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AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION**

The Russian Federation is a multinational state and is one of the leading states around the world in terms of ethnic diversity with over 160 nationalities living on its territory¹. The so-called “democratic changes” in the late 1980’s and the dawn of the 1990’s have led to the outburst of certain processes resulting in a boom in the self-determination and declaring sovereignty on the part of the peoples in the former RSFSR. The ultimate result of the processes in question is a series of bloody conflicts, the consequences of which are tangible even at present. For this reason, it is extremely important for the Russian authorities to adhere to adequate policies, which guarantee both sufficient rights for the ethnical minorities on the one hand, and the sustenance of the ethnic piece in the country on the other. Although in the last few years, we have been witnessing attempts on the part of certain countries to impose a common global framework for solving the problems mentioned and for guaranteeing the rights of the ethnic minorities, we are obliged to admit that there is not and cannot be one common solution. The level of economic development, the public opinion, the mind-set, the requirements and the needs of the minorities, etc. differ in different countries which makes imposing a common convention useless and erroneous. Such conventions are particularly inapplicable in Russia as it is inhabited by hundreds of different ethnic minorities with their specific modes of life and cultures, which, more often than not, significantly differ from those of the other peoples they share the same land with. The Russian Federation, being a successor of the Soviet Union, which in turn inherits the Russian Empire, has been bequeathed with the series of achievements and failures of the experience dating back to centuries ago, which it could learn from and can use as the basis for determining their own national policy and the importance of the topic hereby is connected with the fact that it is part of this particular historical heritage.

In fact, it was as early as the XVI century, during the reign of Ivan the Terrible when, as a result of the expansion in the Volga Region and Siberia

¹ Всероссийская перепись населения 2002 года. Национальный состав. <http://www.perepis2002.ru/content.html?id=11&docid=10715289081463> (25.06.2011)

territories inhabited by non-Russian population were annexed to Russia. The state expansion continues in the next centuries, securing its position among the biggest empires worldwide and making it one of the most multi-ethnic states. Formally, there are no limitations in terms of nationality in the legislation of the Russian Empire (except for the Jews and the Polish Catholics), but at the informal level, the state implements a policy for fostering the orthodox Christians and depressing the so-called inorodtsy². This results in the inevitable increase in tension, which is sometimes accompanied by collisions on ethnic basis. Despite of the fact that the problem of the rights of the peoples in Russia has been discussed at length in the State Duma in the period between 1905 and 1917, no particular actions have been taken for solving it³. There was a radical change in status in 1917 when the Bolsheviks took over and raised the National Question to a new, higher level turning it into a crucial element in their state policy.

Many experts admit, as Trofimov states that from 1905 on, Stalin had been the main ideologist of the RSDLP (Russian Social Democratic Labour Party) (b) because his views on the party policy on the National Question strongly impressed Lenin. And although not all of Stalin's ideas were realized, his view on specific points differed from that of Lenin, he remained the main ideologist and interpreter of the soviet national policy until his death in 1953. Not only do Stalin's theses on the National Question become the basis of the soviet national policy, but in fact (with insignificant changes only) they remain in force throughout the existence of the Soviet Union⁴.

The problem of the soviet national policy raises serious interest among researchers as many articles, monographs, and digests devoted to this topic have been issued. Among these are the documentary collections: „ЦК РКП (б) – ВКП (б) и национальный вопрос”⁵, the two parts of V.G. Chebotareva's monograph „Национальная политика Российской Федерации 1925–1938 гг.”⁶, E. N. Trofimov's monograph „Государственная национальная политика

² Трофимов, Е. Н. Государственная национальная политика России: законодательный аспект (1906–2007 годы). Москва. 2008, с. 27.

³ Ibid. p. 10–89.

⁴ Ibid. 90–178.

⁵ ЦК РКП (б) – ВКП (б) и национальный вопрос. Кн. 1. 1918–1933 гг. Москва. 2005; ЦК ВКП (б) и национальный вопрос. Кн. 2. 1933–1945 гг. Москва. 2009.

⁶ Чеботарева, В. Г. Национальная политика Российской Федерации 1925–1938 гг. Ч. I и II. Москва. 2008.

