

"Turkestan autonomy" - legitimate power of Turkestan

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***Abstract** - In this article, by means of examination of Bolsheviks "Turkistanskije Vedomosti" newspaper and "Erikti Oylar Organi" and "Turkistanskiji Vestnik" newspapers which had been published during 1917-1918, the fact that "Turkistan Governorship" established in city of Kokand in November of 1917, within the framework of former tsarist Russia Turkistan general-governorship, was the legal government formed as a requisition of people of Turkistan was proved. An examination of these two newspapers providing information regarding history of "Turkistan Autonomy" but having opposite to each other views makes it possible to obtain valuable data concerning history of autonomy which was inappropriately misrepresented during Soviet period.*

Keywords - Turkestan autonomy, tsarist Russia, Turkic peoples, People's Government of Turkestan

The history of "Turkestan autonomy" is one of the events, that was reflected in the pages of various publications in a certain period of time, but for a long time was not correctly assessed. This public formation was founded in an area populated mostly with Turkic peoples - Turkestan province of Tsarist Russia at the 4th extra Muslim Regional Meeting in November 1917 in Cocan city.

At the end of the Meeting, starting December 1st in Russian media published in Tashkent, there were several articles published on it's results. We see that the solutions adopted at the meeting were the great social and political events of Turkestan, not only for the indigenous Muslim population, but also for its Russian-speaking readers.

The body of free thought (organ of the Party of Turkestan and the Social-Democratic tendencies - KA), the newspaper "Turkestan Bulletin", performed a number of works, including: presentation of the best information about "Turkestan autonomy", acquaintance of the inhabitants of the province with the work of the Meeting, the proof of the legality of its decisions and the deflation of the false accusations. This is evidenced in the newspaper announced bulletins of the Meeting, adopted resolutions, appeals to the people, the full version of the article supporting decisions of the Meeting, the newspaper also actively fought against false accusations of the Bolsheviks against the Meeting.

Organ of the People's Commissars of the Bolshevik newspaper "Turkestan Gazette" published a few articles to disprove the decisions of the Meeting, reducing its value, and proving its illegitimacy.

We take the opposite to each other, but giving ideas on the "Turkestan autonomy" and help to reveal different sides in two papers as the source. Our goal is not to study the history of "Turkestan autonomy" in details, but to determine its level of disclosure as a social phenomenon in these editions, from information embedded in them through the analysis with identification of the necessary facts from the history of Autonomy, and determination of their validity.

For example, "Turkestan Bulletin" in the edition of 1917, September 9 of the general Muslim Meeting published bulletin, held in the city of Cocan. "Extra general Muslim Regional

Meeting", which was on preparation stage since the end of October, was held in Cocan between 26 to 29 October.

On October 26th, the number of checked by mandates and approved in the list of the participants reached 203 persons.

At 12 am, in unofficial environment a member of the organizational bureau and the regional representative of the Union of Muslims, citizen Mustafa Chokaev has declared the Meeting open. Chocaev called for voting to determine the level of the Meeting.

With only one vote against, the majority have resolved to declare it as the Meeting.

Meeting approved a program consisting of 10 points.

In the evening meeting citizen Chokaev, explaining the current political and economic situation in Russia and Turkestan, said: "Through the bloodshed came to Turkestan Soviet government denied any form of joint control, in alliance with the Muslims, so the Muslim population should take their destiny into their own hands" ¹. In the 15th edition of the newspaper, which was published on December 1st, there was an article entitled "The Turkestan autonomy." It was stating that in addition to the indigenous population of Muslims in the Meeting, there were also representatives of municipal government, some democratic institutions, national and ethnic groups.

Later in this article, there are particularly important for the fate of Turkestan excerpts from the decisions made at the Meeting. For example, the resolution adopted on November 26, at the Meeting stated: "4th extraordinary general Muslim Regional Meeting taking as a basis the call for the Russian revolution, declaring the will of the people inhabiting Turkestan to self-government in the unity of the Russian federal democratic republic announces Turkestan territorial autonomy and takes the responsibility for the preservation of rights of the national minority of the population of Turkestan.

Determination of the form Turkestan autonomy Meeting reserves after the short-term meeting" ².

