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TURKESTANI «NATIVE NEWSPAPERS» DURING WORLD WAR I: SOFT POWER TOOL OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

Abstract. In the early 20th century, the Ottoman Empire was successfully waging an “ideological war” against the Russian Empire. The objective of this war was the loyalty of Russian Muslims. Clearly visible behind the Ottoman Empire was the silhouette of Germany, which acted as a think tank. One of the tools of this rivalry was the private press of Russian Muslims, which often published blatantly pro-Turkish and pro-German materials. In their turn, the Young Turks manipulated the national and religious feelings of Turkestani Muslims, applying all kinds of soft power on a large scale, from religious indoctrination to direct anti-Russian propaganda. Under the circumstances, Russian state-owned media were supposed to help Turkestani Muslims integrate into the imperial space as loyal citizens. Having lost the propaganda war on the Asian periphery of the country in peacetime, during World War I, the Russian Empire faced the need to form its positive image among the Muslim population not only in Turkestan, but also in the neighboring countries, China, Afghanistan, and Iran. It was at least loyalty if not affections Russia was hoping for. This paper discusses how successfully the above task was accomplished, drawing on the example of two official Russian newspapers published in Turkic languages, *Turkestanskaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta* and *Zakaspiyskaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta*.

Keywords: Turkestan; periodical press; Turkestani Native Newspaper; Transcaspian Native Newspaper; Transcaspian region; Semirechensk region; Persia; Afghanistan; Chinese Turkestan.

Introduction

In the second half of the 19th century, Russia's imperial policy came to be dominated by the principle of state unity, which stemmed from the concept of nation state. This implied familiarizing “foreigners” with the Russian statehood and culture, and in the long run, their acculturation.¹ Within this discourse, the state periodical press was called upon to act as an important link in cross-cultural communication. In case of the Muslim population of Turkmenistan, this mission was assigned, starting in 1872, to *Turkestanskaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta* (the Turkestan Native Newspaper) and, after the outbreak of the First World War, also to *Zakaspiyskaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta* (the Transcaspian Native Newspaper). The Muslims of Turkestan experienced a profound lack of information that would be readily available in their native languages on such areas as the Russian Em-

pire itself, other countries and cultures, or the achievements of the world science and technology. The major task of Turkestani “native newspapers” was not only to tell about the world of Russian and European values, which Muslims were unfamiliar with, but also to help Turkestan Muslims gradually integrate into the imperial space and find their place in it.²

² Kotyukova T. V. “Another world” in local eyes according to “The Turkistan Native Gazette” Oriental Archive 2014. № 2 (30). С. 25–30; Kotyukova T. V. Mahmudkhodja Behbudiy About the Turkestan Representation in the State Duma of the Russian Empire (based on publications in the “Native Newspaper of Turkestan”) Electronic Scientific and Educational Journal «History». 2021. Volume. 12. Issue 5 (103). URL: <https://history.jes.su/s207987840015903-2-1/>; Soegova A.M. Turkmen Progressive Jadids: Mukhammedkuli Atabayev and his articles // Electronic Scientific and Educational Journal «History». 2022. T. 13. Issue 10 (120). URL: <https://history.jes.su/s207987840023541-4-1/>; Kotyukova T.V. “Turkestan Native Newspaper” as a Tool for Promoting the Cotton Policy of the Russian Empire in Turkestan Electronic Scientific and Educational Journal «History». 2024. Volume 15. Issue 3 (137). URL: <https://history.jes.su/s207987840031252-6-1/>, and other publications.

¹ Vorobyova E.I. Power and the Muslim Clergy in the Russian Empire Between the Second Half of the 19-th Century and 1917 // Historical Annual. Omsk, 1997. p. 40.

The state-owned native press faced intense competition. In the wake of the 1905-1907 revolution, about ten private periodicals emerged in Turkestan, unfolding active discussion about political reforms in the region. Not unfrequently, materials published by those media were anti-Russian, utterly pro-Turkish, or pro-German.

By the beginning of the First World War, the Russian Empire had failed to create information space for Turkestani Muslims in their native languages. On the other hand, interest in Russian-language newspapers and magazines was rather limited since very few natives, even in the urban areas, could understand Russian.

When at war, the Russian Empire was also forced to deal with another set of issues, particularly combating enemy propaganda and establishing counter-propaganda, not only in Turkestan itself, but also beyond its borders. *Turkestanskaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta* and *Zakaspiyskaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta* played a vital part in that.

