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GOVERNING AUTHORITY IN SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA: THE LEGAL STATUS AND INSTITUTIONAL ROLE OF THE TURKESTAN ASSR CONGRESSES OF SOVIETS

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Abstract: This study employs a multifaceted methodological approach to analyze the structural impact of the Russian Empire's 1917 political crisis and subsequent revolutionary transformations on the legal, political, and social systems of the Turkestan region. The research provides a sequential and comparative examination of the genesis of national identity and independent statehood in the region, their manifestation within political discourse, and the institutional establishment of Soviet power.

The central focus of this research is the functional role, legal-normative status, and institutional architecture of the Congresses of Soviets within Turkestan's regional administration. These elements are investigated through historical-legal, historical-comparative, and institutional analysis, drawing extensively on primary sources and archival materials.

The findings offer a scientific framework for a systematic understanding of the legal nature of the Soviet state mechanism formed in the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (TASSR) between 1917 and 1924. Furthermore, this study contributes to a reassessment of the legislative and institutional foundations of the Congresses of Soviets, their jurisdictional scope, and their administrative functions from the perspective of modern state-law theory.

Keywords: revolutionary upheavals, February Revolution, Turkestan, Soviet, Congress, Shorai Islamiya, Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, Constituent Assembly, representative, NKVD, TSK, Turkestan Soviet Socialist Republic (TSSR), section.

Introduction

The Soviet era stands as a singularly complex and antithetical epoch in Uzbekistan's historiography. Defined by multifaceted socio-political metamorphoses, this period synthesized remarkable developmental milestones with profound systemic tragedies, ensuring its enduring prominence in scholarly discourse. The 1917 revolutionary ruptures in Russia served as more than a standard political transition for Turkestan; they acted as a definitive historical pivot, fundamentally reconfiguring the region's geopolitical trajectory, its socio-economic fabric, and the burgeoning national pursuit of sovereign statehood.

Results

After the "February Revolution", elements of a new socio-political system began to form in Turkestan. However, a fierce power struggle and conflict of interests began between the opposing political poles in the ownership of state





power - the Turkestan Committee of the Provisional Government with liberal views, the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies with radical sentiments, and the Muslim Councils that put forward the idea of national independence. Among these political forces, especially the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, with their aggressive radicalism and “revolutionary” slogans, exacerbated the situation in the country and began to rapidly gain political dominance. In particular, the foundation stone for the activity of the Soviets in Turkestan was laid on March 2, 1917. On this day, the first Soviet of Workers' Deputies was established on the initiative of Russian workers of the Central Asian Railway Main Workshops in Tashkent, and this event served as a political start for the formation of the Soviet system in the entire region. On March 3-4, separate Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies were formed in Tashkent. By March 28, these two structures had merged to form a single Tashkent Soviet. At the instigation of this central council, the network of Soviets began to spread rapidly throughout Turkestan: by the end of March, 75 Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies in the cities and workers' settlements of the region had quickly formed a solid political network [1. – P.228]. However, the composition of these Soviets consisted almost entirely of representatives of the European population, which did not at all reflect the needs and interests of the indigenous population of the region. Later, political activity was also observed in rural areas, and Soviets of Peasants' Deputies appeared.

In the first months, the Soviets operated in a scattered and localized manner, but gradually, through the soviets, all local soviets were subordinated to a single ideological and administrative center. That is, these soviets effectively used the soviets directly to legitimize (legally substantiate) their role in the governance of the state and society and their political position. Systematically convening soviets and adopting strategic decisions and other regulatory documents through them legally strengthened the Soviets' claims to power in the country. The local soviets of the Turkestan Soviets convened in Tashkent took a central and leading place. It is worth noting that the indigenous population of Turkestan did not follow the above-mentioned "foreign" soviets. On the contrary, the masses of the people expressed great confidence in the national Muslim councils (soviets) formed under the initiative and leadership of the Jadids and ulema, and united in their ranks. Such national political centers were rapidly established in the Old City of Tashkent, as well as in large regions such as Samarkand, Syrdarya, Fergana and Andijan, becoming the hotbed of the national liberation movement. The first swallow of the national political movement was the “Shuroi Islamiya” (“Islamic Council”), established in Tashkent on March 14, 1917. The organization was initially chaired by the famous ulama Abduvohid Qariyev (1855–1938), and later by the prominent jurist Ubaydullakhodja Asadullakhodjayev (1878–1937) [2. – P.380-381]. The subsequent escalation of political events showed that in the relentless struggle for power, the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies (which by the end of 1917 had also included peasants) began to push all other





political forces out of the field. Using their administrative and military superiority, these Soviets eliminated the political influence of both the liberal Turkestan Committee and the national Muslim councils and removed them from power.

