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“Communist Piedmont” in the USSR, Polish autonomies, unfulfilled projects of Soviet administrative-territorial entities, 1925–1937

Abstract

The article reconstructs the history of the Polish autonomous regions in the USSR – Marchlewski (1925–1935) and Dzerzhinsky (1932–1937) – as a political project known by the metaphor of "communist Piedmont". The relevance of the study stems from the need for a comprehensive analysis of Soviet Polish autonomous regions, which have long remained on the periphery of historiography. The objectives of the study are to identify the origins of this special political project, its connections to the activities of the Polish Revolutionary Committee and the Polish Bureau of the Central Committee of the RCP(b), analyze the functioning of the Polish autonomous regions in the context of the indigenization policy in the USSR, and establish the causes and mechanisms of their abolition. The study is based on the principles of objectivity and historicism, using historical-comparative, historical-genetic, and source study methods. The article, based on documents from the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), the Central Archive of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (TsA FSB), the Central State Archive of the Supreme Bodies of Power and Government of Ukraine (TsDAVO) and the National Archives of the Republic of Belarus (NARB), describes the evolution of the project from the creation of the Polrevkom in July 1920 to the complete dismantling of the institutional infrastructure of the Polish autonomies by 1937. The main reasons for the failure of the project are identified: the economic subsidization of the districts, the resistance of the Polish peasantry to collectivization, the conflict between the Central Committee of the RCP(b) / VKP(b) and the republican leadership of the CP(b) of Ukraine and the CP(b) of Belarus over the issue of identifying the local Catholic population, as well as the transformation of the status of the autonomies from "model socialist districts" to "hotbeds of espionage" in the perception of the state security agencies by the mid-1930s. A direct institutional continuity has been established between the abolition of the autonomous regions, the "Polish Military Organization" cases, and the subsequent NKVD "Polish Operation" of 1937–1938. The authors conclude that the abolition of "communist Piedmont" was a logical outcome of the original duality of the project, which combined utopian domestic political principles with foreign policy goals. The research findings

can be used in further study of the phenomenon of Soviet indigenization and the repressive policies of the second half of the 1930s.

Keywords

Polish regional autonomies, Marchlewsky Polish region, Dzerzhinsky Polish region, “communist Piedmont”, Polish-Baltic Lander-Secretariat of the ECCI, indigenization processes in the USSR, Soviet domestic and foreign policy, Polish Bureau of the Central Committee of the RCP(b)-VKP(b), “Polish direction”, Polrevkom, “Polish operation” of the NKVD.

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