6 *A rada* for the empire

Inventing the tradition of Cossack self-governance during the 1905 Revolution¹

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Introduction

In September 1906, Petr Opochinin, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Kavkaz*, a semi-official media outlet of the Caucasus Viceroyalty, shared his thoughts on the significance of what he believed was the culmination of the revolutionary transformation experienced by the Russian Empire.

That was a great moment of the first encounter between the Russian people and the Russian Tsar after a long separation. They had been silently and lovingly looking into each other's eyes and, in the end, they understood one another, so that now their progressive union can be broken neither by a right-wing extremist [*chernosotenets*], nor by a stubborn and insane bureaucrat, nor by a frenzied Social Democrat, nor by a mad anarchist.²

The moment he referred to was the Tsar's October Manifesto of 1905, by which Nicholas II granted basic civil liberties to the population of the Russian Empire and announced the establishment of the imperial legislative body, the State Duma.³ The metaphor of a "first encounter" in its own way captured the mood that was reigning all over the empire in the midst of the Revolution: people, with their demands and aspirations, became as visible for the regime as never before, they gained the right to speak out and a chance to be heard. Opochinin's metaphor, however, also implied that this new, more "progressive" form of political order could exist autonomously from the newly born sphere of mass politics, secured merely by the people's loyalty to the throne and the Emperor's patronizing love.⁴ It goes without saying that the fanciful images of mutual love had little to do with the turbulent revolutionary reality of the day. Yet, the language that heralded the birth of the new bonds of intimacy between the Tsar and his subjects, exemplified by Opochinin's wording, in a very tangible way opened up an opportunity for new forms of popular engagement in the revolutionary reordering of intra-imperial relations.

Among the great diversity of the imperial population no other social category, according to the long-standing political mythology of the state, enjoyed such a close and direct patronage and benevolent care from the Tsar as the Cossacks,

with their image as pillars of the throne and the Orthodox faith firmly entrenched in the imperial imagination.⁵ Whereas the first communities of Cossack freebooters appeared as early as the sixteenth century along such rivers as the Dnieper, Don, Terek, and Yaik, in the eighteenth century, the Cossack hosts refashioned themselves as military communities in the service of the empire, dependent on the Tsars' will. By the end of the Tsarist regime, 11 Cossack hosts populated the imperial fringes from the Black Sea steppes to the Pacific coast.⁶ These late imperial Cossack communities shared almost no similarities with the original adventurers of the early modern era (part of them were created by the state from scratch, from people of different social backgrounds, to maintain the Tsarist rule in the empire's Asian possessions). Rather than being an archaic rudiment of a distant past, the late imperial Cossack estate was, to a considerable extent, a surprisingly modern phenomenon that owed much to imperial social creativity. In the early twentieth century, the authorities reinvented the Cossacks as guardians of the domestic order, fulfilling police functions to fight social unrest. In 1905–1906, Cossacks gained notorious fame as the nemeses of the Revolution. However, their actual experiences of the Revolution went far beyond the superficial image of suppressors of popular will.

One particular aspect of discussions about the ideas and practices of parliamentarism, representative democracy, or self-governance in the Russian Empire brought about by the Revolution of 1905–1906 is a tradition to consider them as essentially linked to the agenda of the liberationist movement or the tasks of the nationalist mobilization. The aim of this study is to challenge this vision by looking at how such ideas played out in an assertively conservative, imperial-loyal context. The article deals with a largely neglected and short-lived experiment in self-governance attempted by the Cossacks in the North Caucasus in 1906. It had as much to do with a revolutionary search for new possibilities of popular participation in political life as with a belief that this search was a return to primordial traditions that existed in the past.

Nowadays, the term *rada* is mostly known as the name of the modern-day Ukrainian parliament. It echoes the name of the representative political body that emerged in revolutionary Kyiv/Kiev in March 1917, *Tsentral'na Rada*, the Central Council. In turn, its name referred to a historical practice of general Cossack assemblies in the Zaporozhian Sich, one of the oldest and most remarkable early modern Cossack communities, which existed on the lower Dnieper River from the late sixteenth to the late eighteenth centuries.⁷ For the newly emerged Ukrainian polity in 1917, the Zaporozhian Sich was a precedent of Ukrainian statehood, while the historical phenomenon of Cossack *rada* served as proof of an intrinsic propensity of Ukrainian people to democratic self-organization.⁸

The myth of historical continuity of Ukraine from the Zaporozhian Sich, however, has a major disruption. Disbanded in 1775, tens of thousands of the Zaporozhian Cossacks ended up in the territory that was at that time the southernmost borderland of the Russian Empire, the steppe lands to the north of the Caucasus mountains, bounded by the Kuban River to the south and the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea to the west. The territory, granted to the Cossacks by

Empress Catherine II “for eternal ownership,” turned into a large Ukrainian settler colony known as *Chernomoriia*, or the Land of the Black Sea Cossacks. In 1860, it was renamed to Kuban oblast (province; a type of administrative unit in the Russian Empire), which also included a part of the so-called Caucasus Fortified Line (or simply *Liniia*), populated by largely Russian-speaking Cossacks. In the following years, as the government launched a large-scale colonization of the Caucasus highlands with the simultaneous expulsion of the native Adyghe/Circassian people to the Ottoman Empire, Kuban oblast expanded far into the mountainous area. This region, hitherto known as Circassia, came to be called *Zakuban’e*, literally – the land beyond the Kuban.⁹

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Kuban Cossack conservative elites, dissatisfied with dramatic transformations of the social, economic, and cultural life in the Kuban countryside, increasingly appealed to the mythologized image of the Zaporozhian Sich as a means to navigate uncertainties of the present and secure the Cossacks’ privileged status. In what was a classic example of an invented tradition, they relied on purported “Zaporozhian” legacies to advance their claims, and the Revolution of 1905 gave impetus to one such initiative.¹⁰ More than ten years before the Rada emerged in Kyiv, another *rada* convoked in the administrative center of Kuban oblast, Ekaterinodar, in December 1906. It was the first and only assembly with such a name that existed not after but within the empire; not against, but thanks to it, sanctioned by the Emperor and spearheaded by local authorities. That is all the more striking given that the Rada of 1906 was itself a product of the Revolution, an extraordinary phenomenon inherently at odds with the imperial system of rule. Even more ironically, the Rada was a profoundly conservative initiative brought about by the State Duma debates on the role of the Cossacks in suppressing protests all across the empire. In essence, it was a local response to these debates – a forum convened to assert the Cossacks’ loyalty to the throne and their readiness to safeguard the monarchy from the revolutionary turmoil.

