revolutions" and "soft/smart power", which created the prerequisites for attempts to isolate Russia around the perimeter of Western and parts of the southern borders. (Skalepov, 2022, p.13) Commentators have pointed out that such a scenario was described by Z. Brzezinski and J. Mann with Ukraine in a central place and as a leading actor in it. (Remarchuk, 2022) Against the background of the Ukrainian crisis in the relations of Russia and the "collective West", tension gradually grew. Russia was ready to compromise (Minsk agreements) but did not find understanding from the United States and the EU countries. At the same time, several forming centers of power (China, India, Iran, Brazil, South Africa) throughout the crisis either defiantly maintained neutrality or secretly maintained the position of the Russian Federation. The last straw was the situation of December 2021 - February 2022, when Russia put forward the requirements for the United

States and NATO under guarantees of security and further non-expanding to the east, which were not satisfied, and Kyiv intensified military operations in the Donbass and declared the possibility of returning to development nuclear program. (Hishmiashvili, Veshnyakova, 2022; Tadaev, 2022)

The Ukrainian crisis certainly influenced the relations of Russia and other countries of Eurasia. The particular concern remained about the so-called 'multi-vector' policy of Kazakhstan and the unstable political situation in this country. (Kurmanov, 2022). In general, the current situation can be considered as transitional or intermediate since changes in the system of international relations are a long process. Today it is obvious that a strong Russia is the main factor in maintaining the military-political stability of the huge region of the former USSR, and hence Greater Eurasia.

Much will depend on the results of Special Military Operation, which may determine the completion of the crisis by the "domino effect", when the disappearance or cardinal transformation of Russian-Ukrainian relations will lead to serious changes within other levels. However, in this case, one should not expect the stabilization of the prevailing system of international relations, since its principles, formed in the late 1980s and the 1990s, do not in many ways meet modern reality. (Belashchenko, Sikirazh, 2022, p.38)

The USA and its partners put endless and wide ranged sanctions to punish Russia, but the same they deployment of the global economic system what will have ripple effects that can negatively impact economy of other Eurasian countries. The natural response of Russia and other large countries is the creation of alternative institutions that allow them to move away from Western infrastructure (for example, BRICS+). The unipolar world and the era of globalisation according to the old rules has come to an end. We are standing on the edge on perhaps very unpredictable, uneasy, dangerous, and extremely important decade after the WWII and implementation of Yalta-Potsdam System of international relations. There is a search for new rules and a new balance of power, including economic ones. Obviously there will be confrontations but it could be a constructive conflict, since they objectively undermine a system based on fantastic injustice.

The uniqueness and drama of the current state of international affairs lies in the fact that nobody can count on the ability of one state, or a group of sufficiently powerful countries, to play the role of leaders in the future. But in

coming years in this complex world there will be not one player, but a lot with different interests and everyone will have to negotiate. Russia, as President V. Putin said, sees the value and significance of Eurasia as a self-sufficient complex, and Russia feel themselves as a harmonically part of Greater Eurasia, considering the anti-colonial struggle against so-called 'collective West'.

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