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Some Issues of the RSFSR Federal Construction in the 1920s

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Abstract: The author considers the problems of the relationship between the multi-level authorities and management, and the center and national autonomies in the RSFSR, as among the most complex hierarchical arrangement of the USSR. The author reveals the place and significance of the so-called private meeting of national workers (November 1926) and the discussion of its results on the ground in solving the key issues of nation-building and Soviet modernization of the multi-ethnic country. The research is based on the published materials, as well as archival documents related to the meeting in Moscow in November 1926 and its discussion in: the autonomies (the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (F. 17 – the Central Committee of the Russian communist party of the Bolsheviks – All-Union Communist Party, F. 78 – M.I. Kalinin), the Archive of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan (F. 141 – the Kazakh Regional Committee of the Russian communist party of the Bolsheviks – All-Union Communist Party), and the State Archive of the Russian Federation (F. 3316 – Central Executive Committee of the USSR). The author concludes that the federal construction was accompanied by intense search for balance between state bodies, and the discussions between representatives of the center and autonomies concerned: the determination of the status of the autonomies, the adjustment of the management mechanism, the distribution of powers and interaction of all-Russian and autonomist structures, the role of the center and ethno-political elites in the implementation of the tasks of ethno-national policy, and the strengthening of statehood.

Keywords: national policy, “Ryskulov’s conference,” federalization, management, national leaders

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Некоторые вопросы федеративного строительства РСФСР в 1920-е гг.

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Аннотация: Анализируются проблемы взаимоотношений между равноуровневыми органами власти и управления, центром и национальными автономиями в РСФСР как самого сложно устроенного иерархического конструкта СССР. Выясняется место и значение так называемого частного совещания национальных работников (ноябрь 1926 г.) и обсуждения его итогов на местах в решении ключевых вопросов нацистроительства и советской модернизации многоэтнич-



ной страны. Источниковой основой исследования служат опубликованные материалы, а также архивные документы о совещании в Москве в ноябре 1926 г. и его обсуждении в автономиях: Российский государственный архив социально-политической истории, РГАСПИ (Ф. 17 – ЦК РКП(б)-ВКП(б), ф. 78 – М.И. Калинин) и Архива Президента Республики Казахстан, АП РК (Ф. 141 – Казахский краевой комитет РКП(б) – ВКП(б), Государственный архив Российской Федерации, ГА РФ (Ф. 3316 – ЦИК СССР). Автор делает вывод, что федеративное строительство сопровождалось напряженными поисками баланса, а дискуссии представителей центра и автономий касались определения статуса автономий, наладки механизма управления, распределения полномочий и взаимодействия общероссийских и автономистских структур, роли центра и этнополитических элит в реализации задач этнонациональной политики, укрепления государственности.

Ключевые слова: национальная политика, «рыскуловское совещание», федерализация, управление, национальные лидеры

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Introduction

Relevance. The relevance of the research on the subject is determined by the rethinking of a number of important problems in the history of federalization and nation-building in the USSR and its largest republic – the RSFSR – during the 1920s. This process of federalization was controversial and was accompanied by active debates involving the authorities and governing bodies in the center and regions. For the RSFSR, which received the most complex hierarchical system: of provinces, regions, territories, autonomous republics, districts, and national village councils, of great significance were the following factors – streamlining management links, achieving a balance of rights and responsibilities, and an optimization in the distribution of departmental powers; without all this the state mechanism could not work effectively enough. The relations between the center and national-state entities, as well as between the latter with neighboring provinces and regions, developed in a complex search for tools to satisfy the ambitions and objective needs of each region. In addition, these relations work ensure the coherence of territories, strengthening the integrity of the country, and the controllability along with the stability of a state that declared its connection to a class approach alongside a self-determination of its peoples.

Elaboration of the problem. Currently, there have been a limit number of works concerning the understanding of the totality of these issues. Through the example of Buryatia, this issue is shown in the context of the establishment of the Soviet model in traditional societies¹. The formation of Soviet federalism in connection with the organization of the USSR territory, including in the 1920s, and taking into account the conflicts between the center and the autonomous bodies, was shown in V.N. Kruglov's monograph². However, as a rule, in the study of the history of national-state entities in the early Soviet period, the main attention of most authors are paid to various nuances in the formation of ethnopolitical elites, their often-conflicting interaction with the center and in intra-elite relationships, and the problems of indigenization and ethno-social moderniza-

¹ B.V. Bazarov, *Interiorizatsiia sovetskoï modeli v traditsionnykh soobshchestvakh Buryat-Mongolii (1920–1930 gg.)* [Interiorization of the Soviet model in the traditional communities of Buryat-Mongolia (1920–1930)] (Irkutsk: Ottisk Publ., 2021).