“Native newspapers” as a tool for developing cross-cultural communications in the Russian Empire

Vernacular state press in the Muslim regions of Russia appeared in the 1820s. In 1828, Russian-language newspaper *Tiflisskie Vedomosti* (*The Tiflis Gazette*) began to be published in Tiflis. In December 1831, Baron G.V. Rosen came up with a project of a newspaper in the Turkic (Azerbaijani) language, *Tatar Ekhbary* (*The Tatar Gazette*). As a matter of fact, it was the above *Tiflis Gazette*, but translated into the language of the Turkic-speaking Transcaucasian population. By this time, the newspaper had already been regularly publishing additional materials in Georgian and Armenian. The first issue of *Tatar Ekhbary* appeared in January 1832.³ Initially, additional materials were released in Persian, but there was no demand for them. The newspaper was published once a week, and the annual subscription cost eight silver rubles. It found its readers not only in Transcaucasia, but also in the Ottoman Empire and Iran. According to the rules, before a newly published issue of the newspaper reached the

readers, it had to be sent to St. Petersburg for censorship. Technically, this requirement was not easy to meet. Therefore, at the beginning of 1833, the publication was discontinued⁴.

In 1841, the administration of the Caucasian Viceroyalty began publishing a new newspaper, *Zakavkazskii Vestnik* (*the Transcaucasian Bulletin*). The first issue of the newspaper in the Azerbaijani language was published in 1845 under the title *Gafgazyn bu terefyn khebery* (the word-for-word translation being “News from this side of the Caucasus”). It mainly communicated official information, royal decrees, decisions of the Qadi courts, and similar materials. The newspaper existed for four and a half years and was closed by the authorities.⁵

In 1888, publishing of *Dala Ulyatyn Gazeti* (*the Kirghiz Steppe Newspaper*) in Russian and Kazakh began in Omsk. It was *Osoboye Pribavleniye* (a special add-on) to three newspapers: *Akmolinskiye Oblastnyye Vedomosti* (*the Akmola Regional Gazette*); later, to *Semipalatinskiye Oblastnyye Vedomosti* (*the Semipalatinsk Regional Gazette*) and *Semirechenskiye Oblastnyye Vedomosti* (*the Semirechensk Regional Gazette*), the former being released from 1888 to 1905, and the other two from 1894 to 1905. The official part of the newspaper published decrees, resolutions, and other documents of the tsarist administration and local authorities related to the management of the Steppe Governorate-General. The newspaper featured Russian scientists' research on the history, ethnography, and culture of the Kazakhs. Besides, it included samples of Kazakh oral folk art and works by Russian writers translated into Kazakh. Kazakh educators Akylbai Kunanbayev, Shoqan Walikhanov, and Ybyrai Altynsarin contributed to the newspaper.⁶ Despite its small runs, the newspaper was distributed almost throughout the entire territory of modern Kazakhstan.

In 1913, the Governor-General of the Dagestan region Sigizmund Volsky initiated a launch of the *Jaridat Dagestan*. The newspaper was published

³ Not a single copy of the newspaper in Azerbaijani has been preserved.

⁴ Enikolopov I. The first Turkic Newspaper in the Caucasus // Culture and Writing of the Caucasus. Book 3. Baku, 1928. pp. 139-146.

⁵ Vəliyev A. A. oğlu (Aşırılı). Azərbaycan mətbuatı tarixi. Bakı, 2009. S.4-6.

⁶ Kirghiz Steppe Newspaper: man, society, nature. 1888-1902/ Comp. U. Subkhanberdin. Almaty, 1994. pp. 5-17.

from 1913 to 1918 in Arabic, which acted as a lingua franca in the multilingual region with a limited spread of Russian. It was assumed that Jaridat Dagestan would be an Arabic translation of the government media *Dagestanskiye Oblastnyye Novosti* (the *Dagestan Regional Gazette*). During the first year, the newspaper was funded by the Russian government. However, at the end of January 1914, the financing was discontinued since the paper made losses and failed to reach the objectives set at its foundation. From that moment, it was financed by a local philanthropist, who became the editor. The newspaper continued to publish such materials as government orders, information on current events, or announcements. Importantly, Jaridat Dagestan came to serve as a platform for discussions between Jadidists and Kadi-mists of the North Caucasus.⁷