России: законодательный аспект (1906–2007 годы)”⁷, the collaborative research of A.I. Vdovin, V.J. Zorin and A.V. Nikonov „Русский народ в национальной политике XX века”⁸, the article collection „Власть и общество: национальная политика и межэтнические отношения (исторический опыт и современность) 1906–2006 гг.”⁹.

When talking about the soviet national policy, it is worth mentioning that the latter has different aspects and concerns large territories, so it would be naive and even unreliable to attempt at a comprehensive description in a short article. Having this in mind, I am to discuss the development of its theoretical basis in the work hereby, or in other words, the views of J.V. Stalin on the “National Question.” As Stalin himself states, “the formulation of the national question in the history of Russian Marxism passed through two stages – the first one, i.e. the pre-revolutionary and the second one – the October period.”¹⁰

The debates about the policy directions concerning the “national question” are typical for the first period. According to Stalin, “The National Question” in different periods serves different interests and takes different hues depending on the class that raises it, and the time it raises it.”¹¹ In his article “*How social democracy interprets the National Question*”¹² from 1904 he makes a brief review of the changes in the essence of the National Question in different periods, and criticizes those social democrats who prose that the social democratic party should be divided into independent national parties, united in a “*free union*” instead of being a consolidated Russian social-democratic party with an integrated centre. Stalin believes that their proposition is rather in favour of the bourgeoisie and the Tsar’s Government. In his view, “*it is essential for all the workers, regardless of their nationality to unite so as to assure the victory of the proletariat*”¹³ and “*the so-called national interests*” and “*the national claims*” *per se* are not that valuable, ant that those interests and claims are

⁷ Трофимов, Е. Н. Государственная...

⁸ Вдовин, А. И. И др. Русский народ в национальной политике XX века. Кунгур. 2007.

⁹ Власть и общество: национальная политика и межэтнические отношения (исторический опыт и современность) 1906–2006 гг. Краснодар. 2006.

¹⁰ Сталин, И. В. Съчинения. Т. 7. С., 1952, с. 60.

¹¹ Сталин, И. В. Съчинения. Т. 1. С., 1953, с. 25.

¹² Сталин, И. В. Как социалдемократията разбира националния въпрос? – Съчинения. Т. 1. С., 1953, с. 25–44.

¹³ Ibid. p. 28

worth attention just as long as they push or can push the class consciousness and the class development of the proletariat forward.”¹⁴ Pointing out that the central claims of the “federalists”, as Stalin calls them, like equality of the nationalities in Russia, language freedom and right to self-governance (including the right to separating from Russia) underlie the program of RSDLP, Stalin emphasizes that the proletariat should not support the movement for national liberation, which serves the bourgeoisie and thus emasculates and corrupts its class consciousness. For Stalin, the essence of the National Question lies in the breach of the national divide and the abolition of the national enclosure in order to rally the proletariat in Russia and to help it close its ranks.¹⁵ Proceeding from these assumptions, Stalin positions himself firmly against the so-called cultural and national autonomy, which, in his opinion fostered the different nationalisms and impedes the union of the proletariat, by asking the following rhetorical question: “The nationality determines its faith, but does that mean that the party should not influence this choice for decisions that are in the best interest of the proletariat?”¹⁶

Stalin’s core treatise on the problem of the national policy from the so-called pre-revolutionary period “*Marxism and the National Question*”¹⁷ was published in 1913 in three consequent issues of the “Prosveshtenie” magazine. As the author himself states, this article reflects the principle discussions on the national question in the ranks of the Russian social democracy in the time when within the social democracy there are two theories and two programs, competing for the leading role – the Austrian, supported by Bund and the Mensheviks and the Russia, supported by the Bolsheviks.¹⁸ In this work Stalin opposes his views to those of the Austrian social democratic theoreticians on the national question – R. Springer and O. Bauer, and provides his own definition of Nation, stating that “*A Nation is a stable community of persons, which has originated historically on the basis of the community, the language, the territory, the*

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 33

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 25–44.

¹⁶ Сталин, И. В. Съчинения. Т. 2. С., 1949, с. 242.

¹⁷ Сталин, И. В. Марксизмът и националният въпрос. – Съчинения. Т. 2. С., 1949, 245–308.