² V.N. Kruglov, *Organizatsiia territorii Rossii v 1917–2007 gg.: idei, praktiki, rezul'taty* [Organization of the territory of Russia in 1917–2007: ideas, practice, results] (Moscow; St. Petersburg: Tsentr gumanitarnukh initsiativ Publ., 2020).

tion in its various manifestations³. Much less attention is paid to those aside of these phenomena, specifically issues associated with the development of compromise and balance in multi-level management system, the role of the center and leadership of national subjects of the federation in ensuring the integrity and sustainability of the state as a single organism that consolidated all kinds of resources, and how the state ensured the implementation of the policy of national equality and self-determination.

Of great interest is the series of events of 1925–1926, when, in the process of reorganizing the administrative-territorial format of the country, changing the status of some subjects of the federation and developing the constitutions of autonomous republics, along with the ongoing indigenization and economic construction, the ethnopolitical elites made a number of attempts to implement their own ideas promote the essence and conditions of functioning of the self-determined entities. At the same time the center sought to establish a coordinated and manageable multi-level state system that was built in such a way as to ensure the implementation of the adopted programs for socialist modernization of national regions and strengthen the socio-political unity of a multicultural society of workers on a class basis. Several important aspects of these processes have been considered⁴, useful data and judgments are given by I. Tagirov and B. Sarsenbaev using the example of Kyrgyzstan and the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic⁵.

The purpose of the study. It is necessary to establish what place the so-called “Ryskulov meeting” (November 1926) occupies in the above context, including in the projection of its results locally, in the autonomous bodies.

Source base. For this purpose, there are analyzed the published⁶ and archival sources about the meeting in Moscow and its discussion in some autonomous bodies of the RSFSR: Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (F. 17 – Central Committee of the RCP(b)-VKP(b), f. 78 – M. I. Kalinin) and the Archive of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan (F. 141 – Kazakh Regional Committee of the RCP(b)-VKP(b), State Archive of the Russian Federation (F. 3316 – the USSR Central Executive Committee).

Debates and decisions

We should pay attention to some events that clarify our ideas about the organizational and managerial features of the formation of Soviet statehood as a complex interaction of institutional, ethnocultural, socio-political, and other components. By the mid-1920s, the adjustment of the control mechanism was far from complete. On September 8,

³ T.I. Morozova, “A conflict in the Buryat-Mongol Regional Committee of the Russian Communist Party of the Bolsheviks: Formal and informal tactics of the power game (March–November 1925),” *Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta – Tomsk State University Journal*, no. 426 (2018): 142–153, <https://doi.org/10.17223/15617793/426/18>; M.S. Kamenskikh, “1921 in the discussion on the creation of the Komi-Permyak district,” *RUDN Journal of Russian History* 19, no. 1 (2020): 47–62, <https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-8674-2020-19-1-47-62>; B.N. Mironov, “Derusification of Administration in USSR,” *Modern History of Russia* 11, no. 2 (2021): 436–458, <https://doi.org/10.21638/11701/spbu24.2021.209>, etc.

⁴ V.G. Chebotareva, *Natsional'naiia poliika Rossiiskoi Federatsii 1925–1938 gg.* [National Policy of the Russian Federation 1925–1938] (Moscow: Moskovskii dom natsional'nostei Publ., 2008), 44–70; D.A. Amanzholova, “‘The RSFSR is a central country’: Problems of federalization of Russia in the 1920s,” *Rossiiskaia istoriia*, no. 6 (2022): 15–27, <https://doi.org/10.31857/S0869568722060024>

⁵ I. Tagirov, “‘Ryskulovskoe soveschasnie’ i protivoborstvo sovetского i partiinogo rukovodstva Tatarskoi respublikii [‘Ryskulov’s meeting’ and the confrontation between the Soviet and party leadership of the Tatar Republic],” *Gasyrlar avazy – Ekho vekov*, no. 1 (2006): 33–43; B.S. Sarsenbaev, “Novye svedeniia o ‘ryskulovskom soveschasnii natsionalov’ [New information about the ‘Ryskulovsky meeting of the nationals’],” *Vestnik KRSU* 15, no. 5 (2015): 27–31.

⁶ *III sessiia VTsYK XII sozvyva. Stenograficheskii otchet* [III session of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the XII convocation. Verbatim report] (Moscow: VTsYK Publ., 1926); *TsK RKP(b) – VKP(b) i natsional'nyi vopros. 1918–1933 gg.* [The Central Committee of the RCP(b) – the CPSU (b) and the national question. 1918–1933], bk. 1 (Moscow: ROSSPEN Publ., 2005) etc.

