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The First Debate on the Organization of State Statistics in the Russian Empire

Abstract

The article is devoted to the history of state statistical institutions formation in Russia in the first quarter of the 19th century. In that period, the government gradually came to understand the statistics role in public administration, and yet varying views of the leading statesmen on the

goals of administrative statistics resulted in long search for optimal configuration of the statistical agency. Exponents of opposite approaches were the Minister of Police A. D. Balashev and Minister of Internal Affairs V. P. Kochubey. The full text of Balashev's project "On the statistical institution," submitted in 1819 for the Committee of Ministers consideration, is being published for the first time, as well as Kochubey's opinion on the issue. It is noted that Balashev's project encapsulated his ongoing efforts to create the statistical Department of the Ministry of Police, the first body of administrative statistics in Russia. The department was established in 1810 with participation of the Academy of Sciences member, statistician Karl F. Herman. Later, the structure of the department was improved, the problems of staffing and funding solved. The initial ministry staff did not allow for the creation of a separate statistical body, and its activities were regulated only by intra-ministerial instructions. New administrative reform of 1819, when the Ministry of Police merged with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, called into question the future of administrative statistics in Russia. Balashev lost his ministerial post. The status of the statistical department, created as an intra-ministerial experiment, was undefined. In the circumstances, Balashev attempted to preserve the statistical department, formalizing its place in the central administration structure; he sent his proposals to the Committee of Ministers. Balashev's project raised issues of centralization of statistical research (which remains relevant up to date) and proposed to secure the statistical agency's independent status. He also put forward an idea of involving the scientific community in statistical work through creation of the Statistical Society. The essence of Kochubey's report on Balashev's project amounted to developing statistical units within different ministries and to abandoning all plans for centralized aggregation of statistical information. The projects' historical context and their significance for evolution of statistics in the Russian Empire are considered.

Keywords

Historical sources, reform projects, history of statistics, administrative statistics, A. D. Balashev, V. P. Kochubey, K. F. Hermann.

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