The Cossack land

The revolutionary crisis that swept the Kuban region in 1905 did not affect Cossack *stanitsas* (settlements) as profoundly as urban centers with masses of non-Cossack laborers. Yet, local authorities were fearful to see the symptoms of a potentially much more dangerous phenomenon. The so-called agricultural movement – peasants’ grievances over land shortages, which spread across the Russian Empire – was seen as an imminent threat that was about to reach the Kuban countryside.¹¹ Indeed, in December 1905, one of the military units of the Kuban Cossack Host, the 2nd Urupskii regiment, joined the revolutionary movement by taking up arms against the command. In early January 1906, the head of Kuban oblast introduced martial law in the whole region. The official newspaper attributed it to “the first symptoms of the agrarian movement.”¹²

There were many social and political reasons for the Cossack insubordination. And yet the economic factor did serve as a fertile ground that made the growth of

the discontent among the Cossacks formerly unaccustomed to any sort of political action possible. One of the leaders of the mutiny, Aleksei Kurganov, recalled that the unfair distribution of lands in the mountain area of Transkubania was one of the reasons that prompted the whole regiment to rebel against its commanders. While Cossacks in the lowlands, wrote Kurganov, had 30 *desiatinas* of land (1 *desiatina* is equivalent to approximately 1.1 hectares), there were such stanitsas in Maikop district that did not even have three *desiatinas* at their disposal. Even worse, while rank-and-file Cossacks suffered from the lack of land, generals and officers possessed the best arable lands in the region. Kurganov demanded to enlarge land allotments and to take measures for relieving the plight of his fellow Cossacks.¹³

The crisis in Transkubania did not come as a surprise to the authorities or the public. Rather, it was a long-lasting effect of the poorly engineered governmental settler colonial project, the failure of which became evident soon after it began. The project, implemented in the early 1860s with an eye to consolidate the imperial grip over the new territorial acquisition, conquered after decades of protracted struggle against the Adyghe people, was also an attempt to showcase the Russians' colonizing potential and their ability to successfully adapt to any geographic circumstances. Visions of Cossack colonizers bringing civilization to the "savage" and "virgin" Caucasus valleys galvanized bureaucrats and members of educated public alike. However, much to their chagrin, the Cossacks proved unable to fit in the new environment, and their economies remained largely unsustainable for decades.¹⁴

The pressing calls for solving the land problem in Transkubania remained the most recurrent theme of local discussions on the pages of Kuban periodicals, both conservative and liberal. By the end of 1906, the Kuban Cossack elites resolved the issue in quite an inventive way. They saw the way for solving the land problem in what the Cossacks believed to have been the experience of their own past. The Kuban Host employed the Zaporozhian myth, as a way out of the revolutionary situation, to alleviate the land problem and to organize important segments of its life according to the principles of self-governance and representative democracy.

On December 1, 1906, a large Cossack assembly convened in Ekaterinodar to distribute the lands in possession of the Kuban Host among different Cossack communities in the most equitable way possible. A total of 506 delegates, all belonging to the Cossack estate and representing every Cossack settlement of the oblast, came together for a 16-day-long session.¹⁵ Their task was to jointly, through detailed discussions, redraw the map of the Kuban Host's landholdings and to supply the most destitute communities with additional plots of land. The assembly adopted the name *rada*, which referred to the ancient tradition of Zaporozhian self-rule, when the Cossacks of the Sich convened general gatherings to tackle a wide variety of issues concerning political questions and their everyday life. Indeed, the Rada of 1906 became an unparalleled phenomenon in terms of its representative, egalitarian mechanisms and aspirations. Even more curious, however, was the fact the Rada owed its existence to a profoundly illiberal, conservative initiative launched by the semi-official regional newspaper *Kubanskie oblastnye*

vedomosti (hereinafter, KOV), being closely intertwined with and echoing events that took place at another, all-imperial assembly, first convened the same year – the State Duma.

Metropolitan Russia encounters the Cossacks

The elections to this legislative organ, announced by the October Manifesto of 1905, in Kuban oblast were held in a rather calm manner, as opposed to heated competition in other, industrially developed and politically variegated, areas of the Russian Empire.¹⁶ The population of Kuban, divided into two separate curiae – of the Cossacks and of the non-Cossack estates – voted for electors in their settlements, and the chosen representatives, in their turn, selected the deputies for the Duma among themselves in a ballot in Ekaterinodar. Three deputies, elected from the Cossack curia, Nikifor Kochevskii, Kondrat Bardizh, and Petr Grishai, had a considerable administrative experience of running economic and military affairs of their respective stanitsas (Dolzhanskaia, Batalpashinskaia, and Zelenchukskaia) during their tenure as stanitsa atamans.¹⁷

All of them were rather liberal-minded and, eventually, during the Duma sessions, sided with the Constitutional Democrats, while Bardizh joined the party as its member. At the same time, the election of their candidatures went unopposed by the Cossack conservatives. An editorial of *KOV* characterized the deputies positively, listing everyone's merits as those of distinguished administrators. Even the lack of education, as was the case of Grishai, was touted as a virtue: although he could not express his thoughts "stylistically correctly," he did it in a clear and competent way.¹⁸

On the day of the deputies' departure for St. Petersburg, the Host organized the farewell at a high level, with a public prayer in the Ekaterinodar cathedral, attended by the Host's leadership. Both the authorities and the conservative supporters of the Cossack traditional values believed that the deputies would uphold the broadly defined, common interests of the Kuban Cossacks and, most likely, hoped that they would counterbalance the non-Cossack deputies with their explicit liberationist agenda.¹⁹

The actual political discussions that took place at the Tauride Palace, the seat of the State Duma, elucidated profound discrepancies among the Cossack representatives and made it clear that the notion of Cossack interests was far too meaningless to suggest any concrete program of legislative action. Deputies from the Duma's Cossack caucus, who had different political leanings and were elected from different hosts, failed to elaborate the common agenda and expressed opposing points of view on basic matters pertaining to Cossack life. One major discussion – and the only one in which the Kuban Cossack deputies took part – became a landmark moment for both the participants of the debates and the Kuban public that kept an eye on reports about sessions of the parliament.

On June 13, the Duma raised a question that was relevant to the Cossack hosts and to the population of the empire at large. Cossacks' notorious participation in dissolving mass rallies throughout the Russian Empire, from its core to its

most remote corners, and the police service that the Cossacks carried out in great variety of towns and cities, became the first – and frightening if not painful – encounter of the imperial metropole with the real, not mythologized Cossacks, and the Cossacks' role in fighting the Revolution naturally became a subject of the parliament's proceedings. The parliamentary hearings of the Duma's request to the War Minister, in which a special commission accused him of violating a range of laws and rules in view of the supposedly illegitimate mobilization of the Cossacks on police service, spectacularly turned into an emotional drama as soon as the Cossack representatives took the floor. The parliament, composed mostly of liberal-minded deputies who claimed to represent the people that were affected by the Cossack actions, became a stage for a performed court hearing.²⁰ It brought together two "warring sides": the representatives of those who beat the people appeared before the representatives of those who were beaten. Following the scenario of the political performance, the Cossack deputies were making excuses for the actions of their electors. For instance, one deputy from the Oblast of the Don Host depicted a truly apocalyptic vision of the Cossacks' role in the Revolution: "It was like a slaughter. It was as if the Tatars or other ancient enemies marched through Rus' with the whistle of whips [*nagaiki*], leaving behind nothing but tears, tears, tears!" Lavishly exaggerating Cossack brutality, most of the deputies at the same time put all the blame on the imperial government, the military authorities, and the arbitrary exercise of power in general. The same deputy assured the Duma that it was the "lawlessness" that "moved the Cossacks to Rus' and made them hated by it."²¹ Another Don representative condemned the Tsarist military upbringing for turning the once free Cossacks into "living, artificially bestialized [*ozverennye*] machines."²² Several deputies from other regions emphasized the fundamental and striking discrepancy between the myth of the Cossacks they had been taught about and the personally experienced reality. A deputy from Simbirsk *gubernia* (governorate; the main type of administrative division in the Russian Empire) expressed his disappointment that throughout his youth, from primary school to university, the figure of the Cossack epitomized for him "all the best and free that the Russian people had." This image, he bewailed, was endlessly distant from the actual Cossack behavior he had an unfortunate chance to observe.²³