Notably, vernacular newspapers were not common across all Muslim regions of the Russian Empire. Thus, the Muslims of the Volga-Ural region did not have official media in their native languages although efforts were made to establish some. One of the first attempts was issuing the paper *Kazanskiye Izvestiya* in Old Tatar and Russian. Subsequent attempts to publish newspapers *Bahrel Akhbar*, *Yoldiz*, and *Tang Yoldiz* also failed.⁸

The range of scholarly views on the functions of “native newspapers” is admittedly wide: from guides of Russification policy to a tool for establishing cross-cultural connections. Nonetheless, foreign authors tend to regard such official “native newspapers” as tools of the empire’s Russification policy, sometimes acknowledging their “preparatory role” in creating a national press in Azerbaijani, Kazakh, Uzbek, and other languages.⁹ As for the Turkestani “native newspapers”, the first coverage of this issue was a synchronous one, provided by *Turkestan-skaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta* editor-in-chief Nikolay Ostroumov.¹⁰ In the Soviet period, the historiography on the matter was further devel-

oped.¹¹ These days, fruitful research on the history of Turkestani periodicals is carried out by S. Shadmanova.¹²

In my opinion, the “native newspapers” were rather tools for modernization, adaptation and subsequent integration of Muslim peoples into the overall imperial project, bridges for building cross-cultural connections, as well as intermediaries between the Muslim population and local administration, platforms for demonstrating the loyalty of the local elite, and Jadidist tribunes.

***Turkestan-skaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta* as the official mouthpiece of the Russian regional administration**

In 1872, *Turkestan-skaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta* (the *Turkestan Native Newspaper*), the first official newspaper of the regional administration in Turkic languages, was published in Turkestan. In Turkic, it was called *Turkistot viloyatining gazetisi* (i.e. Turkestani regional newspaper). The media operated until February 1917.¹³

At the initial stage, *Turkestan-skaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta* was published as an add-on to the *Turkestan Gazette* four times a month: twice in Old Uzbek and twice in Old Kazakh. On January 30, 1883, the add-on became an independent weekly. Starting from 1906, the newspaper came out twice a week. Between 1885 and 1901, *Turkestan-skaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta* was published in two languages, Old Uzbek and Russian.

The mission of the newspaper was to familiarize Turkestani officials, as well as representatives of the indigenous peoples, with official Russian chronicles, orders of the local administration, verdicts of the Russian courts concerning the Muslim population of the region, and government orders

⁷ Navruzov A.R. “Jaridat Dagestan”, the Arabic-language newspaper of the Caucasian Jadids. Moscow, 2012. pp. 9–14

⁸ Nadir Davlet. Ismail Gasprinsky. Kazan, 2015. p. 12.

⁹ Rasulov A. Isokboev A. Nasretdinova D. Tatars in Turkestan at the Turn of the Epochs. The Early 20-th Century. Kazan, 2021. p. 156.

¹⁰ Ostroumov, N.P. The Turkestan Native Newspaper of Turkestan // The Sarts. Ethnographic materials. Tashkent, 1896. pp. 156–172.

¹¹ Avsharova M.P. The Russian Periodical press in Turkestan (1870–1917). Bibliographic index. Tashkent, 1960; Ilyasov A. “The Transcaspian Native Newspaper” as a Source of Studying the History of Spiritual Culture of the Turkmen People (1914–1917) // Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences of Turkmen SSR. Series of Social Sciences. 1964. No. 4. pp.3–9; Babakhanov M. From the History of the Periodical Press of Turkestan. Dushanbe, 1987; Saryev B. The First Turkmen Newspaper // Propagandist of Turkmenistan. No. 5. 1989. p. 25, and other publications.

¹² Shadmanova S.B. The History of Turkestan Through the Prism of the Periodical Press. (1870–1917). Tashkent, 2023.

¹³ Avsharova M.P. The Russian Periodical press in Turkestan (1870–1917). Bibliographic index. Tashkent, 1960. P. 64.

that applied to Turkestan and some other parts of the empire. Besides, the paper wrote about both state and local holidays, celebrations and memorable dates; the life of the Russian imperial family and foreign ruling dynasties; remarkable events in world and Russian history; current affairs in Russia and foreign countries; regional history and geography; local industrial and agricultural news, changes in market prices and similar things.