1925, a meeting was held by commission on Soviet construction in national regions and republics under the Organization Bureau of the Central Committee of the RCP (b); in that meeting it was pointed out significant problems in the party leadership of the Soviets and the strong influence of traditional ethno-social hierarchies. The most important elements were identified, such as: the indigenization and simplification of the government apparatus, the training of personnel for it, the influence of remnants of pre-capitalist life in the eastern national republics and regions, and the formation of autonomous entities and zoning. Although the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee divided the autonomous bodies back in October 1924, taking into account the size of the territories, in order to ensure certain standards in simplifying management structures, the technical “apparatuses” of some Central Executive Committees, Council of People’s Commissars, and other bodies and departments were united, but it turned out that “in some places little was done”⁷ to effect needed changes.

At the session of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the 12th convocation (October 1925), representatives of the autonomous bodies tried to defend their ideas about powers and division of functions in the hierarchy of administrative institutions. N.P. Samursky (Efendiev), the head of the Central Executive Committee of Dagestan and V.A. Kurtz, the head of the government of the autonomy of the Volga Germans turned to the Party Central Committee, its Secretariat and J.V. Stalin with proposals to amend the Regulations on the RSFSR People's Commissariats, primarily in regards to the autonomous departments. They protested the expansion of powers of the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR⁸. But soon after afterward, central bodies adopted the General Regulations on the People's Commissariats of the RSFSR, according to which the previously disunified People's Commissariats were directly subordinate to the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, its presidium, and the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR. In extraordinary circumstances the Central Executive Committees of the autonomous republics, as well as executive committees of territories and regions could on their own responsibility suspend the orders of the People's Commissariats of the RSFSR, after having previously notified the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee⁹.

This approach was fully justified, since it ensured the consolidation of management structures and their coordinated activities within the framework of not only the largest, but also the “most federal” national-territorial entity of the USSR. For the union republics, such unity of the directive line was ensured by the general governing bodies of the USSR.

However, the problem of coordinating the decisions and actions of numerous bureaucratic authorities, created, like the autonomous bodies, according to the Matryoshka principle, persisted, as did local discontent. This was confirmed by the meeting chaired by Secretary of the Party Central Committee V.M. Molotov in the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks on January 2, 1926. The leaders of party organizations in the regions with Turkic-speaking population discussed the problems of forming a national political class in the republics, as well as the implementation of Soviet ethnopolitics. Their speeches confirmed the existence of difficulties known to the center in the practical implementation of program guidelines in relation to the specifics of a par-

⁷ *TsK RKP(b) – VKP(b) i natsional'nyi vopros*, 317–323.

⁸ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arhiv sotsialno-politicheskoi istorii [Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History] (hereafter – RGASPI), f. 17, op. 84, d. 997, l. 37–38; *TsK RKP(b) – VKP(b) i natsional'nyi vopros*, 331–332.

⁹ S.D. Asfendiarov, “Voprosu III sessii VTsIK i natsional'nye avtonomii [Issues of the III session of the VTsIK and national autonomies],” *Vlast' Sovetov*, no. 41 (1926): 1–3; *TsK RKP(b) – VKP(b) i natsional'nyi vopros*, 346–350; RGASPI, f. 78, op. 7, d. 35, l. 2–18.

ticular ethno-social community. After the 4th meeting of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks with senior officials of the national republics and regions in 1923, a proposal to hold a new one came up more than once, but V.M. Molotov rejected it, although he admitted: “...we have so far been little concerned with national republics.”¹⁰ The party line confirmed in 1923 remained unchanged, and the structures of legislative and executive power had to deal with the problems of agreements, discussions and disputes on specific issues of management and development, which were resolved daily in each autonomous region.

These issues were related to the development and adoption of the constitutions of the autonomous republics, in particular, the issue of the rights of increasingly disunited people's commissariats, as Deputy Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR A.M. Lezhava informed M.I. Kalinin on February 11, 1926. In turn, Kalinin, the head of Soviet Russia sent a note to Stalin on February 20 “personally” in a “top secret” way, and again he dismissed the protests of representatives of the autonomous bodies as unserious. Meanwhile, there was no unity in the central apparatus either: S.D. Asfendiarov, the head of the Department for Nationalities of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee advocated the expansion of the powers of the Central Executive Committees and governments of the autonomous republics in the sphere of local finance, and the People's Commissariats of Justice – in judicial administration, while maintaining subordination in controversial and general issues and obeying the instructions of the all-Russian authorities¹¹. He supported the claims of the leaders of the Kazakh Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (KASSR)¹². Thus, on April 14, 1926, in the Council of Nationalities, chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the KASSR N.N. Nurmakov spoke about the lack of coordination between the actions of the center and the republics and the ignoring of their interests in the distribution of funds. He stated that the center was reducing the allocation of planned funds, arguing: “... you cannot cope with this; you do not have the strength.” Moreover,

we have no budgetary rights. The provision on budgetary rights of autonomous republics and regions in the RSFSR is only a fiction. <...> along with the revision of the budgetary rights of the union republics, it would be necessary to give a firm directive to the union republics, which include autonomous republics and regions, so that they can review their budgetary rights and their clarification and expansion¹³.

