

## FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED THE FORMATION OF THE BSSR

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*Factors of the formation of the BSSR are examined. The attention is paid to approaches to nationalism in the Marxist ideology, as well as – to the views of V.Lenin and J.Stalin on the national question. Lack of research on the issue is pointed out.*

**Introduction.** In December 2016 twenty five years have passed since the disintegration of the Soviet Union. As the Belarusian researcher Vladimir Ivanovich Malinovski points out, the collapse of the USSR regardless of its perception led to the emergence of independent states on the Post-Soviet territory what in its turn rendered quite productive. The emergence of the Republic of Belarus on the western border of the former Soviet Union is a vital element of this development [5, c. 3]. The modern Belarus is the immediate successor to the processes of development that were set in motion in the BSSR. So, the period of the emergence of the Soviet Belarus is of crucial importance for understanding the development of the Belarusian statehood.

**Task formulation.** The task of the paper is to establish and examine the factors that influenced the formation of the BSSR.

**Methods of research.** During the research the following methods were used: the method of historical analysis, that of comparative analysis and systems thinking. Works of Belarusian and foreign authors concerning the formation of the BSSR, the national question and the nationality policy in the USSR were used as a material for the research.

**Results, their discussion and perspectives.** December of 1918 could be considered as the decisive month for the formation of the BSSR. By then two opposite opinions on the Belorussian issue were shaped: 1. Belarus has the right to self-determination; 2. Belarus doesn't have the right to self-determination [2, c. 61–62].

As to opponents of self-determination of Belarus, first of all, the politically influential Regional Executive Committee of the Western Front (Obliscomzap), headed by Alexander Fyodorovich Myasnikov (1886–1925), should be mentioned. A.Myasnikov and his allies from the heads of the Executive Committee of the Bolshevik Party of the North-Western Territory and from the Soviet of People's Commissars of the Western Region and Western Front considered Belarus as an unalienable part of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (the RSFSR) [4, c. 309].

The right of Belarus to self-determination was upheld by the Belarusian National Council of People's Commissars (Belnatscom) that had been created in Moscow from among Belarusian refugees (Belnatscom was headed by Alexander Grigoryevich Chervyakov (1892–1937) and Dmitry Fyodorovich Zhylunovich (1887–1937) [5, c. 154].

Taking into account the existence of the two opposite views on the Belarusian question we consider as important to establish the opinion about this issue of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–1924), who in December 1918 held the position of the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR (Sovnarcom), and the opinion of Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin (1878–1953) who held the office of the People's Commissar for Nationalities Affairs of the RSFSR. For understandable reasons after the October revolution all principal political decisions concerning the Soviet Russia were taken by the leaders of the Bolshevik Party. With regard to the Belarusian issue it seems to be important to establish a constellation of factors that influenced the final decision taken on Belarus in the Kremlin.

To our mind the Marxist approaches to nationalism, espoused by V.Lenin and J.Stalin, exerted a significant influence on the positive resolution of the Belarusian question. That is why it is reasonable to shortly present approaches to the national question in the Marxist ideology here.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels considered nationalism as a by-product of capitalism. In their opinion, nationalism was an ideology contrived by capitalists in order to delusively unite interests of bourgeoisie with those of proletariat [9, c. 8].

Discussions about the national question intensified amidst Marxists in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a result two main points of view took shape: the approach of Austromarxism and that of Rosa Luxemburg [9, c. 9].

A revolutionary of Polish origin Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919) fervently opposed the right of nations to self-determination. To her mind, the so called «national interests» could serve only imperialists, the sworn enemy of proletariat, in order to delude toiling masses. Also a national autonomy was regarded by R.Luxemburg as unnecessary and possible only in exceptional cases [9, c. 15].

On the contrary Austromarxism is known for its attempt to conciliate nationality and nationalism with socialism. In the works of a prominent Austrian Marxist Otto Bauer (1881–1938) the approach of Austromarxism to the national question finds its full expression. O. Bauer insisted that the development of education and communication under capitalism attached workers and peasants to their national culture and under socialism this development will be completed. Socialism won't put a finish to national distinctions, under socialism the national principle will be put into practice completely. Different nations could be united into a federal state, thus they could govern their territories in accordance with their own cultural and linguistic distinctions [8, c. 107–109].