For a deputy from Kiev *gubernia*, the encounter with the Cossacks came as a shock that made him disenchanted with the image of Cossackdom altogether. He went as far as to speculate that the Cossacks stationed in his native region were not Cossacks at all as long as they shared no similarities with the brave Zaporozhian Cossacks he knew about from literature and Ukrainian folklore: "they do not look like Cossacks, they are something vague, not ours at all, because a Cossack is Little Russian [Ukrainian] by origin." After everyone gained first-hand knowledge of those Cossacks, the deputy rhetorically asked, "would [they] sing about the Cossacks all over Ukraine as before?"²⁴

Naturally, the liberationist stance in this discussion was not the only one. A few deputies opposed the very idea of challenging the necessity of the Cossack mobilization. Their arguments ranged from the insistence on unquestioned subordination to the will of the Tsar and the government, whatever it might be, to the

more nuanced and tactical support for the Cossack participation in suppressing the Revolution as the justification of the Cossack existence as a privileged estate. As one deputy wondered, “if the Emperor did not need the Cossacks, then, I think, he would have dissolved them altogether.”²⁵

Both groups claimed to act on behalf of the ordinary Cossacks and to be the real exponents of people’s opinion and aspirations. To substantiate their arguments, most of the deputies referred to letters at their disposal, handed to them by rank-and-file Cossacks before they departed for St. Petersburg, *nakazy* (“mandates”). These mandates, one of the most salient features of the emergent mass politics in the Russian Empire of 1905–1906, were demands to the Duma deputies on the part of their electors to act on their behalf and in their interests.²⁶ Whereas monarchists read aloud the letters, whose compilers expressed loyalist feelings and their unconditional readiness to obey orders and to fight with the rioters as long as necessary, liberationists demonstrated letters of complaint, whose authors lamented about unbearable hardships of mobilization. In his turn, Kochevskii, speaking in support of the request to the war minister, asserted that his fellow Kuban Cossacks had given him a mandate, in which they commissioned him “not to ask but to demand the immediate disbandment” of the Cossack regiments and battalions taking part in suppressing the popular protests.²⁷

The discussion of the Cossacks’ role in the Revolution, which bore resemblance to an orchestrated, performative tribunal before an imperial-wide audience, provoked an angry reaction among the Kuban official circles and in the semi-official press. One author of *KOV*, condemning the speeches by Bardizh and Kochevskii, warned that the need to fight the Revolution was self-evident for all the Cossacks, because otherwise the Cossacks risked “to lose everything that our ancestors acquired with the help of arms and what we now possess.”²⁸ The implication was clear: the loyal service was the guarantee of the Cossack estate’s well-being, secured by the state. Another correspondent went as far as to invite stanitsas assemblies to pass resolutions denouncing the speeches by Bardizh and Kochevskii and even to exclude them from the Cossack estate.²⁹

Moreover, the appeal to the voices of ordinary Cossacks, to the instruction they had ostensibly given to Kochevskii and his fellow deputies, the reference to a certain mandate, prompted a counter-initiative on the part of the Kuban conservatives. The official newspaper, denying that any sort of instructions had actually been given to the deputies, put forward the idea to elaborate a real mandate to the deputies, “so that they would not dare, in front of the whole Russia, to present their thoughts, opinions, and convictions as the thoughts, opinions, and convictions of all the Cossacks.”³⁰

After Nicholas II, with his increasingly negative attitude toward the Duma, dissolved it in July 1906 and announced the elections to the second convocation of the parliament, *KOV* once again raised the question of the elaboration of the mandate for next cohort of Duma representatives. An anonymous author of a newspaper article outlined his view of how to proceed with this matter. To determine the principal needs of the Cossacks, he proposed to convene a common council, which would consist of five representatives from every settlement (three

from Cossacks and two from non-Cossacks), and of one high rank officer from every military unit on actual service or administrative institution of the Host.³¹

If conservatives proposed the idea of the mandate elaboration as a means to accuse Bardizh and Kochevskii of not having the right to speak on behalf of the Kuban Cossacks, liberationist press, too, adhered to the initiative, inverting at the same time its accusatory implication. Kirill Zhivilo, who responded with an article in the left-wing local newspaper *Svoboda*, argued that in view of the absence of any instruction that the deputies were to follow, they could not bear responsibility to the Host for the presumed breach of obligations. Instead, it was the Host's fault for not having entrusted the deputies with a precise mandate.³²

Meanwhile, the initiative developed rapidly. In early September, *KOV* urged stanitsas not to defer with composing resolutions concerning the council.³³ Even before this call was published, the question of the council had already been discussed and well received at the grassroots level in at least one stanitsa. A resolution, passed by the assembly of stanitsa Blagoveshchenskaia, expressed its full support for the idea of the council. In the meantime, the planned convention received its own, remarkable title. It is not clear who and when decided to name it *rada*, but the name was already in use in early September 1906. Whereas the assembly used the word "council" (*sovet*), *KOV* used the word *rada* in the title of its article, referring to the Zaporozhian tradition of regular mass assemblies.³⁴

At the same time, the initiative took a completely new turn. Instead of becoming a council for elaborating instruction for the future deputies, it turned into a consultative body, which was entrusted with the mission of solving the long-pending land question by means of more equitable reallocation of land to the benefit of the Cossack settlements in Transkubania.

The tradition restored

In early November, the head of the oblast and the acting ataman (*nakaznoi ataman*; the leader of the host), Nikolai Mikhailov, proudly informed the Host that the Emperor approved the convocation of the Rada – the name that became official from that time on and was confirmed by the Emperor's signature. Mikhailov's order proclaimed: "Let the Cossacks come together to the general gatherings and select two representatives each, and the latter would come together into a single Cossack 'rada.'"³⁵

That is how the Zaporozhian tradition, ostensibly restored, was utilized to serve as an ideological underpinning of the new organ. Although its declared task was narrow, the overtly revolutionary and subversive rhetoric easily found its way into the Rada's rostrum. The famous statistician Fedor Shcherbina, authorized as the spokesman of the Rada and subsequently elected as its chair for his expert knowledge of the local land situation, publicly expressed his gratitude to Mikhailov for the restoration of the ancient Cossack custom. His opening speech presented the Rada's convocation as the turning point in the history of the Kuban Cossacks, whose administrative organization from that moment on was supposed to go back to its Zaporozhian roots. Shcherbina denounced the imperial encroachment on the

rights and privileges of the Kuban Cossacks and decried the losses for the local economy caused by the imperial centralization:

The Cossack self-rule, land needs, economic issues, domestic life, in short – the whole ancient Cossack governance [*uriad*] was being changed, rebuilt, and abolished without any participation of stanitsas, of the working rank-and-file Cossacks and, as the impartial Cossack history states, not to our advantage.

