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Gadilya G. Kornoukhova, Marina N. Moseikina

Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Moscow, Russian Federation

Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults and the Religious Policy of the USSR in the Central Asian Republics during Late Stalinism: Archival Documents

Abstract

The article is devoted to the issue of the USSR central authorities control over religious life in the Central Asian republics during Late Stalinism. Thus, the subject of research is the activities of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults under the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR, which was established at May 19, 1944 as a state body for the management of religious issues in the Union republics by mean of the institution of Commissioners. This one was a kind of barometer of the religious situation at the local level, but it was also responsible for the implementation of initiatives coming from the center. The structure of the article is determined

by the need for a consistent analysis of the interaction of these institutions: Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults ? Representatives of the Council in the Republics ? Representatives in the regions. Special attention is paid to the Central Asian Spiritual Board of Muslims Activities established in 1943. The study is based on the meeting minutes of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults under the Council of Ministers of the USSR stored in the State Archive of the Russian Federation. These documents, collected in a single file of 529 pages, clearly reflect the state of the Soviet religious policy in Central Asia. The protocols contain rich materials of vigorous debates with the participation of members of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults, who analyzed the reports of republican Representatives in detail and spotted some serious defects of the system functioning. The authors reveal a correlation between the operational information from the Commissioners in the republics and the Council's timely response to the problematic situations on the ground. It is also noted that regional leaders did not possess the necessary competences for effective work in the field of national and religious policy, as the Soviet state required. This article disproves that Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults was an effective state authority for the management of religious life in the Central Asian republics in Late Stalinism. Such a characteristic of this structure is more applicable to the period of subsequent decades of Soviet history, but not to late 1940s.

Keywords

Historical sources, archive, Late Stalinism, state-religious relations, USSR, Central Asia.

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About authors

Kornoukhova Gadilya Gizatullaevna, PhD in History, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University), Department of Russian History, associate professor, Moscow, Russian Federation, +7-495-434-12-12, kornouh@mail.ru

Moseikina Marina Nikilaevna, PhD in History, professor, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University), department of Russian history, professor, Moscow, Russian Federation, +7-916-675-48-96, marina_moseikina@mail.ru

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