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The unrealized state attempt of establishing German autonomy in Kazakhstan (1950–1970s)

The article considers important historical aspects of the national movement of the Soviet Germans in Kazakhstan in the second half of the 20th century. The study highlights the contribution, forced resettlement, labor, numbers, the discriminatory policy of the authorities as well as the emergence of the emigrant and autonomist moods of the Germans in Kazakhstan. The reasons for the emergence of the “German question” were revealed and characterized. The struggle of the Germans for restoration of the autonomy on the Volga and the campaigns of German delegations to the Kremlin with the aim to resolve this issue are noted. The anti-autonomist movement of youth and students in Tselinograd oblast in June 1979 is evaluated. The authors express their opinion on the causes and consequences for Kazakhstani society of the failed attempt to establish German autonomy.

Keywords: German population, deportation, Soviet Union, Soviet Germans, emigration moods, national movement, Volga region, Tselinograd event.

Introduction

The Germans of Kazakhstan are one of the once numerous ethnic groups that appeared at the end of the XVIII century during the Russian colonization of the southeastern outskirts of the empire. Over time, the German population managed to create strong economic communities in Kazakhstan with their traditional culture and ethnic identity of the society [1].

But not only these institutions had distinguished the resettled German population. We should agree with the opinion of one of the leading researchers of the history of Germans in pre-Soviet Kazakhstan and in the USSR V. Krieger, who noted that arriving in the region, Germans, thanks to their extensive knowledge and ability to organize a joint cultural and economic space of the newcomers and local population, eventually became authoritative administrators of the region (for example, “conqueror” and the first governor-general of Turkistan General Konstantin von Kaufmann, the governor-general of Western Siberia Gustav Christian Gasforth and others). In addition, the role of German scientists, researchers and travelers in the study of the culture and history of Kazakhs and other peoples of Asia is indispensable. The works of Peter Simon Pallas, Johann Gottlieb Georgi, Samuel Gottlieb Gmelin, Gerhard Friedrich Müller and many others are today desk books for those engaged in the study of traditional Kazakh society [2; 4–5]. The German population also contributed to the genesis and development of capitalist relations in Kazakhstan by investing in the creation of profitable companies in industry and agriculture.

Results

The history of the deportation of peoples to the territory of Kazakhstan is of great interest to scholars. In the 1930s and 1950s, the Kazakhstani land became a place of exile and deportation for many “punished” peoples. The expulsion and physical extermination during the “ethnic cleansing” also affected the German people. Many interesting archival documents have been published in recent years, making it possible to delve into this subject and uncover stories that had previously been hidden from the academic community. However, the process of x-raying the problem is long and painstaking, requiring careful, non-partisan study of the issue. In the Soviet society Germanophobia led to the emergence of a persistent negative image of the Germans in society the concept of “German” practically equaled with “fascist” [3].

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It is no coincidence that the fate of the Germans turned out to be the most dramatic. The German population was forcibly expelled both before the war (1936) and during the first years of the war of 1941–1942. In September 1941, by the decision of the Soviet party leadership, about half a million Germans were deported from Siberia and Kazakhstan from the Volga region. The Republic of Volga Germans that existed here was liquidated, and its territory was divided between the Saratov and Stalingrad regions [4]. In the summary of the Deputy head of the evacuation department at the Council of People's Commissars of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, M. Yakovlev, it was noted that by January 1942 to the territory of the North Kazakhstan Region (hereinafter – NKR) 50,687 Germans arrived, among them: 10,878 men, 16,799 women and 23,010 children. In the certificate of the head of the department of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs of the Kazakh SSR Novik to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Bolsheviks of Kazakhstan, it was noted that 17950 Germans lived only in the territory of the North Kazakhstan region before the deportation. Later, in the course of forced resettlement, according to the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, 62473 Germans will be registered on the territory of the North Kazakhstan Region in December 1942. There will be several such waves of forced deportations to the Kazakh SSR in 1942 (Table).