A century of obscurity ended with the recreation of the Rada. “And now, after one hundred years,” said Shcherbina,

thanks to the care of our *Koshevoi Bat'ko* [father of the *Kish/Kosh*; an archaic, Zaporozhian term for the Cossack community], we are elected by all the Cossack population from the stanitsas, which have been in oblivion for over a century, to the Host's Rada in order to solve the single most important of our issues.

Addressing Mikhailov with the Zaporozhian title complemented the whole picture – not merely the Rada was restored, but the Zaporozhian chief stood in charge of it.³⁶ What is more, as Shcherbina told Mikhailov at another occasion, the ataman was “twice as *bat'ko* to the Kuban Cossacks – the *koshevoi bat'ko* of the Kuban Cossack Host and the *bat'ko* of the Host's Rada.”³⁷ It is not clear whether Shcherbina invented this “fatherly” Zaporozhian metaphor or just popularized it during this major event, but the metaphor firmly entered the official use.

Just as semi-officially, and at the same time in the same informal manner, Mikhailov was praised in even more flattering terms. At a deputies' dinner in Ekaterinodar's garden, an amateur Cossack poet from Eisk district performed a song in public, calling Mikhailov the *hetman* (the title used by heads of the Ukrainian Cossack polity) of the Black Sea Cossacks:

Our Cossack <i>rada</i> Used to convene for centuries; If Mikhailov were not here We would not have the <i>rada</i> .	Kozats'kaia rada nasha Sbyralas' vikamy; Ne bulo b u nas Mykhailova Ne bulo b i rady.
You, Mikhailov, the ataman of ours The Hetman of the Kish Do not forget the Black Sea Cossacks And their good fame.	Ty, Mykhailov, otaman nash Koshovyi het'mane Ne zabud' zhe chornomortsiv I ikh dobroï slavy. ⁴³

The Cossack Rada, a debut poem by Oleksandr/Aleksandr Piven', one of the most prolific local writers who authored a vast number of best-selling collections of humorous stories, folk tales, and poetry, published on the occasion of the assembly, repeatedly portrayed it as a restored tradition that was meant to bring harmony and prosperity to the lives of Black Sea, Line, and Transkubania Cossacks (a difference he consistently laid stress on). Piven' characterized the *rada* as a custom practiced by the Zaporozhian Cossacks, discontinued for a century and renewed again as soon as the right moment came:

Many things [The Cossacks] were doing there At the host's <i>rada</i> Because they learned to follow That tradition Already in the Sich...	Vsiakie dilo Tut robyly Na vois'kovii radi, Bo toi zvychai Shche u Sichi Navchyls' spravliaty...
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One hundred years have passed After that And the tradition was gone Dead for an age! And only now It has returned to us again!	Sto lit proishlo, Yak te bulo, Ta zvychai mynuvsia... Na vik umer! Til'ke teper Znov do nas vernuvsia! ⁴⁴
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Piven' depicted the hundred years that passed after the dissolution of the Sich – that is, the whole historical experience of the Black Sea Host from its emergence and up to the Revolution – as a wasted time marked by nothing but miseries. It was only the Rada that put an end to the Cossacks' hardships:

The Cossack has lived Not so much One hundred years in Kuban These years had nothing To be praised for Because they were bad	Prozhyv kozak Ne tak, ne siak Sto lit na Kubani; Nichym tikh lit Yomu khvalyt', Bo buly pohani!
This bad life Has passed The old tradition is back So for the <i>rada</i> For the meeting We, Cossacks, are being called	Mynulos' te Zhyttia plokhe, Vernuvs' staryi zvychai: Vzhe na radu, Na poradu Nas kozakiv klychut'. ⁴⁵

In Piven's poem, the restoration of the Rada was not only the revival of the ancient custom – it rendered insignificant the last 100 years that separated the Cossacks from their ancestors, diminishing the temporal distance and bringing them closer to the bygone era of the Sich. Even such a gesture as Mikhailov's bow to the delegates, which evoked an image of Zaporozhian atamans' symbolic submission to the Cossacks' will, lumped together the present and the past:

When at the Rada, He bowed down To the whole public It appeared again, It seemed That the olden times are close ...	Yak vin radi, Vsii hromadi, Poklonyvsia nyz'ko, Znov zdavalos' Pokazalos' Mov, staryna blyz'ko ... ⁴⁶
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The Zaporozhian rhetorics, engendered by the Rada and endorsed officially, was entrenched even in locales that had little connection with Chernomoria. A

resolution passed in early 1907 by the Cossack assembly of stanitsa Yaroslavskaia in Transkubania expressed gratitude to Mikhailov for his patronage over the Kuban Cossacks. Calling him “our Chieftain *Koshevoi Bat’ka*” (a Russian rendition of the Ukrainian title), the authors of the resolution thanked Mikhailov for the establishment of the *rada*, “which has almost been blurred out from our memory.”³⁸

The invented character of the tradition did not go unnoticed. The historian Petr Korolenko authored an article for *KOV*, dedicated to the history of *rada* as a political practice. Recognizing its importance for both Zaporozhia and Ukraine, he pointed out that it lost its significance after Ukraine fell under the rule of Russia. The Black Sea Cossacks did not and could not know this practice in its original meaning. The Rada of 1906, Korolenko argued, resembled a sort of assembly that was indeed practiced in Chernomoria in the late eighteenth century, but its competence was limited to solving a rather narrow range of issues.³⁹

At the same time, Korolenko celebrated the Rada in another article in a liberal newspaper, devoted to the history of the land of the Kuban Cossacks. In a similar vein to Shcherbina, he offered quite a critical reassessment of the imperial treatment of the Kuban Cossacks and their Zaporozhian ancestors, which contravened the officially established view of the benevolent autocracy and the unconditionally loyal Cossacks. Korolenko, hardly an overt and ardent Ukrainophile, gave a perspective that one could easily confuse with that of Ukrainian national activists. The land of the Cossacks was known as *Ukraine* (the term he italicized) already in the twelfth century, and its population, which he practically interchangeably called “Russes,” “Ukrainian Cossacks,” and “Ukrainians,” organized themselves as early as the thirteenth century to defend Ukraine from the nomadic tribes. The independent and heroic era of the Ukrainian Cossacks lasted, as the reader could conclude, for nearly half a millennium and came to a close due to the reforms initiated by Peter I. Just as he broke the state order of Russia, Peter “did not leave Zaporozhia in peace, too.” Zaporozhians, on whose land the Tsar began building fortresses and stationing garrisons, “finally lost their temper” (*etogo uzhe ne sterpeli*) and, during the war with Sweden, joined forces with Charles XII, who promised to restore their former rights and privileges – a voluntary and reasonable choice, which Korolenko did not call a treason.