In the resolution adopted on November 27, there were the main principles of relationship of "Turkestan autonomy" with its neighbors adopted.

The decisions of the Meeting (resolution) about the organization of the People's Government of Turkestan on November 28 stated: "From now Turkestan will be referred to as "Turkestan autonomy". Before the convention of the meeting of Turkestan, government's power is transferred to "The Temporary Government of Turkestan" and "People's Government of Turkestan"" ³.

Also in the resolution there was specified the members of the government, and their exact amount by area. It is noteworthy that one third of the allocated positions in the Government by the decision of the Meeting were given to representatives of non-indigenous people.

On November 29, in accordance with all democratic norms, the Meeting adopted a decree on the rights of the people's representatives of Turkestan. "On November 28, 1917 in Cocan considering oath of Muslims "Turkestan autonomy" (in Muhtariyate Turkestan) responsible with their lives for their choice, 4th extraordinary general Muslim Regional Meeting resolved:

- declare the inviolability of members of the Temporary Government of Turkestan, consisting of 54 people and the People's Government of Turkestan consisting of 12 people;

¹ " Turkestan Bulletin", 1917 No.21, 9th of December

² Turkestan autonomy. // Turkestan Bulletin, 1917 No.15, 1st of December

³ Turkestan autonomy. // Turkestan Bulletin, 1917 No.15, 1st of December

- any use of force against one of them would be regarded as an act against all the ten million population of Turkestan;

- the safety and protection of the decisions, the Meeting gives into the hands of the people" - it says ⁴.

Correspondent of the newspaper in its own messages from Cocan reports that the Meeting, in order to form a police of Turkestan and address the financial problems has decided to form the Turkestan National Foundation.

Thus the newspaper, at that time providing information about important events to its readers, became a very important historical material. From the reports it is clear, that there were civilized and responsible democratic announcements about the new government of Turkestan.

Firstly, the "Turkestan autonomy" was pre-announced in preparation of organizational bureau, with participation of legal mandate holders, nominated by people in the Muslim Meeting, in which 98% of the indigenous population of the province took part.

Secondly, the question about the government, in determination of its final form was left for the Constituent Assembly, called for short-time and having all the rights to make decisions on behalf of the people. Thirdly, formed at the Meeting executive and managing organs got the status of "temporary". In addition to daily activities related to the management of autonomy, the primary responsibility was gathering the Constituent Assembly, adopted as the supreme legislative body and organization for elections. Fourthly, the non-indigenous population was guaranteed that there would be full respect of their rights. Fifthly, "Turkestan autonomy" in accordance with the request, containing "to all workers - Muslims of the East and Russia" of the Union of People's Commissars, who took power in the capital of Russia in November 1917, have declared itself in unity with the Russian Federal Democratic Republic.

All of this shows that in formed in Russian Empire and the Turkestan situation the question about power was resolved peacefully and democratically through the transfer people's destiny in their hands. Therefore, we can confidently state that the "Turkestan autonomy" was a legitimate government formed on the territory of former governor-generality.

Another argument was a remarkable full support and consent of the decision of the Meeting by non-indigenous, democratic organizations, religious and public organizations of Turkestan, along with the Muslim population of the region. For example, the newspaper "Turkestan Bulletin" in the above article wrote, "Tashkent. December 1st. At the general Muslim Meeting of Cocan Region... enacted a decree recognizing the autonomous Turkestan as territory of Great Russia.

This decree was released at the same time with the last reference of the Council of People's Commissars... about the appeal of the transfer of cultural and social life of Muslims in their own hands. Making such decisions of the Meeting, we sincerely wish our fellow Muslims to reach fast and without obstacles of the goals such as self-management, the unity and equality of nations" ⁵.

Written on behalf of the editorial board this main article can be considered as the opinion of the democratically-minded, understanding the essence of the situation Russian-speaking reader. They accepted preserving of such a rich land, as Turkestan as a part of Russia through democratic way. Also, their support for maintaining the "Turkestan autonomy" expressed

⁴ Turkestan autonomy. // Turkestan Bulletin, 1917 No.15, 1st of December

⁵ Turkestan autonomy. // Turkestan Bulletin, 1917 No.15, 1st of December

"Pooley-ciron", body of Jewish Social-Democratic Labour Party, the community of Georgians, Tashkent Advocates Association, Teachers Union in Tashkent, etc.

