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## The Soviet Federation\*

### I

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is a multinational state. According to the 1970 census, there are more than 100 nations and nationalities in the Soviet Union, with 22 of them numbering over 1 million people, 27 between 100 thousand and 1 million, and 28 between 10 and 100 thousand.

In 1970, the Russian population accounted for 53.4 per cent of the entire population, Ukrainian 16.9 per cent, Uzbek 3.8 per cent, Byelorussian 3.7 per cent, Tatar 2.4 per cent, Kazakh 2.2 per cent, Azerbaijan 1.8, Armenian 1.5 per cent, Georgian 1.3 per cent, Lithuanian 1.1 per cent, Moldavian 1.1, Jewish 0.9, and Tajik 0.9 per cent.

The Soviet Union has gained a wealth of experience in establishing the state federative system both for the country as a whole and for every individual republic. The Soviet socialist federation, which has become a state form of solving the national problem, is a new type of a federative system.

Federation in the Soviet Union includes two forms, that is, the treaty federation, or the association of equal Union republics forming an integral federal state, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and the federation based on the national and territorial autonomy uniting nationalities with a different state and legal status (such as, autonomous Soviet socialist republics, autonomous regions, and national districts).

According to the 1977 Constitution of the Soviet Union, "The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is an integral, federal, multinational state formed on the principle of socialist federalism as a result of the free self-determination of nations and the voluntary association of equal Soviet Socialist Republics" (Article 70).

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\* Section on the Transcaucasian Federation prepared together with T. P. A g a y a n.

The Soviet Union unites 15 Union Republics listed in Article 71 of the Constitution<sup>1</sup>. Articles 73-75 determine the jurisdiction of the USSR, which covers: the admission of new republics to the USSR, determination and safeguarding of the state boundaries, representation in international relations. Through supreme bodies of state power and government, the Soviet Union pursues a common socio-economic policy, determines the key trends of progress in science and technology and general steps aimed at rational utilisation and protection of natural resources, works out and approves state plans for the country's social and economic development, plans and approves the single State Budget of the Soviet Union, and management of a single monetary and credit system. The laws of the USSR have the same force in all the Union republics.

A Union republic is a sovereign Soviet socialist state that has united with other Soviet republics in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Each Union republic has the right freely to secede from the USSR.

A Union republic has its own Constitution and supreme bodies of power. The jurisdiction of Union republics is determined in Articles 76-80 of the Constitution of the Soviet Union.

A Union republic exercises independent authority in its territory, ensures comprehensive economic and social development in its territory, determines its division into territories, regions, areas and districts, and decides other matters relating to its administrative and territorial structure.

A Union republic has the right to enter into relations with other states, conclude treaties with them, exchange diplomatic and consular representatives, and take part in the activities of international organisations.

The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic is an example of a federation based on the national and territorial autonomy. The RSFSR unites the national majority of the Federation, the Russian people, with other nations which live in its territory. According to the 1978 Constitution of the Russian Federation, the RSFSR includes 16 autonomous Soviet socialist republics, 5 autonomous national regions and 11 autonomous national areas.

An autonomous republic has its own Constitution and its own highest bodies of state authority (the Supreme Soviet and the Council of Ministers). The jurisdiction of an autonomous republic is determined by the Articles 82-84 of the Constitution of the USSR and Articles 78-81 of the Constitution of the RSFSR.

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<sup>1</sup> The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, the Ukrainian, Byelorussian, Uzbek, Kazakh, Georgian, Azerbaijan, Lithuanian, Moldavian, Latvian, Kirghiz, Tajik, Armenian, Turkmen and Estonian Soviet Socialist Republics.

The jurisdiction of autonomous regions and autonomous areas is determined by the Articles 86 - 88 of the Constitution of the Soviet Union and Articles 82 - 84 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation.

The Uzbek, Georgian and Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republics also include autonomous republics. Apart from the Russian Federation, autonomous regions are also to be found in the Georgian, Azerbaijan and Tajik SSR.

All the Union and autonomous republics, autonomous regions and autonomous areas have secured representation in the highest bodies of state authority of the Soviet Union. The highest body of state authority of the USSR, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, consists of two chambers. Both chambers, the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities, have equal rights and equal numbers of deputies.

The Soviet of the Union is elected by constituencies (750 constituencies) with equal population, while the Soviet of Nationalities is elected to ensure equal representation of every individual republic, autonomous region and area.

The Soviet of Nationalities is elected on the following basis: 32 deputies from each Union republic, 11 deputies from each autonomous republic, five deputies from each autonomous region, and one deputy from each autonomous area (750 deputies in all). In this way, equal representation is ensured for all the national republics, regions and areas, irrespective of the size of their population. For instance, the Union republic of the Russian Federation with about 97 million electors during the 1979 elections and the Union republic of Estonia with slightly over one million electors have the same number of deputies (32) in the Soviet of Nationalities. The autonomous republic of Bashkiria with its almost 2.5 million electors and the autonomous republic of Nakhichevan with 115 thousand electors both have 11 deputies in the Soviet of Nationalities. The Khakass Autonomous Region (with 323 thousand electors) and the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (56 thousand electors) have five deputies each in the Soviet of Nationalities.