The description of the Zaporozhian life in the mid-eighteenth century, after the reemergence of the Sich under the control of St. Petersburg, portrayed an almost idyllic picture of Zaporozhia, fully restored in its rights. Korolenko italicized the word *rada* throughout the text, attracting attention to the term that so remarkably entered into the local official discourse, referring to it as an example for the Kuban Host to follow, albeit a hardly achievable one:

The *rada* of the host managed all the host’s affairs. The Cossacks were complete masters and owners of their land. Newcomer settlers used land allotments on conditions of the Cossacks and were still considered subjects of the Zaporozhian Host, obliged to fulfill all the military and rural obligations.

Korolenko drew poorly covered analogies with the contemporaneous situation of the Kuban Host's most acute social problem – the presence in the region of hundreds of thousands of non-Cossack immigrants from the empire's internal provinces, *inogorodnie* (outlanders; literally, people from other towns), who, many Cossacks believed, challenged their right over the land. Besides, he emphasized that similarly to the ancient history of the Sich, the more recent history of the Kuban Cossacks demonstrated that the risk of losing the land still remained. It was the project to resettle the Black Sea Cossacks to Transkubania *en masse* in the early 1860s. The realization of the plan, he argued, did not materialize only because of the charter of Catherine II, by which she granted the Cossacks the land for “eternal ownership.” The powerful document, which the Black Sea Cossacks “put forward in front of themselves” for their protection, like a magical shield, defended the Cossacks from the imperial encroachments – the task that from that time on the pompous monument of Catherine II in Ekaterinodar with its bronze replica of the charter was designed to carry out.⁴⁰

Korolenko's article was just one among the texts by local intellectuals, for whom the Rada became a good occasion to reflect upon the question of the Kuban and – more particularly – Black Sea Cossack land as the Zaporozhian legacy and Cossacks' rights on it as opposed to rights of the empire. Were the Black Sea/Kuban Cossacks the sole proprietors of the fertile lands, granted by Catherine II for eternal ownership? How inviolable was that right? How “eternal” was the “eternal ownership” in fact? The historian and cartographer Nikolai Ivanenkov responded rather negatively, stating that it was not once that the state violated the rights of the Cossacks to the land, bestowed by Catherine II, as was demonstrated by the resettlement projects of the 1860s.⁴¹

The Rada successfully completed its task. Several commissions that were formed to elaborate the project of land readjustment reached a mutually satisfactory agreement. The most important stipulation of it implied that largely impoverished and land-hungry settlements beyond the Kuban received 32,000 *desiatinas* of arable reserve land in former Chernomoria and 20,000 *desiatinas* of the land of similar quality in former Linia. In return, former Line and Black Sea Cossack *stanitsas* obtained forest areas in Transkubania. The successful outcome of the work of the commissions, which suited every negotiating side, caused a surge of overall satisfaction, conceptualized on the official level in terms of mutual solidarity and Cossack kinship. On the wave of enthusiasm, Rada members even determined to send a telegram to the Emperor that expressed the idea of the Cossack unity, achieved and perceived as a result of bargaining.⁴²

Mapping the Host

Ja-Jeong Koo attached great importance to the rhetoric of brotherhood, so manifested at the days of the Rada's closure. He argued that the convocation of the Rada was a moment of revolutionary significance in the process of fundamental transformation of the Kuban Cossacks' self-image, which asserted “the new

organic Cossack identity” and led to “the evolution from *soslovie* to *ethnos*,” accomplished during the time of the Revolution of 1917 and the Civil War.⁴⁷ I suggest looking at this rhetoric from a different angle. I argue that, instead of being a starting point of convergence of several previously dissociated “sub-hosts,” as Koo pointed out, the discussions of the land question waged at the Rada and local press were quite a radical departure from the official image of the uniform Kuban Host, established in the 1860s.

The deputies of the Rada divided themselves into several groups not along the lines of Kuban oblast’s administrative division but according to geographic and historical criteria. Thus, the deputies found themselves not as the representatives of Maikop district or Eisk district but as the spokesmen of Chernomoria, Old Linia, New Linia, and Transkubania. The reason for it were different regulations that determined the amount of land per capita, since each territory initially possessed different legal status and was demarcated separately.⁴⁸ The invocation of these four regions was a technical matter, deriving from the size of land plots. And yet, from the very outset, the regional division was interpreted in social and cultural terms. The Cossacks of New and Old Linia were referred to simply as the Line Cossacks, as contrasted to the Black Sea Cossacks and the Cossacks of Transkubania. At the opening session of the Rada, Mikhailov appealed to the Cossacks as if they constituted three different groups: “Black Sea, Line, and Transkubanians Cossacks, exchange here your thoughts on the raised issue, talk ardently, tell the truth to each other even if it is unpleasant.”⁴⁹

At the concluding session of the Rada, the chair of the Black Sea Cossack representatives proudly asserted that “the black cat that had crossed the paths of the Black Sea, Line, and Transkubania Cossacks a long time ago, no longer exists,” referring to the same three groups. As he added, thanks to the Rada, the Kuban Cossacks became “united into a single fraternal family of the Host.” But the Kuban Cossack fraternity, itself, was meant to be a fraternity of these precisely three groups.⁵⁰

The framing of agrarian discontent in socio-historical terms was not an exclusive peculiarity of discussions within the walls of the Rada. Polemics, unleashed on pages of the press in the previous months, too, readily employed these very same divisions in order to seek equitable distribution of land (for some) or to defend their land against encroachments (for others). Authors boasted venerable origin of their respective communities to support their claims and, consequently, denied the right of others to be treated on equal footing. Several authors from Chernomoria, for example, went as far as to call the Cossacks of Transkubania “rabble” on the ground that they had come from various places, had been artificially included into the Cossack estate, and in view of this did not possess the honorable genealogy of a sort of the Black Sea or Line Cossacks. As one correspondent put it, the Cossacks beyond the Kuban “had nothing in common with the past of the glorious Kuban [*sic!*] or Black Sea Cossacks.”⁵¹

In the same way, another correspondent from Transkubania (who happened to be his namesake) noted that stanitsas of the mountain territories were populated partially

by the Cossacks of the glorious Don Host, partially by soldiers of the glorious Caucasus army that conquered the Caucasus, and partially by Little Russians from Kharkov, Poltava and other gubernias, who were kindred to the Black Sea Cossacks.

At the same time, he continued, “if we speak about rabble, then, Zaporozhia, from which the glorious Black Sea Host emerged, was rabble as well.” In view of this, the correspondent asked, “how could it be that they are the native sons, and we are the stepsons?”⁵² This kind of rhetoric was echoed during Rada’s sessions. As reported by one of its members, a certain representative of Black Sea Cossack stanitsas called the Cossacks from Transkubania “adoptees,” referring to their inferior and nonnative status within the Kuban Host’s family.⁵³

These discussions, which preceded the Rada, and which continued with new vigor at its meetings, brought seemingly obsolete appellations back into the official discourse. Historical communities of Chernomoria and Linia reemerged again as subjects of legal practice, and it was particularly true for the Black Sea Cossacks. On the one hand, deputies representing the inhabitants of Black Sea Cossack stanitsas eagerly appealed to historical rights of Chernomoria on its own territory, this time defending it not from *inogorodnie* settlers, but from their fellow Kuban Cossacks of non-Black Sea Cossack origin. Even the author of the semi-official brochure about the Rada characterized Chernomoria, as it was represented at the Rada, as “the restored Zaporozhian Host, which settled on its own lands within definite borders and formed a completely separate region.” On the other hand, speakers from other stanitsas no less eagerly portrayed the Black Sea Cossacks as a miserly collective owner of spare land and reproached them for their unwillingness to share it with their needy brethren.⁵⁴

The Black Sea Cossacks’ eventual generosity was rewarded at the last day of the Rada. In the Host’s cathedral, the priest Arsenii Belanovskii turned it into a triumph of the Zaporozhian symbolism.

