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The Role and Place of the Periodical Press in the Formation of a New National Identity in Tajikistan of the Restructuring Period (1985–1991)

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Abstract

Background/Objectives: The article discusses the role, place and importance of the publications of the periodical press in Tajikistan of restructuring period on the problems of the Tajiks new national identity. **Methods analysis:** It should be noted that the analysis of the entire Tajik journalism of restructuring period presented in the press of that era cannot be performed in one article. In this article, we just tried to trace the main topics of the periodical materials, briefly analyze them and determine their role in the formation of the new Tajik identity. Hence, this topic will remain relevant and it will require a full-scale study in the future. **Findings:** A series of articles published in newspapers and magazines in Tajikistan of restructuring period are analyzed in chronological order. It is emphasized that the publications of that period had and still have some impact on the formation of the national identity of post-Soviet Tajikistan, and therefore still have not lost their relevance and value. **Improvements:** The article can be useful to researchers who are interested in various aspects of the history and the current situation in Central Asia, Tajikistan in particular.

Keywords: Central Asia, Periodicals, National Identity, Restructuring, Tajik, Tajik Journalism, Tajik National Identity, Tajik Publicism, Tajikistan, Bukhara and Samarkand

1. Introduction

Issues of formation of a new national identity in the independent states of Central Asia, having appeared on the political map of the world, as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, were and are still one of the main problems of these countries. Their origins lie in the early 20th century, when the national consciousness (we specifically note that in this article the concept of "national identity" and "national consciousness" are used as synonyms) of the peoples of the region, including the Tajik people, had no further development as a result of the October Revolution (1917), the Bukhara Revolution (1920), the spread of communist ideology and the inclusion of Central Asia (then Middle Asia) into a single empire. But regardless of the fact that the communist ideology was dominant, the national identity of peoples

of the former USSR national republics, of course, has not disappeared; it has been, so to speak, in a preserved condition. This state lasted until the second half of the 80s of the 20th century, when the restructuring began in the Soviet Union.

And now it was exactly thirty years after the announcement of the General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee M.S. Gorbachev of restructuring policy and renewal of that time Soviet society. As it is known, there was no independent press in Soviet times and therefore there was no freedom of the press. In the restructuring period with the announcement of the policy of transparency and openness the freedom of opinion and press was implemented exactly in the official press, as there was no private press. In particular, in Tajikistan (then the Tajik SSR) the official press started dwelling upon previously banned topics, particularly the problems of national identity and

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self-awareness. To be more precise, all the problems were considered, taking into account the national interests of Tajikistan, and not as it was before through the prism of the interests of the "Soviet motherland".

Already in the restructuring period (1985-1991 years) the Soviet ideological machine began to falter both in the center and in the national republics (both union and autonomous). Communist values could no longer meet the spiritual needs of people and, therefore, a kind of spiritual vacuum began to appear in the society. For this reason, we began an intensive search for filling this vacuum, especially on the part of the national intellectuals, who wrote articles on current needs of the day, and therefore a special role in this process belongs to the periodical press.

It should be noted that the materials of the Tajik periodicals press of restructuring period, after more than a quarter-century, still have not been subjected to extensive study and analysis, although their relevance increases over time. Of course, researchers mentioned them on a particular occasion in passing, including the authors of this article, but special scientific articles on the subject have not been written yet. Based on the fact that the topic has not yet been subjected to a separate study and taking into account its relevance, we have chosen it as an object of the study. The material under the study is presented by two collections of newspaper articles entitled "Lessons of self" (1989 and 1991)^{1,2}. These two collections (a total circulation of 45000, which is a huge one in Tajikistan), which were published also in the period of restructuring include fifty-eight articles published in various newspapers and magazines in Tajikistan at that time.

The relevance of the chosen topic is not only that it is not subjected to a certain study, but also in the fact that in today's realities of Tajik society their role is increasing, as in contemporary Tajikistan press the attention is given to highlighting the problems of national identity formation. It should be noted that contemporary authors writing about the problems of the formation of the Tajik national identity constantly appeal to the publications of restructuring period which shows that they still have not lost their importance.

Allowing for the fact that so far the topic was not studied separately, the main purpose of this article is to analyze the peculiarities of materials of Tajik restructuring periodical press coverage on this issue. In accordance with the purpose, the article solved the following tasks: a) the value of the materials of the periodical press of the restructuring period in the history of the Tajik journalism; b) their

place and role in the coverage and process of forming a new Tajik national identity.