At the initial stage, in 1872-1883, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper was the translator of the Office of the Turkestan Governor-General Shokhimardon Ibragimov, then, for several months in 1883, a translator of the Turkestan Governor-General's Office Mukhammadhasan Chanyshiev, from the end of 1883 to February 1917, the orientalist Nikolai Ostroumov. From August to November 1907, Ibniamin bek Khudoyarkhanov, the son of the last ruler of the Kokand Khanate, supposedly served as the newspaper's editor-in-chief.¹⁴

Turkestani Jadids, such as Zokirjon Furqat, Iskhakhan Ibrat, Mahkmudkhodja Behbudiy, and Mirmukhsin Shermukhamedov collaborated with the newspaper as local authors. Along with texts by well-known local enlightenment writers, the newspaper published poems by beginner poets and travel stories by Turkestani merchants who made business trips to other regions of the empire.¹⁵ By 1888, the one-issue run had grown from 500 to 600 copies. The newspaper found its readers outside Turkestan, namely in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kazan, Omsk, Bakhchysarai, as well as in Kashgar (Chinese Turkestan).

However, despite all the efforts of the administration, it was *Tarjiman* (*The Translator*) newspaper, run by Ismail Gasprinsky, and a number of other private Russian Muslim media that Muslim population of the region preferred. The Turkestani authorities tried to find out the reasons for the low popularity of the official newspaper. According to Ostroumov, being the first newspaper in the local language, *Turkestanskaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta* was considered somewhat odd by the

population.¹⁶ Perhaps it was also overloaded with official information. Besides, foreseeable difficulties arose when translating names of positions and ranks, as well as a number of political terms and concepts. To solve this issue, Ostroumov had to use Arabic or Persian borrowings, which made the text obscure for Turkic-speaking readers.¹⁷

On the eve of World War I, the newspaper faced serious financial problems and was on the verge of closure. In 1913-1915, there was voluminous correspondence on this matter between the regional authorities and the Ministry of War of the Russian Empire, to which Turkestan was administratively subordinate. On April 16, 1915, Turkestani Governor-General Fyodor Martson wrote in a letter to the military governor of the Syrdarya region Alexander Galkin, that it was a printed word that was the most effective way of communicating government objectives to Turkestani indigenous population. Martson stated that not only did the private Muslim press fail to convey "the right views", but it was often rather hostile towards the regional administration. In addition, this press was predominantly of Tatar origin, "quite remote from the local life." Nevertheless, Martson believed, it was imperative that the indigenous population was informed about the activities of the Russian government in the region not only through private newspapers, but also through the local media, which was then the only one in the region, *Turkestanskaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta* since the government could rely only on it "in order to effectively communicate the government's views and goals to the broad Muslim population and develop the right attitude to those"¹⁸.

Martson insisted that, in addition to mandatory subscribers, the newspaper, be distributed among literate Muslims, who either read private Tatar-language papers or did not subscribe to any. "It is worth noting" the head of the region said, "that, in addition to covering current affairs in a

¹⁴ The National Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Fond 1396. Series 1. File 23. Item 77, back of the sheet.

¹⁵ Ostroumov N.P. The Trip to Russia of the Samarkand Merchant Mirza-Bukharin Mirza-Abdullin // The Sarts. Ethnographic materials. Tashkent, 1896. pp. 192-205.

¹⁶ Shadmanova S. B. Archival Documents as an important Source for Studying the History of the Periodical press in Turkestan (based on the materials of the Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan) // Herald of an Archivist. 2009. No. 3. p. 257.

¹⁷ The National Archive of the Republic of Tatarstan. Fond. 968. Series 1. File 44. Items 1-4 back of the sheet.

¹⁸ The National Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Fond И-462. Series 1. File 478. Items 291-291 back of the sheet.

way that is accessible to the natives, *Turkestan-skaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta* can also bring subscribers real benefits with the free add-on, the agricultural newspaper *Dekhkan* (Peasant – T.K.), which is run by The Turkestani Society of Agriculture and authored by expert agronomists¹⁹.