¹⁸ Сталин, И. В. Съчинения. Т. 4. С., 1949, с. 311.

*economic mode of life and the mindset, which is reflected in the community of the culture*¹⁹

The author points out that it is not the “*simultaneous existence of all indices that builds up the Nation.*”²⁰ According to Stalin, nations emerge in the era of the arising capitalism, and the national movements emerge in the same time in the multi-ethnic countries like Russia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the leading role in these movements belongs to the bourgeoisie. It is not between the nations themselves that the struggle arises, but between the bourgeoisie of the nation in power and the oppressed nations, the latter trying to provide “their own”, “fatherland” market for themselves. The market, as Stalin postulates, is the first school, where the bourgeoisie learns about nationalism, and the struggle in the economic sphere is transferred in the political sphere.²¹ The authorities in the nations in power start to impose a series of limitations to their “competitors”, such as limitations in the freedom of migration, the language, the rights to vote, redundancies in the schools, religious oppression, etc. The miffed bourgeoisie turns to the “homeland lower classes” representing their deeds as a nation-wide cause, though the strength of the national movement is defined through the extent to which the large social strata of a nation take part in it. Surely, the tenor of the national movement cannot be identical worldwide and is to be determined by the claims raised by the specific movement. In addition, the fact that the national struggle in the conditions of flourishing capitalism is a struggle between the bourgeoisie classes does not imply that the proletariat fight against the policy of national suppression which concerns the working class even more than the bourgeoisie and impedes the free development of their spirits. The social democracy however is not to support “*any kind or every custom of the national institutions*”, its only commitment is to defend “*the interests of the proletariat and the national rights, consisting of different classes which differ significantly*”.²² While the programme of the RSDLP (b) “*voices the interests of the proletariat*”, the “*the rights of the nations could voice the interests of any class – of the bourgeoisie, the aristocracy, the clergy, etc.*”²³

¹⁹ *Сталин, И. В. Марксизмът и...* 1949, с. 250.; It should be pointed out that this is the official definition of nation, accepted by the Bolsheviks, and the other concepts like tribe, ethnos and ethnicity, are defined in accordance with the concept of nation.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 251

²¹ Ibid. p. 258.

²² Ibid. p. 261–262

²³ Ibid. p. 299

Abiding by the principle of self-determination of the nations, as proclaimed by the Bolsheviks, Stalin wrote: “*The nation has the right of setting itself up autonomously. It even has the right to separate itself. But it still does not mean that it has to do this under any circumstances and that the autonomy and the separation will be beneficial for the nation, i.e. for the majority in it, i.e. the working classes, everywhere and any time.*”²⁴ Acknowledging the right of the various nations to separate from Russia, in essence, the Bolsheviks add a “but”, which after their coming into power serves as the main argument for collecting the pieces of the disintegrating empire – in the name of the “working classes”.

According to Stalin, solving the national question depends both on the specific historical conditions and on the economic, political and cultural circumstances in which a certain nation exists.²⁵ Proceeding from this view of his, he criticizes the Bund and the Mensheviks, who support the idea of the cultural and national autonomy, not taking into consideration that the conditions in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Russia are totally different. Stalin points out that “...is not the national question that represents the axe of the political life in Russia, it is the agrarian question. This also explains the fact that the national question in Russia is not raised as the only crucial question, but as a part of the general and more important problem of setting the country free. It is not the national question; it is the agrarian question that is to determine the faith of Russia. The national question is tributary.”²⁶

In his view, the cultural - national economy is “*partial and inconclusive*”²⁷ and its aim is rather to preserve the unity of the state, which contradicts the principle of self-determination, asserted by the Bolsheviks. It encloses the working classes within the problems of their nation, which distances them from the core aim of the proletariat. The internationalism is left in the background and the working classes in one nation are opposed to their brothers from another nation positioning themselves side by side with the bourgeoisie. The international unity concedes to the division of the proletariat on the basis of nationality: “*it is not the common features of the workers that stands out, it is*