After reading the publications, printed after the announcement of the Turkestan government I have agree with the truth of the expression "newspaper - a mirror of life." On its pages, you can see the understanding of hard achievement of freedom and the right and determination of the direction of the threat by the people of Turkestan, the rulers of thee autonomy and support them people.

Unless the steps taken to demonstrate the readiness of the people to defend their government, an attempt to unite Turkestan people under its banner of the newly formed government, and not allowing the democratic forces to react is not a bright representation?

On December 5 in the newspaper "Turkestan Bulletin", in its 18th publication, there was a printed appeal, adopted on December 1st and signed by the members of the temporary government of Turkestan. There were uncovering causes of "Turkestan autonomy", the objectives, the principles and aims on behalf of the Regional Extraordinary Meeting of Muslims for all citizens of Turkestan to call: "Muslims, Russian, Jews, workers, soldiers and peasants of all the peoples of the region, local and urban governments, political, public and private organizations to unite on the basis of

The Temporary Turkestan government and give a hand in the implementation of its resolutions of the most serious problems. The appeal was: "Turkestan as the owner of its lands freed from the shackles, now it is time for us to carry out our own history" - it states ⁶ [3].

By this statement there were signatures of the members of the Temporary Government of Autonomous Turkestan: Tynyshbaev, Chokaev, Khodjajev, Yurguli-Agaev, Makhmudov, Orazhev, Shagiahmedov, and Herzfeld ⁷.

Increasing growth of the threat of restriction of freedom of Turkestan, doubt about elimination of yet unborn sign of democracy in the region has forced the people of Turkestan to go to the streets and to declare their will. On one of these events held in Tashkent, the old city, where more than 50 thousand people participated on December 8, in its 20th publication the newspaper "Turkestan Bulletin": "Chechens were strongly touched, talking about the end of injustice, lawlessness, and the beginning of a new life in the atmosphere of equity and mutual understanding of the peoples of Turkestan" ⁸ - later on - "the protestants adopted unanimously the decision: "We Muslims... fully recognize the Turkestan autonomy and the join decision of Cocan Meeting... and call upon all Muslims to unite under the banner of the government of Turkestan autonomy, in order to avoid civil war, senseless bloodshed between free related peoples of Turkestan, and to encourage by all peaceful means to assist in achieving the edges of the Autonomy" ⁹.

However, the will to become independent by of Turkestan was not desired by everybody. The Soviet Union, the Bolshevik Party openly declared their position against the unfriendly autonomy through publications. Therefore, the threat to the decisions of the Meeting was not unfounded.

In the center of Turkestan, in Tashkent in early November the power was taken by the Bolsheviks, with the use of power, and they could not accept the existence of another government, no matter how legitimate it was. From the first days relying only on their force that

⁶ Appeal // Turkestan Bulletin, 1917 No.18, 5th of December

⁷ Appeal // Turkestan Bulletin, 1917 No.18, 5th of December

⁸ Turkestan Bulletin, 1917 No.20, 8th of December

⁹ Turkestan Bulletin, 1917 No.20, 8th of December

government in the selected by people body of legal owners Council of People's Commissars, the newspaper "Turkestan Gazette" in the 185th publication, in 1917, December 2nd, published the article "Autonomy of Turkestan" "About the decision of higher forum of Turkestan Muslims". From the article, as a document of great importance for the history of the peoples of Turkestan, we can see the essence of the hypocritical policy of the Bolshevik Party. "Edge publication for the movement against the new government of the indigenous population brings information deliberately distorting the decree of the Council of People's Commissars about granting the rights for self-government of peoples living in Russia.

As a result, it declared that " general Extraordinary Muslim Regional Meeting in Cocan declared "Turkestan autonomy" under the government of the "Temporary Union of Turkestan" and "People's Government of Turkestan".

Supporting all efforts for independence and self-government of indigenous Council of People's Commissars in no way would allow the distortion of the will of population.

Council of People's Commissars was not accepting a decree on self-government of peoples to torture proletarian Muslim population"- it said ¹⁰.

