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A New Document on the Porto Franco Regime in the Crimea: 1798–99

Abstract

The article publishes the “Statute of the Taurida Governorate” (April 23, 1798) prepared by the Prosecutor general Alexei Kurakin. At the time, he and members of the Expedition of State Economy and Guardianship of Foreign and Rural Economics under the Senate (1797–1803)

were working on implementation of the Paul I's decree on introduction of the porto franco regime in the Crimea for 30 years period (February 13, 1798). The decree was prepared on the basis of numerous projects sent to the consideration of the Expedition. Paul I studied the document and postponed it "until special consideration." Alexey Kurakin's project is interesting because it provides a fresh look at the process of introduction of the porto franco regime on the peninsula and permits to revise some well-established theses on the policy of Paul I in the Novorossiya region and the Crimea. Historians often accuse the emperor of seeking to destroy the endeavours of Catherine II. However, archival documents challenge this thesis. Paul I sought to reduce excessive and often unjustified costs of the region's development, made attempts to develop trade and reduce bureaucracy. The statute developed by Alexey Kurakin supplemented the decree on introduction of the porto franco regime. The Taurida Governorate was to govern the new region on a collegiate basis, headed by chief supervisor and trustee. The region was directly subordinate to the Expedition and the Senate. All institutions of power existing before the introduction of porto franco were subject to dissolution. Only Sevastopol and Kerch-Yenikale did not come under the command of chief supervisor and trustee, remaining under the military department. The Statute regulated work of the judicial system: uезд courts were dissolved, magistrates were created in their stead, elected from local inhabitants. These measures were to speed up legal proceedings, especially in commercial cases. Special attention was devoted to land conflicts on the peninsula. Alexey Kurakin proposed radical measures for solving them. He planned to relocate some categories of the Crimean Tatars population from disputed areas and, thus, to settle the conflict and begin distribution of land to foreigners. The project was not implemented due to cancellation of the porto franco regime on December 21, 1799. However, this document is a valuable source on the history of the Crimea of the period. It also allows us a better understanding of the principles of the internal policy of Paul I.

Keywords

Porto franco, Paul I, Alexey Kurakin, Crimea, Taurida oblast, Novorossiya Gubernia, Novorossiya.

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