Table

Information on the resettlement and mobilization of Germans [5; 257–258]

№	Name of regions	there were Germans before resettlement	resettled	all Germans in Kazakhstan	mobilized and sent
1	Alma-Ata	3 000	8840	11840	1339
2	Akmola	10 130	75 418	85 548	11 408
3	Aktobe	401	11 632	12 033	–
4	East Kazakhstan	856	28 499	29 335	4163
5	Dzhambul'skaya	1150	10 480	11 630	1500
6	Karaganda	10 000	20 639	30 639	3739
7	Kyzyl-Orda	215	4807	5022	527
8	Kustanai	8 000	53 317	61 317	8149
9	Pavlodar	4900	51 317	56 217	6940
10	North Kazakhstan	17 950	62 473	80 423	11 860
11	Semipalatinsk	2500	41 913	44 413	4597
12	South Kazakhstan	1715	24798	26 513	3473
13	West Kazakhstan	500	–	500	–
14	Guryevskaya	21	–	21	–
	Total	61 338	394 133	455 531	57 695

Stalin's repressive machine during the Second World War involved deported Germans in all branches of heavy industry and agriculture in Kazakhstan. In addition, the tightening of supervision led to the deployment of political campaigns to search for “enemies of the people”, the authorities organized a broad offensive against any dissent and labeling entire nations. The totalitarian regime did not trust its people. So, here is a small excerpt from numerous “notes” of that time about the “counterrevolutionary” activities of the Germans-immigrants: “The investigation found that Wunder Yakov Heinrichovich, being in close relations with anti-Soviet-minded people – Germans, such as Scherf and Diehl, who systematically conducted anti-Soviet work among the population, Wunder, as a member of the party knowing about the provocative actions of Scherf and Dil, instead of his own alarm system, he essentially concealed the anti-Soviet actions of the above-mentioned persons” [5; 211]. In part, such “letters”, “references” and “memorandums” of state bodies “pulled down” non-Russian peoples, formed an artificial image of the “enemy” in the public mind and explained the vigilant gaze of special power structures towards the “punished” peoples.

Since, according to the 1970 census, the German population occupied the fourth place in number (839,649 people) [6] and was located in different regions of Kazakhstan, and besides, none of the documents of the top leadership of the CPSU and the USSR concerning Soviet Germans in 1950–1960 rehabilitated the German people either politically or in culturally, then, undoubtedly, the Germans all the post-war years cherished the hope of returning to the Volga region and reviving their republic, which was liquidated in 1941. The internal inconsistency of legal acts and, above all, the unequivocal refusal in 1964 to restore the

autonomous republic as a guarantor of national equality, pushed the activists of the national movement to more decisive steps [7; 230]. This is how the problem of the “German question” arose in Kazakhstan.

Its essence lies in the contradiction between the desire of the Germans to return to the Volga, to restore their autonomy, and the policy of the state, which in every possible way prevented the implementation of this. The inability to realize their desire, dissatisfaction with the discriminatory policy of the authorities led to the growth of emigration sentiments among the Germans, which transferred the German issue to the international level and compromised the Soviet leadership in the eyes of the world community [8].

The hidden discrimination of Germans by the state authorities and the feeling of a clear historical injustice due to the refusal to restore their political autonomy provoked among the German population of Soviet Kazakhstan emigrant sentiments, encouraged by the German government, Radio station “German Wave”, West German “Red Cross”, religious and cultural organizations. Informal religious communities, especially the Mennonites, Lutherans and Catholics, have been vigorously working on the repatriation and have significantly strengthened their influence among the German special settlers during the period of exile [9; 122].

We would like to pay attention to the secret note-instruction of the deputy head of the Administration of the State Security Committee under the Council of Ministers of the Kazakh SSR in Akmola Region No. 5535 in 1957 addressed to the secretary of the Akmola Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan G.A. Melnik. We believe that instructions to that effect have also been sent to other regional centers. It was noted that “recently the West German authorities and various reactionary organizations are conducting a company to induce the Germans living in our country to mass departure from the Soviet Union to Germany” [10; 110].

According to the author of the note, the Federal Intelligence Service pursued the goal of obtaining in the person of these Germans sources of valuable information and reliable personnel for subversive work against the USSR. For this, some persons, according to the author of the instructions, were collecting the addresses of Germans wishing to travel to Western Europe, compiling lists of these persons, drawing up the relevant documents, and then forwarding these documents to the embassy through specially selected couriers. At the same time, there was an annual increase in the number of Germans wishing to leave for the FRG (for example, by the beginning of 1957, the number of Germans who visited the Embassy of the FRG in the Akmola region alone reached 105 people). Considering that “emigrant moods of Germans cause certain damage to the interests of our state, we on our part carry out work to degrade their emigrant sentiments and to prevent them from leaving the FRG embassy, using the available agents and other opportunities for this purpose” (State Security Committee – authors) [10; 112]. A very important point of this document lies in the fact that it instructed local state and party bodies “to intensify political mass work in places of German concentration <...> *to immediately report on all changes in the mood and life of the German population* (italics ours. – authors). In our opinion, this and other instructions gave “the start of a large-scale campaign” to collect versatile information about the German population.