2. Relevant Background

If in the other USSR republics restructuring processes started in 1986-1987, then in the Tajikistan press these processes began in 1988. The period from January 1987 to June 1989 presents the second phase of restructuring, when the policy of transparency and openness was declared. This policy began with the January (1987) Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU and reached its peak at the XIX June party conference of the CPSU Central Committee (1988), following which, along with the other five resolutions, the resolution "On the democratization of the Soviet society and reforming of the political system" was adopted.

Tajik journalism and publicity (terms "journalism" and "publicity" are used synonymously in this article) experienced their heyday exactly from the second phase of restructuring. There were no independent periodicals there, but on the pages of the official press, one after another began to be printed materials in a variety of journalistic genres, especially articles, interviews and letters. Their authors openly, without regard to still existing censorship (in the face of Glavlit (Main Administration for Safeguarding State Secrets in the Press)), wrote about the problems of political, social and cultural nature accumulated over decades.

The republican youth newspaper "Komsomoli Tojikiston" ("Tajikistan Young Communist") led by its editor Ato Khamdam was a vanguard. On January 6, 1988 in the newspaper an article by Mirbobo Mirrahimov, the candidate of philosophical sciences, "How Long the Water Will Flow Under the Ice?" was published, around which a stormy debate began to flare up. It can be argued that since the publication of the article "the ice is broken", and despite the pressure of that time official authority, a period of openness began in the Tajik periodical press.

Not only intellectuals, but also representatives of other sectors of society in the period of glasnost found the opportunity to express and discuss all sorts of taboos preserved by the Soviet system. Among them, in our opinion, was the topic of a special revival of national cultural, ethnic and historical and national political identity. This process, first of all, was reflected in journalism through all kinds of media, especially newspapers.

Thus, an open debate on previously forbidden or semi-forbidden topics promoted the unprecedented development and the impact of the Tajik journalism on the public consciousness. As it happened many times in the history of the Tajik people (for example Jadid (renovationist) period during the early twentieth century or the period of World War II) in such periods, the entire literature, and the spiritual life in general acquires a sort of journalistic character, since it is through this kind of creativity that one can fully express that emotional lift which always exists in the transition historical stages.

Through journalistic works or literary works with a strong journalistic focus Tajik intellectuals began to discuss and analyze a variety of topics relating to the national revival of the Tajik nation. One of the characteristics of these materials was that the authors did not only criticize the status quo, but also gave recommendations as to the way out, reforms in various fields.

Subjects of journalistic works of restructuring period can be grouped in three parts:

- general problems of national identity;
- language problems;
- problems in the history of the Tajiks in the twentieth century and the debate about the cultural and historical heritage.

The real discussion on these issues began from the above-mentioned article by Mirrakhimov "How Long the Water Will Flow Under the Ice?" ³. This paper consists of two parts: 1. Around the debate; 2. Thoughts. The first part of the article is a kind of the problem statement, in which the author speaks about the superficial understanding of atheism and international education, and the need to eliminate stereotyping. He notes that "the conciliatory attitude of the national nihilism, which manifests itself in the denial and humiliation of its own nation, language, culture, traditions and history, would have negative consequences" ³. In the second part, which is called "Thoughts" the author presents his thoughts on urgent problems of national policies in relation to the Tajiks. He covers a wide range of issues:

 a) Denies the stigma of "nationalists" in relation to young and famous Tajik poets Mumin Kanoat, Loic, Bozor Sobir and Gulrukhsor who yet praised native land, language and culture in their works in the stagnant period;

- b) Speaks of the equality of all nations, bearing in mind the plight of ethnic Tajiks in Uzbekistan;
- Presents an impartial analysis of the works on the Tajik history and cultural heritage by Uzbek scientists and writers;
- d) Honours such personalities as S. Ayni, A. Lakhuti A. Mukhiddinov, Ch. Imomov, Sh. Shotemur, Nissor Muhammad in the Tajik Republic foundation in 1924–1929;
- e) Raises issues of equality of languages and the study of Persian-Tajik alphabet, etc.

On January 31, 1989 the main official newspaper of Tajikistan of that time "Tojikiston Soveti" ("The Soviet Tajikistan") published an article of the founder of Tajik literature of the twentieth century Sadriddin Ayni (1878-1954) entitled "The meaning of the word "Tajik" 4. This article was written by Ayni in December 1942, during the Second World War and even at that time it was translated into Russian by the famous Russian ethnographer N.N. Yershov. But the article neither in the original, nor in Russian translation was published, neither in the war time, nor in subsequent years, and it was published only during restructuring. The fact that during the Second World War S. Ayni turned to this kind of topic was natural, as in the period of 1941-1945 the Soviet national policy underwent some changes. The essence of this policy was a partial shift away from the values of communist ideology and appeal to national values and patriotism, as the harsh wartime required.