“Ryskulov meeting”: in the center and locally

The claims of the national figures in the center were supported by another Kazakh statesman – T.R. Ryskulov, the Deputy Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR. The 3rd session of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the 12th convocation (November 5–19, 1926) prompted the national figures to try to unite efforts. On November 12 and 14, 1926, on the initiative of Asfendiarov and Ryskulov, in Moscow there was held a “Private meeting of national figures – members of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Central Executive Committee of the USSR and other representatives of the national outskirts.”¹⁴

¹⁰ “Kak vesti rukovodstvo, na chto orientirovantsia?” Stenogramma soveschaniya sekretarei pertorganizatsii v CK VKP(b) po voprosu o ‘bol’shevizatsii natsional’nykh kadrov.’ 1926 g. [‘How to guide, what to focus on?’ Transcript of a meeting of secretaries of the leading organization in the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (VKP) on the issue of “Bolshevization of national cadres.” 1926], *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, no. 5 (2015): 100–125.

¹¹ *TsK RKP(b) – VKP(b) i natsional’nyi vopros*, 349, 365–366; S.D. Asfendiarov, “Voprosu III sessii VTsIK,” 1–3.

¹² RGASPI, f. 17, op. 69, d. 61, l. 63, 48–72.

¹³ Gosudarstvennyi arhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii [State Archive of the Russian Federation] (thereafter – GARF), f. 3316, op. 3, d. 131, l. 16.

¹⁴ See: V.G. Chebotareva, *Natsional’naia poliika*, 44–70.

Following the meeting, Ryskulov, Kurts, Samursky, as well as the People's Commissar of Social Security of the RSFSR I.A. Nagovitsyn and Asfendiarov were instructed to report to Stalin on the results of their work. However, it is not known whether this meeting took place¹⁵. These leaders prepared their proposals; Samursky and Nagovitsyn attached some handwritten clarifications. Asfendiarov and Samursky also prepared their proposals for the meeting, and the former again pointed out the ideas which had been expressed in the spring. Samursky was the only one who, in fact, defended the interests of the center. He considered it unprofitable to raise the status of the autonomous republics to the union republics, on which other leaders of autonomous republics insisted; he emphasized the importance of the all-Russian factor for combating the “great-power bias of the state apparatus”. In addition, he regarded the participation of “representatives of small nationalities in the governance of the RSFSR” as a factor of their influence in the legislative and governing bodies of power; he proposed to abandon the Department for Nationalities of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, which “nobody takes into account in the Center” (which Asfendiarov hardly liked) and instead create a Council of Nationalities¹⁶.

Following the meeting¹⁷ there was stated the essentially idealistic position of the leaders of the autonomous bodies: the full implementation of the decisions of the XII Congress and other resolutions “is not sufficiently ensured in the daily practical work of the governing agencies of the RSFSR”, especially the People's Commissariat of Justice and the People's Commissariat of Land. Indeed, the complex issues of relations between the center and the national outskirts, especially in the economic and financial spheres, aroused particular criticism. However, the presence of national figures in the central institutions of the RSFSR and at the sessions of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee was interpreted as the key to solving these growing problems. The document rejected the idea of establishing a Great Russian republic and proposed various practical measures to promote national regions (participation of the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSR) in the distribution of funds for industry and capital construction, taking into account their economic capabilities and the tasks of achieving actual equality, financing, and resolving land disagreements among other issues. They also strived to secure the rights of autonomous bodies in the Constitutions of the RSFSR, ASSR and the Regulations on Autonomous Regions, Cultural Fund, etc.). Samursky emphasized: “The more autonomous republics unite within the RSFSR, the sooner and correctly we will resolve the national issue,” and therefore we should reject secession from the RSFSR and the transition to union republics with the separation of a purely Great Russian republic, as well as create the Council of Nationalities under the All-Russian Central Executive Committee¹⁸. Asfendiarov proposed to follow the path of expanding rights (including taking into account the proposals made when developing constitutions) as well as to raise the status of autonomous bodies: in order

to gradually transform the autonomous regions into autonomous republics and the autonomous republics into union ones. By the upcoming XIII Congress of Soviets, the autonomous Vyatka and Mari regions are to be transformed into autonomous republics and the Kazakh ASSR into a union one¹⁹.