How many years have passed since Hetman Sahaidachnyi, fearsome to enemies but always dear and close to the Cossack heart, put all his energies and his life for the benefit of “his native children and Ukraine [*svoikh ridnykh ditok i Ukrainu*]”? How can the memory of this “eagle of Zaporozhia” ever die in the Cossack’s heart? How can anyone, who loves his motherland, forget that this gatherer of the shattered Ukraine freed the shrines of the Orthodox faith from defilement, let the enslaved Dnieper breathe freely, and ... went into battle with people’s darkness and ignorance, taking care of the Cossacks’ enlightenment?

The God, proclaimed the priest, would disown the Cossacks who would forget their ancestors. “And now I will say with particular solemn joy – and I am saying it here, in the Holy of Holies, at the throne of God – that you, the Kuban–Black Sea Cossacks did not forget your heroic ancestors.” Belanovskii praised the Host

as not merely the descendant of the Zaporozhian forefathers, but as a collective reincarnation of the spirit of chief Zaporozhian leaders. Coming together at the Rada “under the mace of the Zaporozhian unanimity,” the Cossacks, he proudly asserted, “resurrected” the spirits of their Zaporozhian ancestors.⁵⁵

The Tsar’s loyal Cossacks

The Rada had almost nothing in common with the initial idea conceived by Kuban Cossack conservatives. The only reminiscence of the Rada’s original task—to assert the Cossacks’ loyalty to the crown—were Mikhailov’s words, expressed at the assembly’s closure ceremony, in which he encouraged the deputy audience to send delegates to the new Duma who “would not be ashamed of their Cossack rank and for their service, so important for the Tsar.”⁵⁶ The administration did not allow the Cossack delegates to discuss other issues of political relevance. Given the potential perils of the Rada’s turning into a platform for seditious proclamations, authorities ensured that it would remain aloof from any discussions concerned with politics. According to Shcherbina’s memoirs, Mikhailov warned him in private that discussions at the Rada should not touch upon political matters – a condition, imposed by the Emperor himself. Otherwise, Mikhailov assured, he would be obliged to dissolve the Rada immediately.⁵⁷

Shcherbina recalled that the Rada had an occasion to make sure how thoroughly the administration monitored the implementation of the directive. One time, a certain Rada member raised the issue of the 2nd Urupskii regiment’s mutiny, proposing to send a delegation to Nicholas II to express loyalist feelings and beg pardon for the Kuban Host’s guilt. Mikhailov’s senior assistant, Mikhail Babych, prevented the discussion, which all but broke out. He pardoned the Rada for the first time but threatened to shut it down if it happened again.⁵⁸

The issue of the mutiny, though, made its way into the Rada’s floor as Mikhailov spoke on it at the concluding session. Evoking the plotline of Nikolai Gogol’s *Taras Bulba*, the ataman resorted to the famous Zaporozhian fiction as an allegorical reference point for the explanation of what had happened. When Bulba learned about the treason of his own son, Mikhailov said, he did not allow anyone to punish the son. Instead, Bulba killed him himself. The Kuban Cossacks that suppressed the mutiny, Mikhailov continued, are the Bulbas of the nowadays.

The Kuban Cossacks are not guilty of any crime and they do not have to apologize for anything. Those, who are ashamed to be Cossacks or for whom being a Cossack is disadvantageous, then – good riddance, let them go out from the Host.⁵⁹

Beyond the assembly’s hall, however, the issues of the mutiny and of the Rada’s convocation often blended into a single whole – a question of the collective guilt and collective loyalty. The author of the song at the delegates’ dinner sang that

The Black Sea Cossacks are loyal fellows,
So loyal are their stanitsas,
Nowadays the Tsarina's charter
Will prove it. [...]

Chornomortsi virni khloptsi,
Virni ikh stanytsi,
Shcho dokazhe v nashi vremena
Hramota Tsarytsi . . .

Nicholas, our Tsar and Father,
Tell us just a word,
Hey, you, Black Sea Cossacks, –
So we are all ready.⁶⁰

Nikolaiu Tsar' nash Bat'ko,
Skazhy odno slovo,
Hei nu khloptsi, chernomortsi, –
Tak my vsi i hotovi.

In another song, written by an unknown Cossack from a stanitsa in Transkubania, this question went more articulated:

Tsar, do not be angry with us
Not all are guilty
That among us showed up
Damned betrayers.

Ne hnivaesia na nas Tsariu
Ne vsi vynuhati,
Shcho mizh namy ob'iavyls'
Zradnyki prokliati.

Upon the whole Host
They put a black stigma
And covered with shame
The honest name of the Kuban Cossacks.⁶¹

Na vse viisko p'iatno cherne
Vony polozhyly
I kubantsiv chesne imnia
Soromom pokryly.

A Cossack parliament?

The local administration was present at the Rada in full composition: the senior and junior assistants of the acting ataman, the chief of staff, the district atamans, generals on active service and those retired, councilors of the provincial board, etc.⁶² Such supervision kept the Rada's discussions under control, but at the same time it authorized its work, giving an appearance of full legitimacy to everything that was happening at its sessions. The assembly's meetings went smoothly and, with the single exception of the case mentioned above, did not cause any complaints from the part of the officials. It gave its members room for hope. The Rada's gathering was not conceived to be a one-time event. Its organizers, participants, and the local public envisaged that it would become a long-lasting institutional instrument of tackling the most urgent social, economic, and administrative issues of the day. This conviction was reflected in the mere fact that it was often referred to as "the first *rada*," either by its deputies or in the press.⁶³

Even before the closure of the Rada, the press published a proposal on the agenda of the Rada's next convention. Its author suggested raising the issue of improving the system of medical care in the oblast (since only a few settlements were lucky to have a doctor).⁶⁴ In his opening speech, Shcherbina expressed his hope that "the present Host's Rada will not be an exceptional case, but a general rule for solving all the most important military and rural questions, affairs and undertakings."⁶⁵ Likewise, at the concluding session, he once again addressed to the ataman his belief that due to the restoration of the *rada* many other issues

would be solved in the future. He suggested improved education, fishery development, construction of channels and irrigation, the connection of the Kuban River with the Black Sea, building lines of communication, and land that had been taken over by officers being given back to the owners. To this end, he even proposed to build a special building (*khata*) for the next Rada's conventions.⁶⁶ The Rada's deputies, as a local newspaper reported, voiced unanimous support for making the Rada a regular institution in charge of Cossack needs.⁶⁷