²⁴ Ibid. p. 263

²⁵ Ibid. p. 264, 269

²⁶ Ibid. p. 268–269

²⁷ Ibid. p. 268



what makes them different”²⁸ Stalin postulates: „Isn't it clear that the national autonomy clashes with the overall development of the class struggle”²⁹, and then adds: “The cultural - national autonomy of Springer and Bauer is a sophisticated type of nationalism”.³⁰ In his opinion, it is the democratization of the country that assures the freedom of the nationalists; the more democratic the country is, the less the rights of the nationalists are breached.³¹ That is the reason for him to proclaim himself to be against the ideas of the Bund and the Mensheviks, which contradict the common interests of the proletariat in Russia and agrees with Plekhanov, who states that the Bund “adapts the socialism to the nationalism.”³²

Stalin states, that the cultural - national autonomy which is inapplicable in Russia, as a matter of principle, is even “*more pointless and ridiculous in view of the circumstances in Caucasus,*” where it would turn into “*reactionary intention.*”³³ In his opinion the national question in Caucasus could only be solved only in the spirit of involving the underdeveloped nations and ethnicities in the mainstream of the high culture.³⁴ However, due to this point exactly, by fighting for the nations' rights to self-determination, the Bolsheviks position themselves against the separation of the Tatars, or the cultural - national autonomy of the Caucasian peoples, because both these concepts, despite not contradicting to the rights of these peoples, clash with the interests of their proletariat.³⁵ Stalin points out several crucial points which in his view are essential for the positive solution of the national question in Russia, emphasizing that the international conditions should by all means be taken into account. The first and the most important condition pointed out by Stalin is the democratization of the country. As about the right to self-determination Stalin suggests that a so-called regional autonomy should be built instead of the

²⁸ Ibid. p. 307

²⁹ Ibid. p. 276

³⁰ Ibid. p. 277

³¹ Ibid. p. 284

³² Ibid. p. 287

³³ Ibid. p. 294–296

³⁴ Ibid. p. 295

³⁵ Ibid. p. 299

inapplicable cultural-national autonomy, as the regional autonomy would not segregate the people on the basis of their nationality and would not enforce the national barriers. As there are national minorities in every region, they need freedom of consciousness (freedom of religion), freedom of migration, equality of language and schools, etc. Finally yet importantly, there is a necessity of a united party and international integrity which would show that the workers are, in the first place, members of one and the same family³⁶. These theses are further confirmed by Stalin in his report on the national question, delivered during the VII Conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (b), held in April 24-29, 1917³⁷.

On 25 October (7 November) 1917 the Bolsheviks take over the power in Russia, which triggers the second period in the development of the national question, when the promises need to be turned into actions. However, as Stalin himself says: “*Easier said than done*”³⁸. It was as early as the day after the coup – on the 26 October (8 November) a Council of The People’s Commissars (CPC) was established, the first among the commissariats being the People’s Commissariat on Nationalities (Narcomnats), headed by Stalin. This action serves as an affirmative demonstration that the Bolsheviks consider the national question a substantial element of their state policy. The first proofs for that were soon to be seen – no later than 2 (15) November 1917, the Declaration of the

Rights of the Peoples in Russia was approved. It deprived the citizens of all their privileges on the basis or religion and nationality proclaimed the equality and sovereignty of all the peoples in the country, regardless of their

³⁶ Ibid. p. 302–308

³⁷ *Сталин, И. В. Съчинения*. Т. 3. С., 1949, 44–51.

³⁸ *Сталин, И. В. Съчинения*. Т. 5. С., 1951, с. 208.

ethnicity and religion, acknowledging their right to self-determination, including separation and forming a state of their own³⁹.

In the period of the revolution and the subsequent Civil war, processes of disintegration start to take part in Russia, assisted further by the international military intervention. In the outlying districts like Ukraine, the Transcaucasia, etc. the Bolsheviks confront the National Councils and the Regional “Governments,” formed before October 1917 (Don River, Kuban River, Siberia). These “National Governments” refuse to acknowledge the new central socialist governance and start fighting obstinately against it. Stalin, staying faithful to his principle that the national question depends on the specific historical circumstances, claims that the self-determination principle should be interpreted as the right to self-determination should be interpreted like “*a right to self-determination of the working classes of a certain nation, not such of its bourgeoisie. The self-determination principle should be a means of fighting for socialism and should be subsided to the socialist principles.*”⁴⁰ From then on, any resistance on the part of the republics, which have been proclaimed independent, and any attempt to separate from Russia was considered as counter-revolution.⁴¹ The specific conditions impose certain changes in the views of the Bolsheviks on the constitution of the state, and although they are generally against federalism⁴², they still proclaim Soviet Russia a federal republic in January 1918. In fact, the Bolsheviks consider the federation as *one of the temporary forms along the way to total unity*⁴³, but as history shows, it