Interesting material about the daily life and political sentiments of the German population is provided by secret notes of state regulatory authorities. In one of the notes, the commissioner of the Council for Religious Cults in the North Kazakhstan region, Lyapunov, reported in 1957 that the priest of the Catholic community of Germans, Kellert, said in an interview with him that “there is information that <...> an autonomous region in Altai will be allocated for the Germans, with the possibility of having their own national schools and their houses of worship. Of course, this will defuse the situation, but so far, a significant part of the Germans living in Kazakhstan and Siberia are painfully enduring their inequality with other nationalities. That's why many of them turn to the representative of the embassy in West Germany” [11; 96].

The minutes of the meeting of the asset of the professors and students of the Tselinograd Medical Institute noted: “In recent years, actions of ideological sabotage against Soviet citizens of German nationality, aimed at inducing them to leave for permanent residence in Germany, have become more active from abroad and above all from Germany. ... We have recently begun to see emigration among some of the working people studying young Germans. Among the applicants for departure to Germany there are engineering and technical workers, students of secondary specialized institutions, vocational schools, secondary schools of Tselinograd” [12; 154]. Of course, this kind of “agitation” of various political and religious institutions gave its definite results. Thus, at an operational meeting held in the Department of the State Security Committee, attention was drawn to the fact that “various forms of influence on people did not remain without a trace, and this was evidenced by the dynamics of applicants for permanent residence in FRG from the region (Tselinograd. – authors): in 1975, 204 people were counted, in 1976 – 427 (an increase of more than two times), in 1977 – 701, and in the past year the number of petitioners reached 783 people” [13; 7].

The “flow” of secret information about the frame of mind among the German population has not ceased all subsequent years. The commissioner of the Council for Tselinograd Region of the Council of Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the USSR A. Tishkov in a secret note addressed to the chairman of the district executive committee in 1974 reported: “Recently, there has been an increase in the activity and manifestation of extremely undesirable tendencies in the associations of evangelical Christian Baptists consisting of Germans. Leaders of these religious associations demand that teachers of schools not engage in scientific and atheistic education of their children, often at prayer meetings are preached the national isolation” [14; 127].

“Preventive measures” by special government counter-propaganda agencies tried to exert a “useful general preventive influence on emigrant-minded Germans”. For this purpose, in connection with the release of the film “Bitter Truth of Enlightenment”, “compromising the idea of Soviet Germans leaving for permanent residence in West Germany”, 16 public screenings of this film were organized “in places of concentration of the German population, which were combined with lectures exposing provocative actions of special services and ideological bodies of the FRG” [15; 149].

But it was not the “efforts” of state and party structures that were decisive in this matter. The short-sightedness of the state’s national policy towards the Germans was manifested in the fact that the movement for repatriation in the 1950s and 1960s. There was no mass movement, and emigrant sentiments did not prevail among the Germans. Moreover, many Germans associated their future with the resolution of the state issue on the establishment of autonomy in the Volga region. The same head of the Priishim Catholic Church, Kellert, in an interview with Lyapunov, noted that “he, Kellert, was always against their return to West Germany and in all cases turning to him for advice on this matter, tried to dissuade those who applied from their intention” [11; 96].

The autonomist sentiments of the Germans intensified every year. It is no coincidence that after the beginning of the “thaw” in the country and the establishment of relations with the FRG, the restoration of the national self-consciousness of the Germans begins [16; 99]. The result of this was the organization of a delegation to the Kremlin with specific requirements and proposals. After the decree of 1964, in different regions of the Kazakh and Kirghiz SSR, a collection of signatures began under an appeal to restore autonomy, as well as funds for the trip of German activists to Moscow. It was done conspiratorially. The document was signed by 662 people. Otto Gertel, a teacher from Frunze, was sent to Moscow. He was to investigate the situation and let the Germans know by a conventional telegram whether to go or not. The trip was planned for the very beginning of January 1965. When a telegram came from Gertel with the text “The wedding will take place”, everyone immediately went to Moscow. The delegates compared themselves to Lenin's walkers [16].

Repeated meetings of the “walkers” with the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR A.I. Mikoyan on the restoration of autonomy on the Volga were not crowned with success. Although the delegates managed to achieve the adoption of measures to increase attention to the study of the German language, the release of educational and methodological literature in German, the opening of the media and other issues.