During the restructuring period, it also became in demand and its publication caused a wide response among the mass audience, as it had a great influence on the formation of their national identity. In this article, the broad masses of readers learned about the origin and meaning of their ethnonym.

Results and Discussion

Problems of the language development take a central place in all journalistic materials of the restructuring period. It should be noted that it is the language issue that was at the forefront of other issues, and it can be said that all the authors attributed to the rise of the national-cultural and national-historical consciousness, first of all, with the revival and the status of the national language. For this reason, the language issue appears almost in all media materials, but at the same time there were a huge number

of analytical articles and interviews specifically dedicated to the language issue. These include, in particular, articles by Mukhammadjon Shukurov "National language requires special attention", Loik Sherali "Passport of the nation", Fotekhkh Abdullo "It is necessary to respect the native language", Uktam Kholiknazar "My language is my world", T. Vakhkhobov "Restructuring and the Tajik language status", Abdumannon Nasriddinov "Connection between a language and artistic thinking", Tokhir Abdudjabbor "Living environment and a language", M. Vsevolodov "Our languages are equal" and many others.

The main leitmotif of the articles on the language issue, is to confer the Tajik language the status of a state language. It should be noted that this process during the restructuring period went on in all Union republics of the former USSR. It is the linguistic revival that was recognized as the base and the foundation of all other aspects of national revival.

The famous Tajik poet Loik Sherali called his article on the problems of the Tajik language as "Passport of the nation", thus saying that, first of all, the nation is recognized through the language. According to the poet, "it is necessary to create a favorable environment for the Tajik language using in the state apparatus" and "the Tajik language should rule in the Government", "to announce the Tajik language as the state language and to make the necessary changes to the Constitution" ⁵, only then we can talk about its comprehensive development. At the same time, neither Loik Sherali nor any other authors ever questioned the equality of other languages.

In addition to the language issues the authors discussed the problems of the alphabet in certain articles, such as works by Sharif Shukurov "Alphabet of the Tajiks", Adash Istad, M. Saydar "Alphabet of ancestors is the light of our eyes", Safar Abdullo "Connection between a language and the writing" and others. The leitmotif of these articles was that the authors considered the problem of a language and the alphabet in continuity with each other. In particular, Safar Abdullo noting "the organic link of the writing with the language", wrote, that with a forced change of the Tajik alphabet in 20-30s of 20th century "our relationship with our great culture of the past was broken to such a degree that rich written heritage did not fully become the real public domain". According to the author, "the development of a language cannot be achieved without a serious reform of the alphabet"6.

As it is known in the 30-40s of the last century the Tajik alphabet was twice substituted: first in 1929 the

Arab-Persian letters by the Latin alphabet, and then in 1940 Latin by Cyrillic letters. The authors of the above mentioned articles, noting the negative substitution of the Tajik alphabet by the Soviet authorities twice within a decade, called for the study and revival of Arab-Persian writing. According to them, the double substitution of the alphabet in a very short time led to the fact that the Tajiks lost contact with classical culture, and thus their language was cut off from their ancestral roots. At the same time, the authors emphasized that the Tajiks for almost half a century got used to the Cyrillic alphabet, and partly adapted it to their language (i.e. from 1940 to 1989. The articles were written in 1989.) And now 75 years have passed already since that time when the Tajiks began to use the Cyrillic alphabet. On this basis, the authors called initially to give attention to the study and mastering of the old alphabet in order to prepare the ground for a gradual transition.

Another no less important topic of the Tajik journalism of the period under the review was a topic on the history of the Tajiks in the twentieth century and the debates about the cultural and historical heritage.

The root cause of these disputes are two factors: a) the unfair national-territorial delimitation in the 20s of the last century, as the result of which the ancient Tajik cities Samarkand and Bukhara remained outside Tajikistan; b) refusal to the Tajiks in all-Persian cultural heritage until 1940, as well as the appropriation of the Tajik cultural and historical heritage by the Uzbek intellectuals. For decades these topics have been banned for an open and honest scientific and journalistic discussion. Hence the appearance of a large number of articles on the subject, including such as M. Umarzod "The meaning of "Tajik", D. Dovutov, F. Sirodzhov "Friendship should be based on truth", M. Shukurov "One look at the history", "Two cradles of Tajik culture", I. Keldiyev "The sad consequences of unconscientiousness", R. Masov "The clamor of the martyrs: the cry of the pages of history", Abbos Aliyev "Protecting the truth", A. Vishnevskiy "The truth and the justice", A. Mukhiddinov "The population of Bukhara and its environs is the Uzbeks or Tajiks", Sh. Shotemur "Letter to Stalin", etc.