³⁹ „Декларация прав народов России” 2 (15) ноября 1917 г. – В: Декреты Советской власти. Т. 1. Москва. 1957, 39–41., <http://www.hist.msu.ru/ER/Etext/DEKRET/peoples.htm> (05. 06. 2011 г.); These theses are made specific for the Muslims by the Soviet Government in the “Address to the working Muslims in Russia and the East” from 20 November (3 December) 1917, which says “*In the future your beliefs and customs, your national and cultural institutions are proclaimed free and inviolable. You are free and can arrange your national mode of life without being hindered. You have the right to do this.*” cf.: „Из Обращения Совнаркома РСФСР к трудящимся мусульманам России и Востока” 20 ноября (3 декабря) 1917 г. – В: Шансугов, Д. Ю. и др. Обычное право, мусульманское право и акты Российского государства на Северном Кавказе (вторая половина XVIII – первая треть XX вв.). Хрестоматия. Ростов-на-Дону. 2008; <http://constitutions.ru/archives/2458/26> (05. 06. 2011 г.).

⁴⁰ Сталин, И. В. Съчинения. Т. 4, с. 29.

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 45–56, 79–95, 113–114

⁴² Сталин, И. В. Против федерализма. – Съчинения. Т. 3. С., 1949, 22–25.

⁴³ Сталин, И. В. Съчинения. Т. 3, с. 27.

turns out to be among the most durable ones, and furthermore the Soviet Union was later to be built on its principles⁴⁴. A leading principle in establishing the separate autonomies is the “*special mode of life and ethnical range*” of a certain region. Nevertheless, Stalin emphasizes, “*The autonomy should be soviet, based on the Sovdeps (the local councils of deputies). This means that distinguishing the people in a certain region should not be done on the basis of national indices, but on the class index*”⁴⁵. In spite of this statement, he shows incredible flexibility and pragmatism as concerning the policy in the outlying districts, like the one in Northern Caucasus where the Soviet Authority was overly fragile. In a letter to Lenin from July 10, Stalin wrote: “If Trotsky goes on giving away mandates thoughtlessly like that... we can doubtlessly conclude, that within a month, in our homeland, in Northern Caucasus, everything will collapse and we will lose this region for good... Please, do engrave deep in his mind that he should not appoint anyone without the approval of the local people, or else the reputation of the Soviet authority is damaged”⁴⁶.

The essence of the problem is that it is not only the Whiteguards that the Bolsheviks need to fight against at the frontier regions, but also the international intruders, struggling to impose their power over as many parts of the collapsing empire as possible. In order to defeat their opponents, the communists need attract the locals to their side (or at least a considerable part of it). The problem was further aggravated by the fact that the Turkic peoples (except “an inconsiderable part of Azerbaijan”) who have not overcome the capitalism stage, there are no, or there are very few proletariats among them, over 90% of the population are illiterate, and as a whole these peoples sustain “the patriarchal – tribal system” Or the “semi patriarchal – semi feudal” mode of life.⁴⁷ There is no basis for discussing the “class consciousness” in these circumstances, nor is there a reason to plead for support among the local people. Stalin sees a solution to this problem in “*raising the cultural level of the underdeveloped peoples.*” He suggests developing a big network of schools and educational institutions, developing the oral and written Soviet agitation in an “*understandable, native tongue*”, as well as attracting local people, who know the mode of life, the morals, the customs and the language of local people in the authority and the

⁴⁴ For the reasons, which have changed the views of the Bolsheviks on the problem of federalism, see: Ibid. p.26–28.; *Сталин, И. В. Съчинения*. Т. 5, 19–20.