Mikhailov believed that the Rada would raise the prestige of the Host in the eyes of the government. In January 1907, he went to personally report about its results first to Tbilisi/Tiflis, where, according to his companion, the Viceroy of the Caucasus Illarion Vorontsov-Dashkov and the chief of staff of the Caucasus military district expressed their full satisfaction and support, and then to the Emperor. Pleased with the outcome of the assembly, Mikhailov presented to Nicholas II an album, containing photos of the Rada's delegates. The Emperor, as the press proudly noted, looked through the photos and even recognized some of them as former guards of his Convoy.⁶⁸

The resolutions of the Rada were approved in the capital and acquired the force of law.⁶⁹ But the seeming personal bonds between part of the Rada and the Tsar, however, did not result in its institutionalization as a consultative regional body. Despite the hopes of some and the firm beliefs of others, no second *rada* ever convened again. According to some vague information published in the press, in early 1907, an uncertain number of Kuban Cossack representatives elaborated a mandate for the newly elected deputies to the Second Duma, where they outlined a vision of the Host possessing a broader autonomy and self-governance, as well as broader electoral rights that would enable the Cossacks to elect representatives to the "supreme Cossack representative institution, the Rada." A number of reports in liberal newspapers rejoiced at the Cossacks' sudden political "maturity," characterizing their demands as "unexpected liberalism" and even a "betrayal of loyalty" to the oppressive regime on the part of Cossack electors.⁷⁰

Later that year, the question of the second *rada* was overshadowed by – and to a large extent conflated with – the issue of the introduction of zemstvo to the Cossack provinces of the Caucasus, contemplated by the administration in Tiflis.⁷¹ To this end, the head of the oblast organized a meeting in Ekaterinodar in October, mostly composed of members of local officialdom. Participants of the meeting stressed the need to transform the local administration along the lines of self-governance but disagreed over the form of zemstvo concerning diverging interests of Cossacks and *inogorodnie*. To further elaborate the foundations of the zemstvo functioning, the meeting decided to convoke two separate *radas* at once – apart from a Cossack *rada*, a special *rada* of *inogorodnie* was supposed to convoke at the same time.⁷² In November, Mikhailov went to Tiflis to present the viceroy a petition about the convocation of the second *rada*, but the further fate of the petition remains unclear. Various newspaper reports expressed divergent statements, claiming that the second Rada did not meet sympathies on the part of the Caucasus administration or, alternatively, the administration left the question of the *rada* open.⁷³

Still, the October meeting in Ekaterinodar in 1907 was followed by a convention in the administrative center of Labinskii district, Armavir, in February 1908. The latter was particularly reminiscent of yet another *rada*, although on a smaller scale, uniting up to 200 participants that included heads of stanitsas and representatives of local intelligentsia. The delegates met to discuss questions concerning education, roads, medicine, the spread of agricultural knowledge, forestry, and the development of cooperatives, but all those issues remained in the background as the most heated and protracted discussions revolved around the issue of zemstvo, which turned out a veritable stumbling block for all the participants involved. The question was whether to include *inogorodnie* or to make it an exclusive Cossack institution. It was not resolved and postponed for the future.⁷⁴

The question of the zemstvo remained unsolved and the idea of the second *rada* never became a reality. Apparently, the central authorities, who experienced recurring troubles even with the State Duma, did not dare approve of establishing a separate organ that was not envisaged by the state legislation, due to suspicions of its potential ambition. In subsequent years, some of the state officials implicitly accused the Rada of institutional separatism. In 1913, a member of the State Council, Count Fedor Uvarov, while talking with Cossack representatives in Vladikavkaz about the issue of zemstvo, denounced this idea on the ground that it would “very much resemble the former Cossack Rada and, in the end, it would be a state within the state.” Remarkably, the case of the Rada was not a subject of the discussion, but served as an obvious, well-known example of what the empire should avoid while dealing with its periphery.⁷⁵

How was it possible?

At first glance, the Rada’s aims, be it the elaboration of parliament deputies’ instruction, as it was initially conceived, or the redistribution of lands, as it happened to be in the end, were quite moderate in their ambitions. Indeed, the Cossacks’ aspiration to make the Rada into an institution that would run Kuban Cossack affairs on a regular basis, a complete “restoration” of the Zaporozhian administrative practice, was far too bold to come true. And yet even the occasional, one-time implementation of this ostensible Zaporozhian tradition to solve the problem of land shortage was a radical move in and of itself, fraught with unwelcome repercussions for the imperial administration. Allowing to convene a local mini parliament of a sort, the government set a precedent for the mechanism of popular participation in self-government. Even more strikingly, the government allowed the assembly to adopt a name with strong seditious connotations, which directly referred to the experience of autonomy and statehood that the Sich and Ukraine once had.

How did it happen? How did the Rada, instead of elaborating the mandate, acquire a completely new function? Although the flow of documentation that would allow answering this question in full measure is yet to be found, a detailed summary of the correspondence conducted by authorities at various levels, anonymously published in a local liberal periodical, reveals the major steps of the

decision-making process. Whereas the Duma speeches raised controversies over the issue of the Kuban Host's public representation at the parliament, the Host's administration took pains to settle the issue of land shortage. According to the Kuban Host's prospective solution made in April 1906, vast amounts of spare land, which still was in common possession of the Kuban Host, was to be distributed among Cossack settlements according to the geohistorical principle. The reserve land, located on the territory of former Chernomoria, was supposed to be divided among former Black Sea Cossack stanitsas only. Correspondingly, the reserve land of the former Line Host was supposed to be reallocated exclusively among stanitsas within the territory of the former Line Host. The Cossack settlements of the mountainous territories beyond the Kuban River, in particular the neediest ones, were to receive vacant forest areas, formerly owned by the state and passed into the Host's possession in 1889.

This project, which reflected the Host's adherence to the notion of historical rights of the former hosts over their respective lands, met with objections from the Main Administration of the Cossack Hosts (GUKV), which determined to meet the needs of mountainous stanitsas in fertile soil by providing them with steppe areas of the Black Sea and Line Cossack lands. Thus, the Cossacks of Transkubania had to receive their own shares of lands, once constituting Chernomoria and Linia. The Host, refusing to fully carry out the directive of its superiors, only agreed to make minor concessions and to exempt as little land as possible from the possession of the stanitsas of Chernomoria (calculated 10 desiatinas per soul). It was only the Military Council that resolved the discussion by acknowledging that neither local nor central officials had complete information about the land situation. On October 19, it decreed to grant the acting ataman the right to convoke a "land commission" (*zemleustroitel'naia komissiia*), which would consist of two deputies from every settlement of the oblast, to resolve the situation on the grassroots level.⁷⁶

The idea of the commission was not the invention of the Military Council but the result of Mikhailov's endeavor. It can be assumed that at some point in August or September the head of the oblast or someone from the Host's administration seized the initiative of convening the assembly to elaborate the mandate and adapted it for another task. It was with this idea in mind that Mikhailov went to Tiflis and, after that, to St. Petersburg to seek permission from his superiors. On September 29, he had a talk with Nicholas II over the issue of the council, and the latter, as the further fate of the initiative suggests, sanctioned the proposition.⁷⁷ The Rada's case progressed promptly and just twelve days after the Military Council decreed to convene the "commission," the Emperor approved the decree officially.⁷⁸