In November 1915, it was finally decided to provide financing for *Turkestan-skaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta*. The Minister of War Alexei Polivanov, referring to the decisions of the Military Council of May 13 and July 9, 1915, appealed to the State Duma on November 5, 1915, with the petition *On the Two-Year Allotment of Ten Thousand Rubles by the State Treasury for the Financing of Turkestan-skaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta*²⁰. The rationale behind the petition was that the newspaper was the only vernacular official government media in the region. Initially, it cost the state three rubles 80 kopecks per copy annually; from 1906, due to the increased run, four rubles 50 kopecks. The publication was financed by the printing house of the Office of the Turkestan Governor-General. Every year, the newspaper cost the printing house an average of 7,795 rubles, being released twice a week.

Subscriptions only partially covered the publication. Despite the fact that the newspaper was a government media, according to Article 23 of the Regulations on the Administration of the Turkestan Region of 1886, subscription was not mandatory the “native administration” officials. Consequently, the number of subscribers fell and financing became increasingly challenging.²¹ Given the ministry was planning to release the newspaper three times a week during wartime, which, according to Polivanov, was exactly what the political situation demanded, the costs increased to 11,800 rubles. The subscription could cover between 1,500 and 1,800 rubles at best. Finding additional 10,000 was absolutely urgent. Direct government funding was a possible solution, at least for the beginning. Thus, the Ministry of War was petitioning the State Duma to authorize a two-year annual allotment of 10 thousand rubles from

the state treasury funds for publishing *Turkestan-skaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta*²².

In 1916, in order to strengthen patriotic sentiments among Turkestani Muslims, the State Duma approved an annual direct subsidy of 10 thousand rubles. In its turn, the military department had to ensure a regular publication of the newspaper 3-4 times a week. From that moment on, *Turkestan-skaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta* was distributed not only to the native administration officials, but also to mudarris in maktabas and imams in mosques²³.

Up until the end of 1914, *Turkestan-skaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta* remained the only official mouthpiece of the Russian regional administration in Turkestan; the media was trying to create an attractive image of the Russian Empire among the local population. In December 1914, another “native newspaper” began to be published, the target audience of which was not only Muslims in the Russian Empire, but also those in the neighboring countries.

***Zakaspiyskaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta* as a tool of soft power and counter-propaganda targeting Persian and Afghan audiences**

1910 became a turning point Russian Empire, after which Russian authorities began to take the “awakening” of the East, both foreign and their own, quite seriously. Monitoring the public sentiments of Muslims not only within the empire itself and its protectorates Bukhara and Khiva, but also abroad, in Iran, Afghanistan and Chinese Turkestan, has become a major political objective. As is known, during World War I, Iran, Afghanistan, and China remained neutral. However, throughout the entire military conflict, these states were highly likely to side with Russia’s opponents.

As early as 1909, Russian troops were deployed to the northern provinces of Iran due to the unstable political situation in the country, and at the beginning of World War I, they were staying there. The Persian state was multiethnic. In the north of the country, along with the Persians, there lived Kurdish and Turkmen-Yomud tribes. The latter often had dual or even triple citizenship and regu-

¹⁹ The National Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Fond И-462. Series 1. File 478. Items 291–291 back of the sheet.

²⁰ The Russian State Military Historical Archive. Fond 400. Series 1. File 4297. Items 20–21.

²¹ *ibid.* Item 20.

²² The Russian State Military Historical Archive. Fond 400. Series 1. File 4297. Item 21.

²³ The State Duma. Verbatim Record. The Fourth Convocation. Session IV. St. Petersburg, 1916. Vol. 2. p. 1351.

larly made seasonal migrations into the Transcaspian region of the Russian Empire or the Khanate of Khiva. In parallel, a stream of migrants from Central Russia and Russian Turkestan were moving to the northeastern provinces of Iran.

According to reports from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, before World War I, some Persians living in the Transcaspian region were spreading anti-Russian propaganda among the Turkmen.²⁴ Nevertheless, the Turkestan Governor-General, Alexander Samsonov, was skeptical about the likelihood of joint Turkmen-Persian actions in Russia²⁵ since the relationship between Shiite Iranians and Sunni Turkmen had a long history of mutual resentment and hostility.

Since the beginning of the war, there had been another reason for destabilization in the region: the large number of Austro-Hungarian and German prisoners of war.²⁶ Taking advantage of the inadequate security (there were effectively no regular troops left in the province at that time) and the proximity of the borders with Persia and Afghanistan, hundreds of soldiers and officers fled from prison camps, workman teams, and hospitals. The locals helped the fugitives regularly and readily. After a successful escape, the former prisoner would face the choice between trying to reach his homeland and joining the Quadruple Alliance ranks and continuing the war as a military instructor or member of one of the numerous sabotage squads operating at the border. On the territory of the proper Turkestan, there were Turkish emissaries incessantly propagandizing the prisoners²⁷.