Such is an outline of the federal structure of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

## II

It was a long way, however, before such a federative system was established, the system heeding the interests of all the nations in the Soviet Union. Old Russia was a unitary state in which all non-Russian nationalities constituting more than 50 per cent of the population were deprived of any autonomy (not considering the limited autonomy of Finland) and were nationally oppressed. In its "Declaration of Rights of the Peoples of Russia" (November 1917), the Great October Socialist Revolution proclaimed:

- "1) Equality and sovereignty of the peoples of Russia.
- 2) The right of the peoples of Russia to free self-determination up to an including secession and the formation of independent states.
- 3) The abolition of all national and national-religious privileges and limitations,
- 4) The free development of national minorities and ethnic groups."

The national and state development had a great role to play in implementing this programme.

National republics, which now had the right to free selfdetermination emerged in the territory of the former Russian Empire. Between 1917 - 1921, the Ukrainian, Byelorussian, Azerbaijan, Armenian and Georgian Soviet Socialist Republics were formed along with the Russian Soviet Federative Republic. As a result of national revolutions of 1920 in the Central Asia, the Bukhara and Khorezm Peoples' Soviet Republics were formed in place of feudal despotic Bukhara emirat and Khiva khanate. At the same time, national autonomies were emerging in the Russian Soviet Federative Republic, such as Bashkiria, Tataria, Turkestan, Daghestan, etc.

During the Civil war, the independent Soviet republics established a system of treaty relations on the basis of federative contacts. The allied treaties envisaged that some bodies of the economic and administrative management and the armed forces were united. All the Soviet republics were closely connected due to their common interests, goals and tasks and the common nature of their state systems.

Their relations were continued during 1921 - 1922 and promoted by their diplomatic union. Although closely linked between themselves, the Soviet republics were not yet a *single* state.

The period between 1921 and 1922 saw a large-scale, mass campaign of the country's nations for the establishment of a *single* Soviet state. In view of this, there arose the question about the form of the republics' union. Lenin suggested a new type of state formation, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which could unite the independent Soviet republics on the basis of full equality and voluntariness.

Lenin's idea was supported in all the Soviet republics in which, in the autumn of 1922, congresses of Soviets were convened (congresses of Soviets elected by the entire working people, were at the time the highest bodies of state authority).

The republican congresses of Soviets of the Ukraine, Byelorussia and the Transcaucasian Federation (the Transcaucasian Federation, ZSFSR, is to be dealt with in the next chapter) and the Russian Federation (RSFSR) adopted resolutions on the formation of the USSR, which consolidated the desire of their peoples for the creation of a single Union state.

Delegates were sent from all the republics to attend the First All-

-Union Congress of Soviets which took place in Moscow in December 30, 1922. The Congress adopted The Declaration and The Treaty on the Formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The USSR included four Soviet socialist republics, the RSFSR, the ZSFSR, the Ukraine and Byelorussia. In 1924, the Second Congress of Soviets of the Soviet Union adopted the Constitution of the USSR. Later, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was expanded due to the development of individual autonomous republics and formation of new Union republics.

By 1922, there were the following republics to be found in Central Asia: the Turkestan Autonomous Republic belonging to the Russian Federation, and the Bukhara and Khorezm People's Republics. All of them were multinational state formations. Therefore, in conformity with the desire of nations in Central Asia, and as a result of national and state demarcation, sovereign national states were formed: the Uzbek, Turkmen, Tajik and Kirghiz Republics.

In 1925, the Congresses of Soviets of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan proclaimed the formation of the Uzbek and Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republics and applied with the request about their entry to the USSR. The Third All-Union Congress of Soviets (May 1925) admitted to the USSR the Uzbek and Turkmen Soviet Republics (Tajikistan and Kirghizia were autonomous republics at the time. Tajikistan became a Union republic and joined the USSR in 1929).

In conformity with the Constitution of the USSR, the Kirghiz and Kazakh Autonomous Republics were transformed into Union Republics and admitted to the Soviet Union in 1936.

As a result of the victorious national revolutions of July 1940, Soviet power was restored in Latvia, Litva and Estonia, and the republics joined the USSR on the basis of free expression of the people's will.

There existed the Moldavian autonomous republic in the Ukraine's territory populated with Moldavians in 1924 - 1940. The major part of the Moldavian territory, Bessarabia, was unlawfully occupied by Rumania since the time of foreign intervention (the occupation was never recognized by the Soviet government). In June 1940 Bessarabia was returned to the Soviet Union. The Moldavian ASSR, reunited with the Moldavian districts in Bessarabia and transformed into a Union republic in August 1940, joined the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

### III

The Transcaucasian Federation gained specific historical experience of federative relations.

As it has already been mentioned, there emerged three Soviet socialist republics in Transcaucasus in 1920 - 1921, that is, Azerbaijan, Armenian and Georgian.

The internal and external political situation of those republics, which had suffered greatly from foreign intervention in the previous years, made them unite their efforts. From the past, Transcaucasus inherited animosity and distrust between nations and religious strife. In order to overcome the survivals of the past as soon as possible, to restore and develop their economies successfully, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia united into a single Transcaucasian Socialist Republic (ZSFSR) in 1922. Each of the republics preserved its independence.