⁴⁵ *Сталин, И. В. Съчинения*. Т. 4, с. 74.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 99

⁴⁷ *Сталин, И. В. Съчинения*. Т. 5, 21–22.



administrative institutions; Stalin also suggests attracting the local elite groups, who are a minority anyway, but are, although not being members of the party, loyal to the authorities and would, therefore, cooperate⁴⁸. Stalin, who subjects the national policy to the current specificities, criticizes *“the haste, more often than not turning into rude tactlessness, shown by some comrades in the sovietization of the outlying districts.”* When these comrades, who are lagging behind Central Russia with a whole historical period in the region where the medieval regime has not yet been completely abolished, make up their mind and make a *“heroic effort”* to implement the *“poor communism”*, it could be confidently stated that nothing good could come out of such a cavalry attack and such *“communism”*⁴⁹.

Alluding to the RCP, he points out, *“...if, for example, the masses in Dagestan, who are widely contaminated with religious prejudices, lag behind the communists, “on the basis of the sharia law”, so it goes without saying that the direct measures for fighting those prejudice in this country should be replaced by indirect, more subtle measures...”*. To put it shortly – the cavalry raids for *“immediate communization”* should be replaced by a cautious and deeply considered policy for gradual involvement of the masses in the mainstream of the Soviet development⁵⁰.

At the congress of the peoples in Dagestan, held on November 13, 1920, Stalin states, confirming his position: *“...Dagestan must be governed according to its specificities, according to its customs and mode of life. We do have information that the sharia law has a profound influence over the peoples in Dagestan. We also found out that the enemies of the Soviet authorities spread rumours that the Soviet Authority bans the Sharia Law. The Soviet Government considers the Sharia Law as a right equally indisputable and normal, as the ones the other peoples in Russia have. If the Dagestan peoples wish to keep their customs and laws, so be it.”*⁵¹

The Bolsheviks managed to win the trust of the majority of the local people in the outlying districts, due to this policy. Later, Stalin would often state that exactly due to this support the Soviet Authority won the Civil War⁵².

⁴⁸ Сталин, И. В. Съчинения. Т. 4, 198–199, 300–303.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 303

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 304

⁵¹ Ibid. p. 331

⁵² Сталин, И. В. Съчинения. Т. 5, с. 18, 98, 158; Сталин, И. В. Съчинения. Т. 6, с. 124.

However, the stabilization of the fronts is accompanied by a change in the policy of the Bolsheviks concerning the separation of the outlying districts from Russia. Each of these claims was proclaimed “counter revolutionary” and contradicting the interests of the “broad masses of people.” According to Stalin, the separation of the outlying districts would lead to “*diminishing the revolutionary power of Russia and strengthening the positions of imperialism*”⁵³. He points out that the outlying districts are most vulnerable in military terms and are abundant in gas and supplies necessary to Russia, and without which Russia would not be able to sustain its military and economic power. At the same time the outlying regions do not have the military and economic power of Central Russia, and without the latter they are unable to defend their independent existence⁵⁴. That was why the only possible form of self-governance, acknowledged by the Bolsheviks remains the Soviet autonomy in its various forms and extents.⁵⁵ Furthermore, Bolsheviks not only halt the decay of the state but also manage to gather most of the past time empire into a new union – The Soviet Union. Thus, in fact, as Trofimov points out, the Bolsheviks, who during the civil war were the last to agitate about a united Russia and pursued totally different goals, in essence turn out to be the only uniting forces of the State.⁵⁶

Stalin draws out three periods of co-operation through which the peoples from the former empire should pass until the Soviet Union is established. The first period is immediately after the revolution, while the co-operation of the different peoples has no certain, strictly determined form. The second period was during the Civil War, when the co-operation takes the form of a military alliance. The third one is the post military period, when the military alliance is complemented with a economic trust, and the union of the national republics in the Soviet union was the concluding stage of the development of this co-operation, which takes the form of a military economic and political union of the peoples in a united multinational Soviet state. Stalin points out that, “*Thus the proletariat found the key to the optimal solution of the national question in the Soviet state system; in this system the proletariat also found the way to*

⁵³ Сталин, И. В. Съчинения. Т. 4, 296–297, с. 313

⁵⁴ Сталин, И. В. Съчинения. Т. 5, 18–19, с. 97.

⁵⁵ Сталин, И. В. Съчинения. Т. 4, с. 298; Сталин, И. В. Съчинения. Т. 5, 19–20.