¹⁵ There is no information about this in the registry for 1926. See: A.A. Chernobaev, ed. *Na prieme u Stalina. Tetradi (zhurnaly) zapisei lits, prinyatyh I. V. Staliny (1924–1953 gg.). Spravochnik* [At the Stalin's reception. Notebooks (journals) of records of persons received by J.V. Stalin (1924–1953). Directory] (Moscow: Novyi khronograf Publ., 2008). <http://istmat.info/node/165> (дата обращения: 24.04.2018).

¹⁶ RGASPI, f. 17, op. 85, d. 108, l. 5–40, 67, 71.

¹⁷ The list of proposals was sent to V.M. Molotov no later than December 2 from the secretariat of Deputy Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR, most likely T.R. Ryskulov.

¹⁸ RGASPI, f. 17, op. 85, d. 108, l. 5–12; f. 78, op. 7, d. 88, l. 15–17.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 17, op. 85, d. 108, l. 30–32.

The materials of the meeting were sent to the Construction Commission of the RSFSR, national republics and regions, headed by M.I. Kalinin, as well as subcommittees within it under the leadership of head of the State Planning Committee of Russia A.M. Lezhava and Secretary of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks N.M. Shvernik. It worked from June 22, 1926, to March 11, 1927²⁰. The work of the Commission served as a pretext for convening the meeting, since it did not work actively enough on its own as some national figures believed.

The so-called “Ryskulov meeting” attracts the attention of present-day historians of Soviet ethno-elites. For some reason, S.V. Ploskikh and S. Shildebay suppose that it was unauthorized and “secret”; Ploskikh even wrote about a certain order of J.V. Stalin to immediately condemn the behavior of the national figures, but he did not cite any source²¹. This conspiracy does not seem convincing. It is known that the meeting was held with the knowledge and consent of the country's leadership.

I. Tagirov presented his version of the meeting²², assigning a decisive role in its initiation to the Moscow group of Tatar leaders. He believes that Ryskulov tried to use the chance missed before the XII Party Congress to create “a united front of the struggle of national republics to protect the rights of non-Russian peoples.”²³ Such a radical wording is hardly appropriate here. Neither before, nor during the meeting, nor after it was there unity in the positions of the leaders of the autonomous bodies, and intra-elite relations as each of them were burdened by almost permanent group struggle (the author confirms this using the example of Tatar ASSR), and Ryskulov knew this. Most participants of the meeting considered it necessary to achieve more rights and powers in various issues of management, financing, legal proceedings, etc. However, the limits and conditions for raising the status of their republics and relations with the central government were seen differently, which was revealed on November 12 and 14.

The “Ryskulov meeting” forced the authorities to specially gather party-Soviet activists from some of the autonomous bodies. At the beginning of January 1927, in the Tatar ASSR, a meeting of party activists was held, which condemned the position of the meeting participants. Unfortunately, when discussing the proposal made there about the Russian republic and the Council of Nationalities for the Central Executive Committee of the RSFSR, the conclusions of J.V. Stalin as presented by him on the eve of the XII Party Congress in April 1923 were not taken into account, since that note was published later²⁴. As is known, he considered the creation of the Russian republic impossible due to the risk of national autonomous bodies losing territories, capitals, and status. Actually, at the “Ryskulov meeting,” Samursky made similar arguments. Tagirov pointed out the typical, as if programmed, arguments of the meeting participants: the illegitimacy of the meeting, the fallacy and harmfulness of the proposals, the “offensive nature” of local nationalism as opposed to “Great Russian, great-power chauvinism,” and the unfair transfer of responsibility for local problems exclusively to the center. The purpose of the meeting “to fend off all anti-party sentiments” which had been expressed at the meeting was achieved. Never-

²⁰ See: D.A. Amanzholova, “‘The RSFSR is a central country’,” 15–27.

²¹ S.V. Ploskikh, “Iz istorii pervogo protivostoyaniya intelligentsia i vlasti Kyrgyzstana (seredina 20-kh – sredina 30-kh godov XX v.) [From the history of the first confrontation between the intelligentsia and the authorities of Kyrgyzstan (mid-20s – mid-30s of the XX century)],” *Vestnik KRSU* 8, no. 7 (2008): 96–101; S.K. Shildebai; A.B. Ordahanova, eds. *Seitkali Mendeshev: sbornik dokumentov i materialov* [Seitkali Mendeshev: collection of documents and materials] (Almaty: Poligrafiiia-servis I K^o, 2021), 57.