V. Lenin and J. Stalin at the majority of points shared the approach of Austromarxism to the national question. In particular, V. Lenin didn't share the view of R. Luxemburg and the founders of Marxism to nationality and nationalism as a by-product of the capitalist system. He didn't see in nations a fiction but distinct social groups, which could be endowed with common rights regardless their social stratification. But V. Lenin pointed out, that the nationalism of an oppressive nation should be divided from the nationalism of an oppressed national minority. The first kind of nationalism is worth being condemned, i.e. it encourages workers and peasants of an oppressive nation to believe in their superiority, and this in its turn hampers their solidarity with toiling masses of an oppressed nation. In this regard V. Lenin advocated the right of oppressed national minorities to self-determination and a relevant provision was included into the program of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party at its second congress in 1903. However with regard to the situation in the Russian Empire he didn't believe that in case of a revolution oppressed peoples of Russia would want to use this right taking into account economic benefits of a larger state in which they could be included [9, c. 16; 6, c. 19].

It results from the information presented above that regardless the discussions about the national question amidst Marxists V. Lenin and J. Stalin were generally benevolent to the right of nations to self-determination. The peculiarity of the Belarusian question consists in the fact that Belarusians were for a long time regarded not as a distinct national entity but as a part of the Russian nation.

Among the factors that urged the leaders of the Bolshevik Party in December 1918 to see in Belarusians a distinct national entity, V. Malinovski and the authors of the textbook for history of Belarus for establishments of higher educations headed by the professor Evgeny Konstantinovich Novik point out the following ones:

1. persistent activities of Belnatscom and other organizations of Belarusian refugees in Russia during 1918;
2. the attempt to create the Belarusian National Republic (the BNR, proclaimed in Minsk on the 25th of March 1918) [4, c. 309–310; 5, c. 155].

Belarusian oppositional historians, in particular, Vladimir Alexeevich Orlov are inclined to focus on the role of the BNR in the examined processes. V. Orlov insists, that the very existence of the BNR forced the leaders of the Bolshevik Party, who had proclaimed the right of nations to self-determination, to acknowledge Belarusians as a distinctive national entity and propose their own, Soviet alternative to the BNR [1, c. 203].

But the works of a Polish historian Wiktor Sukiennicki (1901–1983) highlight, that up to the end of the December 1918 among the leaders of Bolsheviks there was no perception of Belarusians as a distinct national entity. W. Sukiennicki insists, that the Belarusian question for a long time didn't appear in statements of the Soviet leadership on an equal footing with other national questions. Up to the end of the December 1918 the Soviet leaders regarded Belarus as «Western regions» and in this connection they practically didn't make any difference between «Western regions» and other regions of Russia [7, c. 10].

The defeat of Germany in the First World War in November 1918 actualized the question about the future of western regions of the former Russian Empire. German troops were leaving territories they had occupied in accordance with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of November 1918 the independence of the Soviet government of Estonia was officially proclaimed, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December – that of the Soviet government of Lithuania, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of December – that of the Soviet government of Latvia. All these governments were immediately recognized by Sovnarcom of the RSFSR. The independence of Ukraine had been recognized by the Soviet leadership already on the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 1917. In association with these events on the 23<sup>th</sup> of December J. Stalin delivered a speech at a meeting of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (VTsIK). The resolution of the VTsIK proclaimed the readiness of the RSFSR to render any possible assistance to the working class and the governments of the Soviet Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia and Ukraine. But either in the speech of Stalin or in the resolution of the VTsIK, that were published in the newspaper «Izvestia» on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December 1918, nothing was said about Belarus [7, c. 11–12].

The opinion in the Kremlin on the status of Belarus changed completely literally overnight. Already on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December 1918 the decision about the proclamation of the Belarusian Republic was taken by the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party of Bolsheviks (TsK RKP(B)). The same day J. Stalin wired the head of Obliscomzap A. Myasnikov about this decision. Up to this day it remains unclear what served as a trigger to urge the TsK RKP(B) to take this decision. J. Stalin himself speaks in the wire about the motives of the TsK RKP(B) in the following way: «The TsK has taken the decision for many reasons about which it is now

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untimely to talk...» The Belarusian historian Emmanuil Grygorievich Ioffe points out that up to this day the text of the above-mentioned document of the TsK RKP(B) hasn't been found. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of December 1918 the liquidation of Obliscomzap was declared. On the 1<sup>th</sup> of January 1919 the BSSR was proclaimed [3, с. 54–55].

**Conclusion.** The presented information reveals certain blank spaces in the research on the issue of the emergence of the BSSR. Historians should take further efforts in order to find documents still unknown to the public. The views of V.Lenin and J.Stalin on the national question require a more thorough investigation. Also the relations between Belnatscom on the one hand and V.Lenin and J.Stalin on the other hand require a more thorough investigation. A further study of the BNR as a factor that influenced the formation of the BSSR should be taken. Besides the factor of the impending war between the Soviet Russia and Poland it should be studied taking into account declarations of the Polish leader Józef Piłsudski about his intentions to create a federative Polish state with autonomy for Ukraine, Lithuania and Belarus. In addition we shouldn't rule out that the activities of researchers may reveal other factors that influenced the formation of the BSSR.

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