As an example of open hypocrisy this source explicitly states to the temporary Turkestan leaders that "...helping and enforcing the natives to self-government and supporting steps to their independence... Council of People's Commissars will never allow the give the power in your hands". Such a bad way of concealing of their true intentions, the Bolsheviks repeated for the next day too. In an article published in the 186th publication of the above mentioned newspaper, there was an attempt of slander the Meeting, stripping its value and attempting to prove it illegal. They were saying: "It is clear is that the native working people did not participate in the selection of delegates to the Meeting, according to this, Meeting in no way can express the democratic will of the native population of Turkestan.

Muslims can form the autonomy out of councils of workers and soldiers, deputies... Therefore, for the fight for the right of self-government of the oppressed people have to work together with the fighting, revolutionary democracy - workers, soldiers and peasants, deputies"¹¹.
[6]

The publications of the Turkestan it can be seen that those two impregnated arrogant articles of Bolsheviks, and, in the words of M. Chokaev the Soviet government intention "...not proletarian" and never heard of "proletariat" Turkestan to protect "proletarian nation" of Muslims from Turkestan have started dissatisfaction among the residents of the region. For example, the newspapers wrote that at gatherings, demonstrations, local meetings the Turkestan population was supporting the solutions of Cocan Meeting and expressed their perplexity against the Bolsheviks. As the proof we can look at 19th publication in "Turkestan Bulletin", published on December 6, where an employee of the newspaper Y. Poslavsky in one article provides a deep analysis of two materials of the Bolsheviks. The author points at the lack of relevant information on the Meeting, its main appeal of the Commission, arguing that the Meeting was one of the possible ways to identify the actual will of Turkestan, and that it was a concrete and necessary step to call the Constituent Assembly; the author accurately defines the purpose of the Bolshevik publications with their ultimate goal. So, we are providing an excerpt from the original article of Y. Poslavsky, the reality of which was proven, and which expresses the ideas of Turkestan Democrats: "...hypocritical in essence and deeply reactionary and imperialist references to "

¹⁰ About the Turkestan Autonomy // Turkestan Gazette, 1917 No.185, 2nd of December

¹¹ Who are Muslims with? // Turkestan Gazette, 1917 No.186, 3rd of December

imposture" of the Meeting, the "falsification" of the population's will, the official body of the so-called Council of People (Russian) commissioners of Turkistan, too poorly conceals selfish desire of insignificant armed invaders to use their force, and having nothing in common with the objectives of the entire Russian revolutionary democracy. If you want to know the Muslim people of Turkestan, call, as soon as possible for Turkestan constituent Assembly with giving Muslims number of voting places and corresponding to their actual number, and you will know the truth and the actual will of Turkestan.

One thing can be said now: there will be no place for the rapists and murderers" ¹². In the telegrams, published on December 9, at the same newspaper it was stated: "Second Regional Meeting of Fergana... worker Muslims, warning of the actions leading to a split in the population of such newspapers decides: we will fight with such provocative articles on a similar topics by Bolsheviks newspapers with the similar type and using all the methods, labor Muslims recognize the Temporary government of the Autonomous Turkestan.

The Chairman of the Regional Council of the Muslim organizations Mirza Azmedov".

Unfortunately, the Bolshevik Party could not be stopped by resistance of the people and confrontation of democratic forces. After a while, on February 11, 1918 by force of cannon guns the Temporary Government of Turkestan was dissolved, and its capital city Cocan was destroyed. So, just like in the Russian Empire, the civil war in Turkestan was suppressed. As a result, in the territory of Turkestan for a long time, there was Bolshevik's dictatorship formed. Thus, it is stated that the legal rights of the peoples of Turkestan, their dreams, goals have been crushed.

So, if the analysis of historical facts, taken from the pages of publications of that time allows to judge declaration of "Turkestan Autonomy" as a natural result of the objectives of political and economic development of the region, then, in contrast, the establishment of the Bolsheviks in Turkestan with their boundless domination defines this fact as not corresponding to the nature of Turkestan, enforcement accompanied no democratic norms followed. Though it was late, but it was proven by life. The history has once again showed inconsistency of power that does not rely on the population.

¹² Y. Poslavsky. The will of Turkestan for self-definition. // Turkestan Bulletin, 1917 No.19, 6th of December