²² I. Tagirov, “‘Ryskulovskoe soveschasnie’,” 33–43.

²³ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁴ “‘Chto kasayetsya gosudarstvennogo stroitel'stva, tut, pozhaluy, ne vse yeshche yasno.’ Zapiska I.V. Stalina chlenam Politbyuro TSK RKP(b). 1923 g. [‘As for state building, here, perhaps, not everything is clear yet.’ Note from I.V. Stalin to members of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the RCP(b). 1923],” *Istoricheskiy arkhiv*, no. 6 (2019): 136–142.

theless, as Tagirov showed, the meeting again raised the most sensitive questions that were often asked at that time: about the fundamental grounds for the different statuses of national entities in the USSR and the RSFSR, as well as about the distribution of always insufficient funds for the needs of the autonomous bodies²⁵.

B.S. Sarsenbaev believes that at the meeting, the ethnopolitical elite, as one of the few forces, which resisted

the intensification of the course aimed at centralizing power and “emasculating” the federal character of the USSR with “pulling” powers and resources to Moscow, which had been carried out by J.V. Stalin with the purpose of concentrating all power in his own hands²⁶.

Unfortunately, he did not take into account the publications of V.G. Chebotareva, who most substantively studied the history of the meeting and the range of problems associated with it²⁷. It did not also cover: the essence of the discussions at the joint meeting of the Kyrgyz regional committee of the CPSU(b), the regional control commission, the faction of the regional executive committee, nor the activists following the results of the “Ryskulov meeting.”

Sarsenbaev supplemented the history of the consequences of the meeting with information about the attempts of one of its participants, deputy chairman of the regional executive committee Yu. Abdrakhmanov to clarify and justify his position after the fact, when in late 1926 – early 1927, in the autonomous republics there were special meetings held by the leadership of the republics who had condemned the convening of the meeting and its initiatives.

Indeed, Abdrakhmanov’s appeal to Secretary of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks S.V. Kosior²⁸ regarding the errors in the transcript of the meeting looks primarily as an attempt at justifying the meeting in anticipation of serious possible sanctions from the center. At the same time, it is worth paying attention to the essence of the problems that the author confirmed, regardless of the motives for his appeal. These include the distrust of representatives of the central people’s commissariats of the RSFSR towards nominees from the republics, and inconsistencies in the relations between people’s commissariats of different levels, including in the leadership of Russia; their legal registration was delayed and interfered with the normal work of both all-Russian and autonomous governing bodies. No less interesting is the reaction of T.R. Ryskulov to Abdrakhmanov’s critical remarks regarding the distribution of funds for industrialization and increasing the role of national figures in the central party bodies. As an experienced apparatchik, Ryskulov rejected this criticism. In addition, the mutual accusations of the meeting participants about the need to increase support for industrial projects in the autonomous bodies at the expense of more developed industrial regions did not in fact stand up to criticism. Zelensky suggested that Abdrakhmanov focus not only on the divisive decisions of the meeting in general, but also, in particular, on those countering attempts to “push through the federating of the leading organs of our party.”²⁹ This was fully consistent with the general course of the country’s leadership to ensure a vertical of power

²⁵ I. Tagirov, “‘Ryskulovskoe soveschasnie,’” 33–43.

²⁶ B.S. Sarsenbaev, “Novye svedeniia o ‘ryskulovskom soveschasnii natsionalov’ [New information about the ‘Ryskulovsky meeting of the nationals’],” *Vestnik KRSU* 15, no. 5 (2015): 27.

²⁷ V.G. Chebotareva, “I.V. Stalin i partiino-sovetskie natsional’nye kadry [I.V. Stalin and the Party-Soviet national cadres],” *Voprosy istorii*, no. 7 (2008): 3–25.

²⁸ Copies were sent to the Secretary of the Central Asian Bureau of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks I.A. Zelensky, Deputy Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars of the RSFSR T.R. Ryskulov and First Secretary of the Kirovsky regional committee of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks N.A. Uzyukov.

²⁹ B.S. Sarsenbaev, “Novye svedeniia,” 29–30.

and control over a multicultural society through a centralized party mechanism capable of regulating the activities of the complex structured system that was Soviet statehood.