Although it is not possible to trace in detail how the authorities in Tiflis and St. Petersburg addressed the case of the Rada, or who played the pivotal part in permitting the assembly, a semi-official anonymous account, most probably written by Shcherbina, testifies that when Mikhailov requested permission from the Viceroy, the latter expressed his moral support, but did not give his written approval, as he was not willing to assume responsibility for such a risky initiative. Instead, he suggested that Mikhailov seek the Emperor's permission.⁷⁹

The viceroy's endorsement and his apparent personal part in the whole initiative should not be underestimated, for the very idea of the Rada and the principles it was based on well corresponded to the model of rule he adopted during his tenure. Count Illarion Vorontsov-Dashkov's mission as the head of the Caucasus Viceroyalty, established in early 1905, was to ameliorate social and ethnic tensions that plagued the imperial order in South Caucasia. In striking contrast to the manner of rule practiced by his predecessors and provincial governors elsewhere in the empire, his patterns of governance turned out to be surprisingly liberal-looking and ran counter to the conservative ideologies of the regime.⁸⁰ Vorontsov-Dashkov's liberalism, however limited and moderate it was, was a major departure from the previous policy of steadfast Russification and implied considerable toleration of the local cultural diversity and, moreover, the encouragement of the local population's initiative. In his manifesto to the population of the Caucasus, which declared the principles of the viceroy's rule for the prospective years, Vorontsov-Dashkov announced his intention to rely on all public forces and, so as to learn more about the needs and aspirations of the local inhabitants, to convoke assemblies of representatives elected from social groups, including nobility, townsfolk, rural communities, and clergymen. Coming together, as the viceroy expected, they would be able to speak out about the most urgent measures they wished him to implement.⁸¹

The mechanism of consultative assemblies composed of people's representatives to solve pressing social and political problems that state functionaries felt unable to solve on their own was first tested in February 1906. The so-called Armenian-Tatar (Azeri) convention was an attempt by Vorontsov-Dashkov to put an end to the most dramatic conflict in the South Caucasus – massacres between Armenian and Muslim populations sparked during the Revolution – by bringing together representatives of warring parties who would address the issues that ignited the conflict.⁸² As *Kavkaz* characterized the convention, it was the first time when the “principle of popular representation” was used in the Caucasus on a broad scale, unseen anywhere else in the empire. The “implementation of this principle in practice,” the newspaper declared, was “the main task of our time. One cannot solve pertinent matters of people's life without letting the people speak out, without listening to them.”⁸³

The overall political enthusiasm throughout the Russian Empire, the emergence of political parties, the electoral process to the State Duma, and the proclamation of civil liberties made the notion of popular representation – and along with it the ideas of autonomism and federalism – the catchwords of the time, especially in the Caucasus.⁸⁴ Discussions about Georgian autonomy became a recurrent feature of local intellectual life, with speeches and roundtables on this topic gathering hundreds of listeners.⁸⁵ *Kavkaz*, where reports on these activities were actively published, saw the Armenian-Muslim convention as the model for a possible Georgian assembly drawn from the members of all social groups that would discuss and decide on the nature and extent of Georgian autonomy.⁸⁶ Others insisted on the necessity to organize a special Caucasus council, or a *seim*, composed of deputies from all over the Caucasus, functioning as the

parliament of the viceroyalty with legislative competence in matters of local significance.⁸⁷

The Ukrainian public sphere was also swept by the same spirit. Urges to convoke “our own free *rada*” that would rule the Ukrainians of all classes and estates, permeated the pages of leading periodicals during the Revolution.⁸⁸ Yet it was Ekaterinodar, not Kiev/Kyiv, where an assembly called Rada opened its sessions in 1906. At the time of its convocation, commentators rightfully noticed that whereas no conventions of representatives of this kind were allowed throughout the empire, especially concerning such acute issues as the land question, Kuban oblast, despite being under martial law, presented a striking exception.⁸⁹ Fedor Shcherbina claimed credit for the eventual approval of the Rada. In his memoirs, he expressed his confidence that the Emperor was driven by his knowledge of the history of Zaporozhia. Shcherbina assured that Nicholas II had learned about the great “historical significance” of *rada* as early as his childhood from the book, written and presented to him by Shcherbina in 1888, during his and Alexander’s III visit to Ekaterinodar. But if this testimony reveals us much about the intentions behind the welcoming ceremony of Alexander III, it hardly can be taken for granted with regard to the events that took place 18 years later.⁹⁰

Whether or not any historical knowledge guided the Tsar and the Military Council, they were doubtlessly guided by purely pragmatic reason – to improve the economic plight of the Cossacks, to relieve real or impeding social tensions that might have been caused by land shortage, and to prevent possible acts of disobedience of Cossack military units. The government, thus, forestalled the Revolution by making a modest, but highly significant revolutionary step toward the needs of the Cossack population. Naturally, it hardly could be possible elsewhere in the empire, while the Kuban region was seen as loyal enough to venture into such a risky experiment. As a result, the imperial government appreciated the Rada’s achievements in the issue of land demarcation. What is more, it allowed the Don Cossacks to solve their respective land question collectively, with the help of the same procedure. In Don, a “Host consultative assembly” convened in 1909 (although Nicholas II permitted its convocation as early as March 1907). As in the Kuban region, its participants and the local public styled it as the restoration of an old tradition, the *krug* (“circle”). In contrast to the Rada, however, it did not adopt the “historical” name officially, and the usage of the word “Krug” was rather limited to the unofficial sphere.⁹¹

The idea of the *rada* made a spectacular “return” after the Russian Empire ceased to exist, in the wake of the February Revolution of 1917, this time as a revolutionary government of the Kuban region. The recent experience of 1906 offered a ready-to-use template during a new crisis – and a well-remembered name to adopt. Even though debates followed among Black Sea and Line Cossack delegates as to whether the new organ should be called according to a Zaporozhian tradition, or in line with the old Don practice, the *krug*, the *rada* was the choice most of the Cossacks opted for.⁹² In so doing, an invented tradition of 1906, the *rada*, served as an already established tradition to rely on for the Rada of 1917.

Conclusion

Just as it was throughout the empire, the Revolution of 1905–1906 was a major turning point in social, political, and cultural developments in the Kuban region. One of the Cossacks' responses to the Revolution was the establishment of the Rada, conceived as an autonomous, quasi-parliamentary organ for running the local affairs. The initiators of the Rada designed it as a restoration of the ancient Zaporozhian custom. In the end, reference to the experience of the past made the convention of the Rada possible, but only as a one-off event. The Rada's task was to redistribute the spare lands of the Host. Yet, additionally, discussions at its sessions brought to the fore the collateral question of the enduring disunion of the Kuban historical territories. In a sense, the Rada objectified the ideas of Chernomoria and Linia and rendered the division between them fixed, tangible, and possible to be spoken about publicly. The idea of Chernomoria with all its cultural linkages to the "metropole" Ukraine and its Zaporozhian pride, which officially ceased to exist in 1860, came to the fore as a given reality.

Notes

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