In 1969, the Social Democrats came to power in the German Bundestag elections, which significantly expanded economic, political and cultural cooperation with the Soviet Union. The new German government has updated the issue of ethnic discrimination of the German population in the USSR. This had positive consequences for the Soviet Germans. On October 26, 1972, the Central Committee of the CPSU adopted a resolution “On certain categories of citizens resettled in the past from their places of residence to other regions of the USSR”. On its basis, on November 3, 1972, a Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR was issued “On lifting restrictions on the choice of place of residence provided for in the past for certain categories of citizens” [17].

Despite the fact that the Decree was closed, was not published in the media and was not brought to the attention of the population, the Germans had the legal right to return to their pre-war places of residence. On June 26, 1974, a closed resolution of the Central Committee of the CPSU “On measures to improve work among citizens of the USSR of German nationality” was adopted. On its basis, resolutions were issued on strengthening ideological and political work among citizens of German nationality in the Central Committee of the Communist Parties of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan [17-19].

The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in Helsinki (1975), at which special attention was paid to the observance of human rights, forced the leadership of the Soviet state to take measures again to change the socio-legal status of the German people. On August 6, 1976, the commission established under

the Central Committee of the CPSU was instructed (P. 21/2) to study the situation and make proposals on the issue of creating autonomy for the German population. The commission of eight people was headed by Yu.V. Andropov [8; 179]. The work of the commission took some time.

2 years later, in 1978, the Central Committee of the CPSU received a letter with proposals to grant the German population national-territorial autonomy. The letter was signed by the Chairman of the KGB Yu.A. Andropov, secretaries of the Central Committee of the CPSU I. Kapitonov, M. Zimyanin, First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR Z. Nuriev, Minister of the Ministry of Internal Affairs N. Shchelokov, Prosecutor General R. Rudenko, First Deputy Chairman of the KGB V. Chebrikov [19; 114].

The commission motivated this proposal by the circumstances related to the natural desire of the German population to preserve and develop their national characteristics (self-consciousness, language, culture, religious values, etc.), and also, which was important, to combat the emigrant mood of the latter. “The Soviet system”, “Soviet national policy”, “Soviet values” should not have been in doubt in the world, especially in the West.

In the note, the Commission made a proposal regarding the geographical location of future autonomy. It considered that to create the German autonomy in the Volga region would be impractical, as the German population there actually did not live and, that sounded especially blasphemous, “historical roots in this district did not have”.

It was recommended that German autonomy should be established on the territory of five districts, which are part of the Karaganda, Kokshetau, Pavlodar and Tselinograd regions, with the center in Ereymentau. The Government of Germany was also involved in the establishment of the German autonomy. This decision was based on the fact that more than half of the “Soviet Germans (more than 936 thousand people) lived in Kazakhstan” [20]. Germans made up 6.6% of the population of the republic at that time, and in such regions as Karaganda, Kokshetau, Pavlodar and Tselinograd – 10–13%. There were about 230 settlements with a German population.

In the note, the Commission also noted, the “party and Soviet bodies of Kazakhstan have accumulated some experience of working with the German population. Germans worked well in all spheres of economy and culture, actively participated in social and political life. The Republican radio broadcasts in German for about five hours a week, the daily newspaper “Freundstaf” is published in German in Tselinograd, a German pop ensemble operates at the Karaganda Philharmonic. <...> More than 30 thousand students study German as their native language in the schools of the republic. With this in mind, the Commission makes a proposal: to form the autonomy of the German population as part of Kazakhstan in the form of an autonomous region. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan (D.A Kunaev.) treats this proposal positively” [19; 115–116].

Looking ahead, it should be noted that the attempt made in June 1979 to create German autonomy in Kazakhstan was not crowned with success. As soon as the capital's officials began to fulfill the party's instructions to consider the placement of regional organizations, clarifying the borders, a protest anti-autonomist demonstration of young people and students arose.

The state authorities were not informed about the protest moods among the people. So, at the reporting and election meeting of the party organization of the Kazakh SSR KGB in the Tselinograd region on October 30, 1979, the detective Ufimtsev noted: “The Communists <...> could not timely receive data on the upcoming anti-autonomist manifestations among a separate part of the student youth” [15; 150]. The actions carried out by state bodies caused a negative reaction among part of the population, which resulted in an anti-autonomist movement on June 16 and 19, 1979 in the Tselinograd and Kokshetau regions.