It is worth noting that the meeting took place during the 3rd session of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the 12th convocation (November 5–19, 1926), while on November 12 the meeting participants did not speak; on Saturday, November 13, V. Kurtz spoke at the session. The 2nd day of the meeting, November 14, fell on Sunday. The session, with its decisions, actually focused on claims regarding national figures. The report on the RSFSR budget noted that while the budget had a general increase by 10%, the budgets of the autonomous republics would increase by 22.2%, which was uneven due to the differences in the growth of expenses in previous years: from 16% for the Volga German Republic to 43% for the Yakut Republic.

In any case, ...the budget of 1926–1927, just like that of previous years, accelerate[d] expenditures in the autonomous republics, undoubtedly to a greater extent than expenditures in the rest of the RSFSR³⁰.

At the session, there were approved regulations on a number of people's commissariats, which streamlined such interaction after the adoption of the Constitution of the RSFSR in 1925; and a draft of the new Regulation on the judicial system of the RSFSR was adopted, taking into account recent debates. However, regarding the formulas for relationships and practical control over the activities of judicial institutions on the territory of the autonomous republics, Samursky noted that such details were unnecessary, although they actually brought a necessary balance of interaction between the center and the autonomous bodies. When discussing the RSFSR budget on November 16, it was V. Kurts and N. Samursky who rather sharply criticized the speaker, accusing him of providing incorrect data on the financing of the cultural needs of the autonomous bodies. But other delegates reasonably raised the issue of uneven financing of the needs of nationalities. Peasant Sukach retorted to them as follows:

...in Dagestan we provide funds for feeding students in junior schools, while the North Caucasus is not able to provide primary education to highlanders. I will ask the members of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, as well as the People's Commissariat of Finance: are the peoples of the Caucasus Mountains really more cultured and more advanced than those in Dagestan? <...> by supporting one nationality, we leave others in the care of the territory, which is not able to allocate funds that would satisfy their needs to the same extent as we satisfy the needs of the autonomous republics. <...> we give 90,147 rubles for scholarships at junior schools in Kazakhstan. And what do regions such as Oirotia, Shoria, Khakassia and many others receive (they are to receive funds from the Siberian budget)? Almost nothing³¹.

His speech clearly indicated a managerial imbalance in system and insufficient consideration of the interests of the RSFSR's regions, which were unable to independently finance the modernization of locals, including autonomous regions³².

In the Kazakh Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, the discussion of the "Ryskulov meeting" took place on December 18, 1926, at a joint meeting of the bureau of the Kazakh Regional Committee, the presidium of the regional Control Commission of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and the factions of the Council of People's Commissars of the KASSR and the Kazakh Central Executive Committee. F.I. Goloshchekin, the presiding head of the Kazakh regional committee of the party referred to the Central Committee's plan to discuss the work of the Kalinin Commission and the report of the Department for Nationalities of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee on Soviet construction in Kazakhstan and Bashkiria. With regard to the first question, he noted, "I don't know on whose initiative" a meeting was held where the participants

³⁰ *III sessia VTsIK XII sozyva*, 727–728.

³¹ *Idid.*, 757.

³² *Ibid.*, 826, 757, 832–835, 858.

“spoke on 130 pages of the transcript.”³³ The main speaker was N. Nurmakov, the head of the Council of People's Commissars of the KASSR, who immediately noted the “completely random” composition of the participants – not members of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, but “former dignitaries” who had previously worked in the national republics and now lived in Moscow – “most of them were the offended like our comrade Khodzhanov. This statement was supposed to emphasize their poor knowledge of the real situation in the autonomous bodies, especially since they spoke out the least. Nurmakov believed that Khodzhanov who had proposed at the meeting to ensure that their opinion was considered by the Kalinin Commission, essentially ignored the business qualities and importance of those working directly on the ground. Like in other autonomous bodies, it was emphasized that at the meeting “not a single word was said about our achievements in the national republics.” Nurmakov referred to the words of Abdrakhmanov, who soon then had to prove that the transcript had recorded them incorrectly. Nevertheless, he made his main claims against Kazakh figures – Asfendiarov, Khodzhanov and Munbaev, who allegedly slandered the party, denying the obvious successes of the KASSR. In the speeches of Samursky, who in fact had defended the interests of the RSFSR as a whole, Nurmakov highlighted Samursky’s words “Ivan is rushing,” pointing out the need for a united front when “the struggle of the national figures against Ivan was harmful”. The third point concerned the erroneous demand to finance industrialization in the national republics at the expense of industrial centers, and the proposal to build the party along ethnic lines was called especially dangerous. The need to convene another, 5th meeting of national officials was also rejected. As a result, at the meeting they proposed “to unite, attack whom? The RSFSR! “This is a harmful mistake,” Nurmakov summarized³⁴.