This decision was adopted by the First Transcaucasian Congress of Soviets in Baku on December 13, 1922. The Constitution of the ZSFSR was adopted and the federative bodies of authority were formed (with its own bodies of state authority preserved for each of the republics).

Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia joined the USSR as the members of the Transcaucasian Federation, and not directly.

The ZSFSR ceased to exist in 1936, after it had helped restore and develop the national economy, eliminate the vestiges of strife and distrust between nations. Thus the ZSFSR was abolished, since it had accomplished its tasks, while Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia joined the USSR directly as Union republics, in conformity with the 1936 Constitution of the Soviet Union.

#### IV

The historical experience of the creation and development of the Soviet federative state is of great significance. It is for the first time that a multinational state was formed on the basis of a voluntary agreement of sovereign nations. This proves the varied and flexible nature of the forms of statehood of Soviet nations, the forms of their federative contacts, and the forms of ensuring the rights of national minorities. That the Soviet Federation was formed provided favourable conditions for the all-round development of the country's nations, their mutual aid and support on the basis of socialist internationalism.

By the time of the October Revolution, Russia's peoples were at different levels of their socio-economic development. Many nations of the country's East, South and North that were hundreds of years behind the more advanced peoples, were at a feudal or even patriarchal and tribal stage.

The country as a whole was facing the most urgent problem of overcoming backwardness, which was even more burning and difficult for those particular nations.

However complicated, this task was successfully accomplished. In a short space of time, the Soviet Union has scored great successes in the social, economic and cultural fields.

A socialist society has been built in the country; industrial production has grown considerably; the cultural revolution has done away with illiteracy (which was typical of many nations) and has yielded a great number of national intellectuals. In this, brotherly mutual assistance of peoples united in a single Union state had a great role to play.

Taken separately, a single nation would fail to overcome its backwardness, develop an up-to-date economy, and advance its culture.

Thanks to the aid of other nations, all this has been achieved, and in the shortest possible historical period at that. The peoples that were found at the lowest stages of their economic development received a great deal of material aid. They were given considerable capital investments from the Union budget for the rapid development of their industry, agriculture and culture. This is why the national economies of the formerly backward republics and regions developed at a more rapid rate than throughout the country.

Such assistance was of special importance to the nations which were formerly at the feudal or patriarchal and tribal stages. Now they were able to pass to socialism bypassing capitalism, which is an entirely new phenomenon in the history of humanity. In their turn, all nations of the Soviet Union made their contribution to consolidating the economic potential of the country as a whole on the basis of socialist cooperation and specialisation of the national economy.

Cooperation of the peoples had a great role to play at all the historical stages of the Soviet Union and in its economic, political and cultural life.

All the peoples joined their efforts in struggling to eliminate the survivals of the exploiter elements, to transform agriculture on a socialist basis, to develop powerful industry, and to overcome cultural backwardness through rational utilisation of the resources available.

That socialism has been built; the exploiter elements and exploitation of man by man eliminated; the industrial and agricultural workers transformed into classes of a socialist society; and national intelligentsia formed — all these have helped achieve social homogeneity of the republics, promote the ideological and political unity of the Soviet society as a community of socialist nations.

The rapid development of productive forces in the Union and autonomous republics and national regions makes it possible for them to contribute even more to the common cause. Economic contacts between republics become even closer due to socialist cooperation and specialisation of the national economy. The national economy of the Soviet Union, which is a single, interconnected complex, serves as a solid, objective basis for the further drawing closer together of nations.

The economies of the republics develop on a planned basis as parts

of the USSR economic system. Progress in the scientific and technological revolution and growing intensification of production help the continued development of economic cooperation.

A new historical community of people, the Soviet people, has been formed in the Soviet Union. While preserving the national traditions and national state formation, such a community has a common economic basis and a single social basis.

All Soviet nations, homogeneous in their social structure, consist of friendly classes and social groups. The Soviet people has a single state basis, since all the Soviet people are citizens of a single state. The Soviet peoples are united by the common nature of the political system, the Soviet system. The country's nations develop and consolidate their internationalist features, advance general Soviet traditions and common features of ideological character.

The Soviet nations are drawing closer together in the process of their development, their national cultures are enriched mutually on the basis of their new achievements, and the upbringing in the spirit of internationalism is accompanied by respect for national dignity — such is the dialectics of developing national relations in the Soviet Union<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The paper is based on the 1977 Constitution of the USSR, the constitutions of the Union and autonomous republics, the 1970 census data, the 1979 general election data and on the resolutions of the Congresses of Soviets and of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Cf. numerous recent works the following ones are of the particular importance: *Istorija nacional'nogosudarstvennogo stroitel'stva v SSSR*, vol. 1-2, Moskva 1979; *Sovetskij narod — novaja istoričeskaja obščnost' ljudej. Stanovlenie i razvitie*, Moskva 1975; *SSSR — velikoe sodružestvo narodov — brat'ev*, Moskva 1972 — all being the collective publications.