And it wasn't an accident. The city of Tselinograd was characterized by a large concentration of students due to the presence of a significant number of universities, technical schools, industrial and technical schools. Therefore, students and young people became active participants in protest actions. A detailed chronicle of events is given by Kazakh scientist Zh. Kydyralina, therefore, we will not dwell on her, but we will give a small excerpt from her article: “On the night of June 16 and in the morning, over 30 anonymous leaflets protesting against the formation of German autonomy were seized in the areas of the location of three universities in Tselinograd. On the same day, at about 10 a.m., more than 300 students and young people of Kazakh and other nationalities gathered in the central square of Tselinograd. The participants unfurled banners with texts in Russian and Kazakh: “Soviet Kazakhstan is indivisible”, “There is no German autonomy”, “The Soviet people of Kazakhstan will live without internal borders”. Archival materials vividly demonstrate the cohesion of the Kazakh population. On June 27, in Kokshetau, students of the local pedagogical institute, to express solidarity with the students of Tselinograd, distributed leaflets calling for a rally against German

autonomy. On July 1, about 50 people gathered in the central square of the city, which dispersed after the explanation of the responsible employees of the regional party committee and the city executive committee. After that, the situation in Tselinograd, Kokshetau and other places of the republic normalized” [9; 126].

Conclusions

At the height of the Tselinograd events, individual citizens of German nationality expressed that German autonomy should be restored in the Volga region or created elsewhere. The leaders of the German national movement, inspired by the attention to the problems of the Soviet Germans, appealing to the interests of the ethnic community, prepared new documents demanding the return of their civil rights on the territory of the abolished republic.

The authors of the “References and Appeals to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR” tried to distribute them in their places of residence, thereby involving an increasing number of Germans in the national movement. However, the intensification of the activities of supporters of the restoration of the ASSR of the Volga Germans caused obvious irritation of the authorities. Measures were taken against them “to prevent and localize negative manifestations that may arise on this basis” [8; 180].

Thus, an attempt to resolve the issue by hardware methods, without taking into account the opinions of both the German side and the local population, resulted in a sharp increase in interethnic tension and the emergence of a new ethnic conflict in the Soviet Union. After the failure of the Kazakh project, the center invited the leadership of the Saratov and Volgograd regions to consider the possibility of creating a German national-territorial entity in the Volga region.

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Қазақстанда неміс автономиясын құрудың мемлекеттік іске асырылмаған әрекеті (1950–1970 жж.)

Мақалада ХХ ғасырдың екінші жартысындағы Қазақстандағы кеңестік немістердің ұлттық қозғалысы тарихының маңызды аспектілері қарастырылған. Қазақстандағы немістердің үлесі, күштеп қоныс аударылуы, еңбегі, саны, биліктің кемсітушілік саясаты, эмиграциялық-автономистік көңіл-күйінің пайда болуы баяндалған. «Неміс мәселесінің» пайда болу себептері ашылған және сипатталған. Немістердің Еділ бойындағы автономияны қалпына келтіру жолындағы күресі және осы мәселені шешу үшін неміс делегацияларының Кремльге жасаған жорықтары атап өтілді. Целиноград облысында 1979 жылы маусымда өткен жастар мен студенттердің автономияға қарсы қозғалысына баға берілді. Қазақстан қоғамы үшін неміс автономиясын құрудың сәтсіз әрекетінің себептері мен салдары туралы пікір айтылады.

Кілт сөздер: неміс халқы, депортация, Кеңес Одағы, кеңес немістері, эмиграция көңіл-күйі, ұлттық қозғалыс, Еділ бойы, Целиноград оқиғасы.

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Нереализованная государственная попытка создания немецкой автономии в Казахстане (1950–1970-е гг.)

В статье рассмотрены важные аспекты истории национального движения советских немцев в Казахстане во второй половине ХХ в. Освещены вклад, насильственное переселение, труд, численность, дискриминационная политика властей, возникновение эмигрантских и автономистских настроений немцев в Казахстане. Раскрыты и охарактеризованы причины возникновения «немецкого вопроса». Отмечена борьба немцев за восстановление автономии на Волге и походы немецких делегаций в Кремль с целью решения этого вопроса. Дана оценка антиавтономистского движения молодежи и студентов в июне 1979 г. в Целиноградской области. Высказано мнение о причинах и последствиях для казахстанского общества неудачной попытки создания немецкой автономии.

Ключевые слова: немецкое население, депортация, Советский Союз, советские немцы, эмиграционные настроения, национальное движение, Поволжье, Целиноградское событие.

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