Zh. Munbaev, a participant in the meeting, who came to the session of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, made further excuses: he knew nothing, it was the idea of Ryskulov and Asfendiarov, and the organizer was Ryskulov, since he “wanted to be the leader of all national republics”; and he even remembered his complaints about helplessness in seeking the rights of the national republics, since his secretary did not even have an acceptable premises. Munbaev was mostly concerned about his own situation: “Why am I the only one who got into this mess,” referring to the condemnation at the plenum of the Kazakh regional committee³⁵. U. Isaev, the deputy head of the organizational and instructional department of the Kazakh regional committee of the party dedicated his speech to exposing S. Asfendiarov as an indiscriminate critic who did not notice the real achievements and difficulties of nation-building on the ground in the Republic. In addition, he spoke sharply negatively about the idea of convening another national conference, since it is “not Moscow and the outskirts, but the national republics will fight among themselves, because they have their own tasks, often opposite ones.” The fundamental issues were resolved at the 4th meeting in 1923; the rest is a matter of practice³⁶. A. Dzhangildin made the most conciliatory speech. U. Dzhandosov analytically approached the key problems of development: the uneven development of the USSR regions is natural, and industrial facilities need to be located rationally, based on the interests of the entire country. One of the participants in the meeting expressed an important idea: the national figures nominated to the central apparatus should first of all be trained at the practical school of management and not perceive themselves as arbiters of the federal national policy³⁷. Summing up the discussion, Goloshchekin proposed to decide: who can

³³ Архив Президента Республики Казахстан [Archive of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan] (thereafter – AP RK), f. 141, op. 1, d. 489, l. 4

³⁴ AP RK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 489, l. 5–13.

³⁵ Ibid., l. 14–16.

³⁶ Ibid., l. 19.

³⁷ Ibid., l. 34–35, 39.

represent the opinion of the republic - the party organization or the “worn out leader” – and emphasized that without the USSR, “no one can exist individually”, and the term “comrades-national figures” clearly contrasts with a party of “just comrades”. He also described in detail the indicators of autonomous development. Creating a united front against the RSFSR – this is how Goloshchekin defined the essence of the main mistake made by the meeting participants³⁸.

Conclusion

A meeting formally convened to discuss the work of the Kalinin Commission, created by the decision of the Politburo, was unlikely to have any authority to somehow influence it as whole. Its convening was apparently allowed since the appeals from the autonomous bodies that had been accumulated by that time, could no longer be ignored. All kinds of forums, discussions and decisions of 1924–1925, as well as the January meeting headed by V.M. Molotov did not lead to any agreement among all participants in nation-building; the preparation of the constitutions of the autonomous republics required clarification of a number of fundamental issues. In addition, the “Ryskulov meeting” coincided with the work of the session of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, and it did not require additional efforts and expense for its organization. Furthermore, the discussion during the breaks between the meetings of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee made it possible to fully reveal: the entire range of opinions of national leaders, the essence of their unjustified claims and sensible proposals, the nuances of relationships and possible coalitions both in each of the represented autonomous bodies, and among their leaders, and how former prominent functionaries of these republics were nominated to work in Moscow.

The special meetings held in the Tatar and Kazakh Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics and the Kyrgyz Autonomous Okrug (no information has yet been found on similar forums in other autonomous bodies) can be considered as the Center’s purposeful work to affirm a common position for all leaders of Russian autonomous bodies, positions that then were consolidated with the help of reliable supporters on the ground. In addition, their subsequent decisions took into account the rational proposals of the national figures, since otherwise those decisions would have increased the tension between the center and the regions and would only harm the interests of all parties. The recognition of the difficulties and contradictions in nation-building was not to have to supposed to have develop into a denial of the priority of national interests and tasks. Furthermore, ways to overcome obvious problems on the ground could only have been found with a centralized management of resources, finances, and personnel on the basis of political unity. As I. Tagirov wrote perhaps the problem did not lie in the need to make the autonomous bodies of the RSFSR “truly autonomous” in accordance with the decisions of the XII Party Congress³⁹.

The interpretation of the essence of autonomous status, like that of other national-state entities within the RSFSR, remained controversial, and its changes in different regions of the USSR brought mixed results. The previous experience of federalization, as well as the events after the “Ryskulov meeting,” confirm that the adjustment of the federal organism of the RSFSR and the entire Soviet Union have lasted quite a long time, and the ways to achieve a balance of the state machine were not at all limited by the decisions of the mentioned congress; they were developed, specified and changed throughout the 1920–1930s.

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³⁸ AP RK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 489, l. 41–42, 57.

³⁹ I. Tagirov, “‘Ryskulovskoe soveschasnie’,” 40.

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