These articles can be divided into two parts. Firstly, the article and the authors, who themselves were already the history. We primarily have in mind articles of representatives of the Tajik cultural and political elite of 20-30s of the 20th century Abbos Aliyev and Abdulkadyr Mukhiddinov published in Tajik-Russian press of those years, and were

no more published until the period of restructuring. In addition, this part of the journalistic materials includes "Letter to Stalin" by Shirinsho Shotemur, which was published only during the restructuring for the first time.

Secondly, these are the articles of authors of restructuring period, which are devoted to the problems of the Bolsheviks' national policy against the Tajiks in the 20-30s of the last century. These articles reflect the views of the authors of the restructuring era on the historical problems of the Tajik identity formation during the Tajik Republic creation and establishment.

Among the journalistic works in the 20s of the 20th century, one of the thorough and scheduled articles is that by Abbos Aliyev, the first Minister of Education of the Tajik Autonomous Republic entitled "The National Question in Bukhara and its environs". The paper consists of six parts: 1. Preamble; 2. A look at the historical documents; 3. The issue of the Tajik language in times of Bukhara emirs; 4. Tajik issue in today's Bukhara; 5. For what reason the people of Bukhara were named Uzbeks; 6. What should be done? Analyzing the whole spectrum of raised issues Aliyev comes to the following conclusions: "Bukhara and Samarkand were one of the cultural centers of the Persian-Tajiks. For a thousand years the Tajik people cultivated the land, and it is the native place of their ancestors" 7. "It is necessary to solve the national question in Bukhara. It is necessary that the native language of the people - the Tajik language - was used in the education system and official institutions" 7.

If the article by Aliyev presents the opinion of the author in the 20s of the 20th century on the situation with the ethnic problem in Bukhara, then the article by Shukurov (M. Shakuri) "Two cradles of Tajik culture" is the view of the author of the second half of the 80s of the last century on the ancient centers of Tajik civilization. In the article, Shukurov puts such fateful questions for the Tajiks as: "What meant the loss of Bukhara and Samarkand? What are the consequences caused by the loss of Samarkand and Bukhara in the socio-political and cultural development of the Tajiks? Was it possible that this loss would remain for the Tajiks without consequences or with minimal impact?" 8. The author answers to the questions raised by him in the following way: "No, no way! For over a thousand years Samarkand and Bukhara, as a centralized force, formed the Tajik culture. The fact that Samarkand and Bukhara remained outside Tajikistan means that the Tajiks lost an active part of the creative forces of the language, literature and culture"8.

From this thematic series the article by Mukhsin Umarzoda "The Meaning of "Tajik" from the point of view of history or of the frenzy of the author of "Know thyself"" should also be noted9, since it was one of the first journalistic works on the national historical consciousness of the Tajiks. Besides that, M. Umarzoda was the representative of Tajik-speaking Uzbek intellectuals, he lived in Tashkent and worked in the Tajik-speaking newspaper "Khakikati Uzbekiston" ("The Truth of Uzbekistan"). His article, published on 15 September 1988, was an immediate reaction on the pages of this newspaper as for the article by Uzbek poet Muhammad Ali "Know thyself" (newspaper "Yosh leninchi" ("Young Leninist"), 30-31.08.1988), in which the Tajik history was deliberately distorted and biased. That is, Muhammad Ali received a quick and sciencebased response namely in Uzbekistan. This meant that in the era of restructuring the national consciousness of ethnic Tajiks in Uzbekistan, especially intellectuals, was in the state of enthusiasm and in an era of restructuring there was the relative freedom of speech in the country (then union republic).

The article by M. Umarzoda reinforced the Tajiks national and historical revival both in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. It was republished in the newspaper "Soviet Tajikistan" (09/25/1988), and thus became a part of the Tajik journalistic thought depository of that stage.

4. Conclusion

It should be noted that the analysis of the entire Tajik journalism of restructuring period presented in the press of that era cannot be performed in one article. In this article, we just tried to trace the main topics of the periodical materials, briefly analyze them and determine their role in the formation of the new Tajik identity. Hence, this topic will remain relevant and it will require a full-scale study in the future.

In this study, summing up what was said previously, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- a) The problem of forming a new national identity for the last thirty years in Tajikistan is in the spotlight of both humanities and the state policy;
- b) Certain periodicals paid a great attention to these issues and are going to do it now through the publication of a huge amount of information on the subject for the purpose of its popularization among the population;

c) The problems of formation of national identity reached its peak during the period of restructuring in Tajikistan. That was a boom in Tajik journalism, which reflected topics forbidden and preserved for years. Periodical press and journalistic idea of restructuring period played a crucial role in shaping the Tajiks national identity to achieve national and political independence, which was made possible in September 1991.

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