It is worth noting that the first Constitution of the Turkestan Republic, adopted on October 15, 1918, did not allocate a separate paragraph (article) on the powers of the Congresses of the Soviets of Turkestan. Paragraph 24 of this Constitution only established the general rule that “the Congress of the Soviets of Turkestan is the supreme authority of the Turkestan Republic.” Nevertheless, the congresses, based on this status, had the right to discuss and resolve any issue within the competence of the republic. The constitutional reforms carried out during the subsequent activities of the congresses served to clearly define the scope of these powers and fill legal gaps. In particular, according to the new version of the Constitution (consisting of 6 sections, 20 chapters, 110 articles) adopted by the IX Congress of Soviets of the Turkestan Republic on September 24, 1920, the name of the “Turkestan Soviet Republic” was changed to “Turkestan Soviet Socialist Republic (TSSR)”. According to Article 28 of the Constitution, “The Congress of Soviets of Turkestan, within the framework of this Constitution, is the supreme authority of the Turkestan Soviet Socialist Republic.” Article 29 states that “The Congress of Soviets of Turkestan shall consist of representatives of city Soviets and district congresses (at the rate of 1 deputy for every 25,000 inhabitants).” According to Article 30, the Congress of Soviets of Turkestan shall be convened by the Central Executive Committee of Turkestan at least twice a year. According to Chapter XI, Article 46 of the Constitution of the Turkestan ASSR, the scope of powers of these two supreme authorities was determined. It stated that the Congress of Soviets of Turkestan and the TurkNIQ were authorized to resolve all issues of state importance: a) approve the Constitution of the TASSR, make additions and amendments to it; b) carry out legislative activities within the framework specified in the Constitution; c) determine legal norms in accordance with the legal consciousness of the working population of the republic, as well as the basis for the structure of the judiciary and the conduct of judicial proceedings; g) determine and change the territorial boundaries of the regions and national associations included in the Turkestan Socialist Soviet Republic, determine their spheres of authority and resolve disputes between them; d) determine the administrative division of the territory of the Turkestan Socialist Republic; e) independently introduce taxes and duties, in addition to taxes established by the federal authorities; j) the right to pardon and declare general and partial amnesty within the Turkestan Republic; h) Approval of the list of income and expenses of the Republic of Turkestan [15. – P.33-35].

The work of these congresses was carried out in the form of a plenary session, but in order to analyze specific issues in depth, special sections (departments) were also established in specific areas. In particular, 6 sections were established at the 1st regional congress of the Turkestan Soviets: 1) Administrative section; 2) Agricultural (land use) section; 3) Labor (workers' activities) section; 4)





Economic and food section; 5) Military section; 6) Muslim section [16]. At the 9th congress of the Soviets, four sections (administrative, land policy, food and finance) [17] were established.

Conclusion

In summation, the twelve Congresses of Soviets convened between 1917 and 1924 functioned as the pivotal institutional nexus for both the systematic Sovietization of the Turkestan region and the architectural development of its state apparatus. These Congresses were not merely symbolic gatherings; they served as the primary mechanism through which a fragmented network of local soviets was integrated into a centralized administrative hierarchy. By doing so, the Bolshevik leadership utilized these forums to pursue the formal legitimization of a nascent political order, transforming revolutionary slogans into a codified legal framework.

As the supreme legislative authority of the republic, the Congresses attempted to project regulatory power over every facet of public life—from land reform and economic redistribution to the restructuring of traditional social norms. However, the expansion of this institutional authority was marked by a fundamental democratic deficit. The consolidation of Soviet power in Turkestan was characterized less by the genuine consensus or voluntary political participation of the indigenous population and more by the asymmetric application of coercive force.

Ultimately, the institutionalization of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (TASSR) via the Congresses highlights a profound historical paradox: while the Soviet regime introduced a sophisticated legal and administrative structure, its actual stability was anchored in military hegemony and political dominance. This period thus represents a transition from imperial governance to a new form of ideological and administrative centralism, where the "will of the people" was frequently secondary to the strategic imperatives of the revolutionary metropole.





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