⁵⁶ Трофимов, Е. Н. Государственная...2008, с. 106.

*organizing a sustainable multinational state based on the rudiments of national equality of rights and voluntarism*⁵⁷.

After establishing the Soviet Union together with the long-term task of “enlightening” of the underdeveloped peoples and attracting local people in the governance, Stalin outlines some future tasks, concerning the solution to the national question, as the economic and industrial development of the underdeveloped regions as well as the fight against the remnants of the Great Russia’s and the local nationalism. Stalin blames both the Russian party members, who do not respect the local customs and treat them with contempt, and the local party members who more often than not exaggerate the specificities of the local culture and mode of life⁵⁸. The way to solving the national question in Stalin’s views is the Cultural Revolution, and he claims that the first step to achieving this is making the primary school education obligatory for all the citizens in the country, regardless of their nationality; the secondary school is later to be made compulsory as well⁵⁹. In his opinion without having done this it is impossible neither to achieve any cultural development of the country, nor to have an upsurge in agriculture in industry, nor to have a reliable defense of the country. Which means that the key to success is the abolition of illiteracy, which could only happen if the press, the theatre, the cinema, etc. cultural institutions in the native tongue is developed⁶⁰. According to Stalin the proper solution to the national question in the USSR depends on the attitude of the East to the Socialist revolution⁶¹. And it is the time to point out a very important stage of the so-called Second period of development of the national question is its transformation from a national to an international problem. While in the First period the national question was considered an internal problem and part of the struggle for the general democratization of the country, after the October coup and the subsequent revolution this problem expands from “*a private matter into a general question of liberating the nations, the colonies and semi-colonies of imperialism*”⁶². In Stalin’s views the basic reason for that is the foreign intervention and the occupation policy of the “*imperialists*”, and the

⁵⁷ Сталин, И. В. Съчинения. Т. 5, с. 159.

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 155–165, 202–238, 249–286

⁵⁹ Сталин, И. В. Съчинения. Т. 11. С., 1952, с. 300.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 300–301

⁶¹ Сталин, И. В. Съчинения. Т. 5, 203–204.

⁶² Сталин, И. В. Съчинения. Т. 4, с. 137.

“*October coup*” provides a liaison between the peoples in the “*underdeveloped East and the developed West*”, uniting them in a common struggle against “*imperialism*”⁶³. The October Revolution demolishes the wall between the white and the black, “*the Europeans and the Asians*”, the “*literate and the illiterate*” peoples and connects the national question with the question about the colonies.

And though the Bolsheviks consider the national question as a part of the general question of the proletarian revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat, they proclaim themselves in favour of independence movements, even such that are in essence monarchist movements, as long as they are to “*undermine imperialism*”⁶⁴.

Forming the Bolsheviks views on the national policy is not an unambiguous phenomenon; it is a complex and dynamic process. As we could see, from the very beginning the Bolsheviks put the national question on a class basis and subside it to the general question about the revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Despite the fact that in the different stages some of the views are made obsolete, others change and new ones are added, this basic principle is sustained and remains unchanged. Another basic principle, which is to remain unchanged is the strictly revolutionary approach to the national question. This could be observed in the pre-October period, when the national question is still a matter of internal affairs for the state, and the approach to it was a matter of debates in the ranks of the Russian social democracy, as well as in the period after the revolution, when the national question becomes and international problem as is connected with the problem with the colonies.

As concerning the practical realization of the Bolsheviks’ views, the Bolsheviks turn out to be extremely flexible and pragmatic. Faithful to the principle that the solution to the problem depends on the specific internal and external political conditions, they manage to win the support of the majority of the peoples in Russia, to defeat their enemies in the Civil War, and then to unite the decayed empire in the form of the USSR. As concerning the righteousness of the Soviet national policy and the ways of implementing it in the different

⁶³ Ibid. p. 137–138

⁶⁴ *Сталин, И. В. Сочинения. Т. 6. С., 1951, 116–126.*

regions of the country, there different opinions, but the fact that it has saved the majority of the peoples from the abyss of illiteracy and that many underdeveloped peoples were incorporated in the secular (although Soviet in essence) culture, cannot be denied.

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