The new “native newspaper” was called upon as a counter-propaganda tool for the Russian state. In December 1914, the Office of the Head of the Transcaspian region in Ashgabat began publishing *Zakaspiyskaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta* twice a week. The paper was also released in Turkmen and Farsi and called *Ruzname-i Maver-i Bahr-i Khazar* (*The Newspaper of the Transcaspian re-*

gion). In his report to the head of the Transcaspian region Leonid Lesh, the head of the Askhabad district, pointed out, “Under the circumstances, I consider the publication of a newspaper for Turkmen not only desirable, but also essential”²⁸.

A crucial factor behind the decision to launch the newspaper was the establishment of Tekin regiment. On July 29, 1914, the day after the outbreak of World War I, the volunteer Tekin Regiment began to form on the basis of a division of the Turkmen Cavalry Regiment (irregular militia) from Turkmen-Tekin, mainly from the Merv, Tejen and Askhabad uezds of the Transcaspian region. During the war, the regiment excelled on the South-Western Front. The new “native newspaper” was commissioned to relate the stories of the Tekin people’s deeds. In addition, it was also supposed to be used as a “soft power” tool for propagandizing the Muslim population in the neighboring countries.

The first issue of the newspaper was released on December 14, 1914 in the Turkmen language. The paper contained orders issued by the head of the Transcaspian region, an overview of the world and local events, advice on agriculture and irrigation, horse breeding, public education, poems by local poets, and similar materials.²⁹ Among the authors were local Jadids, primarily Mukhamedkuli Atabaev. In his articles, he addressed the problems that the Turkmen society was facing and considered solutions to them.³⁰ The newspaper invited literate Turkmen people to cooperate and promised monetary rewards for worthy publications.³¹ For example, the ninth issue, dated February 3, 1915, contained a letter by a Turkmen soldier, an article *On the audial method of teaching Turkmen literacy*, a letter from an ishan (an honorific title given to Sufi leaders in Central Asia) about Turkmen poets, an article by a Turkmen from Tejen

²⁴ The Russian State Military Historical Archive. Fond 400. Series 1. File 5067. Item 7.

²⁵ Ibid. Item 17, back of the sheet.

²⁶ Kotyukova T. V. Turkestan captivity: German and Austro-Hungarian Prisoners of War in Russian Turkestan During the First World War // Russia and the Contemporary World. 2017. № 3 (96). pp. 47–64.

²⁷ The National Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Fond I-461. Series 1. File 1818. Item 125.

²⁸ “The Transcaspian Native Newspaper” as a Source of Studying the History of Spiritual Culture of the Turkmen People (1914-1917) // Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences of Turkmen SSR. Series of Social Sciences. 1964. No. 4. pp.3-9.

²⁹ Zakaspiyskaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta. 14 December, 1914.

³⁰ Soegova A.M. Turkmen Progressive Jadids: Mukhammedkuli Atabayev and His Articles // Electronic Scientific and Educational Journal “History”. 2022. Volume 13. Issue 10 (120). URL: <https://history.jes.su/s207987840023541-4-1>.

³¹ Saryev, B. The First Turkmen Newspaper // Propagandist of Turkmenistan, No. 5, 1989, p. 25.

about the war with Turkey, as well as the Persian section, which included a review of events and a few travel essays³².

The newspaper was published in Ashgabat in 1914-1917. It was edited by Ivan Belyaev, a Turkologist, inspector of public schools in the Transcaspien region, and compiler of the first Russian-Turkmen Dictionary. However, according to Turkmen philologists, the wording of the texts was "oversophisticated".³³ An annual subscription to *Zakaspiyskaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta* cost four rubles. The run was rather small, and most of it was sent to the areas bordering Persia and Afghanistan with a view to cultivating pro-Russian sentiments among the population of those neutral countries.

***Turkestanskaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta* as an untapped counter-propaganda tool in relations with China**

The situation on the Russian-Chinese border was also precarious. Back in 1909, the Scientific Bukhara Society was founded in Istanbul, which was part of the Department of Public Education at the Committee of Union and Progress within the Young Turks movement. On behalf of the Scientific Bukhara Society, Turks in Bukhara and Kashgar recruited students for the military and other government schools of the Ottoman Empire. For example, in 1910, according to reports by the Embassy of the Russian Empire in Istanbul, there were about a hundred students recruited in this manner, "of whom half were from Bukhara and the other half from Kashgar". In addition to the general curriculum, the students were taught "all the commonplace ideas of pan-Islamism and Turkish chauvinism"³⁴.

As for the Kyrgyz who were Chinese subjects, they were targets of intensive anti-Russian propaganda by members of the secret society Gelaohui. General Ma, the former head of the Dungan troops in the Ile District, was reported to make a trip from Kashgar to Semirechye in order to foment a rebellion among the Russian subjects of Dunga-

nese origin³⁵. In 1916, there was an uprising in Semirechye, partly organized by a few participants of the Xinhai Revolution. They were well-known in Chinese Turkestan and also belonged to Gelaohui. In 1915, Gelaohui members had been sent to Pishpek, Przhevalsk, and Verny to promote the idea of overthrowing the monarchy. They began recruiting Russian and Chinese Dungans, as well as Kyrgyz people. In Przhevalsk alone, they managed to form a unit as large as a thousand men³⁶. The inquiry conducted by the head of the Vernensky detective department in September 1916 revealed that Gelaohui followers conducted propaganda among the Dungans, calling for an uprising against the Russian authorities³⁷.

A year before the uprising of 1916, the Ministry of War, specifically, by the Asian part of the General Staff of the Turkestani Military District, decided to distribute *Turkestanskaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta* in the Russian frontiers of Chinese Turkestan and Afghanistan in order to inform the Muslim population of those countries about the advancements of the Russian army. On July 25, 1915 The Fourth Political Department of The Russian Foreign Ministry sent a letter to the General Staff saying that the Russian Consul in Kuldzha had suggested issuing a bulletin in a Turkic language, so that the Turkic population of Chinese Turkestan, largely influenced by Turkish propaganda at the moment, are informed about the current situation on the fronts. One of the department's officials, court councillor Mikhail Brodyansky, addressed the military governor of the Semirechensk region, Mikhail Folbaum. The latter replied that printing such a bulletin in a Turkic language would cost about 100 rubles per month, which the local authorities could not afford.

The Imperial mission in Beijing, for its part, sharing the consul's concern, asked the Foreign Ministry to allocate funds for the publication the bulletin with a view to "affecting the minds" of the indigenous Muslim population in Chinese Turkestan and counterbalancing the Turkish propaganda

³² *Zakaspiyskaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta*. 3 February, 1915.

³³ Saryev B. Bibliographic index. p. 25.

³⁴ The National Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Fond I-461. Series 1. File 1260. Item 18.

³⁵ Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire. Fond 147. Series 486. File 247. Items 188-189.

³⁶ Madzhun D.S. The role of the Foreign Factor in the Tragic Events of 1916. // Proceedings of Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University. 2016. Volume 16. No 2. p. 199.

³⁷ *ibid.*

available for them.³⁸ While holding it “highly desirable to inform the natives of Chinese Turkestan about the current events”, the Fourth Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in turn, shifted the burden of financial responsibility to the Military Headquarters, asking them to try and find the notorious 100 rubles a month.

On July 31, 1915, the Asian part of the Headquarters, through the locum tenens head of the Asian Branch, Major General Abdulaziz Davletshin, prepared a response saying “The General Staff informs that, while completely sharing the concerns of Court Councillor Brodyansky, allocating the required funds for the suggested printing of the bulletin about the course of military operations hardly appears possible. For its part, the General Staff would like to suggest that the goal outlined by the Kuldzhinsky Consul be achieved by distributing *Turkestanская Tuzemnaya Gazeta*, published twice a week in Tashkent in the Sart language, to the Turkic population in Chinese Turkestan. Dispatches of this newspaper could be arranged through direct communication between the Consul in Kuldzha and the Office of the Turkestan Governor-General”³⁹.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs found such an alternative inadequate. The Ministry continued its bureaucratic correspondence, cherishing hopes forcing the military to publish the bulletin in Verny. Almost a year later, on May 17, 1916, a few months before the outbreak of the Semirechye uprising, in another letter to the Asian Branch of the Headquarters, the diplomats repeated their plea. Mikhail Brodyansky sent a letter to the Turkestan Governor-General Fyodor Martson, who in response offered to send 50 copies of each issue of *Turkestanская Tuzemnaya Gazeta* to Kuldzha.

In another letter to the Ministry of War, Brodyansky reported that hostile propaganda in Semirechye was intensifying. According to the diplomat, among other things, the residents’ attitudes were affected by the struggle between political parties in Beijing. The 30 inns (units) of Dungan (Muslim) troops located within Chinese Turkestan were ready for a mutiny, and they could easily yield not only to Turkish, but also to German propaganda.

Therefore, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarded “raising the issue of publishing a newsletter in Verny for distribution to the public” as highly essential.⁴⁰ Discussing the financial side of the publication, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs found the cost of 100 rubles “affordable” and the fight against “the all-permeating German propaganda” essential, and again asked the Asian Branch of the Headquarters to “satisfy the aforementioned petition” of the Kulzha consul.⁴¹ In turn, Asian Branch of the Headquarters, in their turn, tried to shift the costs of publishing the notorious bulletin to Turkestan authorities.

Notably, in 1915, assessing the military qualities and mobilization potential of the Dungan and Taranche (Uyghur) Russian subjects living in the Chinese frontier, the Ministry of War, apparently for simplicity, dubbed them all “Chinese Muslims having fled to Turkestan from persecution”. The main fighting quality of Dungans and Uyghurs was said to be their “hatred of the Chinese”, which could be definitely relied upon in the event of an armed conflict with China. Thus, it was decided to impose military duty on them “immediately”.⁴² Never were Dungans and Uyghurs conscripted into the army. They even took an active part in the anti-Russian uprising of 1916. Therefore, their loyalty to Russia turned out to be imaginary.

On May 17, 1916, the Chief of the Military Headquarters, Infantry General Nikolay Mikhnevich, addressed Turkestan Governor-General Fyodor Martson. Having outlined the background, Mikhnevich stated that no one is engaged in counter-propaganda among Chinese Muslims, while they can easily yield to German influence.⁴³ General Mikhnevich stated, “Finding it essential to do our best to combat German propaganda, I believe that the petition of the consul in Kuldzha should be granted, and the 100 rubles per month required for this should, if Your Excellence pleases, be allocated from the funds at your disposal”⁴⁴.

⁴⁰ *ibid.* Items 14–14 back of the sheet.

⁴¹ The Russian State Military Historical Archive. Fond 400. Series 1. File 4412. Item 14, back of the sheet.

⁴² Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire. Fond 147. Series 486. File 340. Item 14.

⁴³ *ibid.* Item 15.

⁴⁴ *ibid.* Item 15 back of the sheet.

³⁸ The Russian State Military Historical Archive. Fond 400. Series 1. File 4412. Items 10–10, back of the sheet.

³⁹ The Russian State Military Historical Archive. Fond 400. Series 1. File 4412. Items 11–11, back of the sheet.

Eventually, neither a publication of a special bulletin nor a dispatch of *Turkestanskaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta* to Chinese Turkestan were agreed upon between the two ministries. Given that the Ministry of War succeeded in having the State Duma approve a separate budget for *Turkestanskaya Tuzemnaya Gazeta*, the refusal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to use the potential of the newspaper, which had been published for several decades, and their suggestion to find additional funds for the publication of a bulletin, looks highly inconsistent.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be noted that all the “native newspapers” in the Russian Empire were unified by their content, publishing such materials as current news, official information, stories about the history of Russia and foreign countries, or texts by local educators. As a result, according to contemporaries and even the editors them-

selves, those papers tended to be overformal. The language of the publications was largely unnatural, but still quite understandable since their editors-in-chief were orientalists. At the same time, the “native newspapers” acted as important discussion platforms for local societies, which did not allow the imperial authorities to lead the ongoing discussion, but did allow them to at least have an idea of that. The obvious strength of the “native newspapers” was their bilingualism or, sometimes, trilingualism. Meanwhile, only two “native newspapers”, each having a rather modest run, were highly unlikely to combat the “information hunger” and overcome the national and cultural isolation of the indigenous Muslim population in Turkestan, which in certain aspects was on the verge of autarky. The Ottoman Empire benefited from this strategic miscalculation of Russia as the former addressed Turkestanis, Kashgarians, and other Muslims in their common language, employing conceivable religious and philosophical symbols and ideas.

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