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# IN SEARCH OF INTERNAL BALANCE: DEBATE ON CHANGES IN THE TERRITORIAL- ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE IN THE 1830S AND 1840S

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The study of empire has become extremely popular among academics over the last couple of years. Currently, the upper level of the field is being built through the comparative studies of empires. The appearance of the neologism “imperiology” in the name of a conference held in Sapporo in October 2004 testifies to the fact that, at least the conference organizers, approach the topic as constituting a distinctive area of investigations. This requires that the subject’s objective limits be carefully considered, especially facing the possibility that almost every aspect of life in an empire might be labeled “imperial.”

Moreover, comparativists often fall victim to hasty generalizations when they base their analysis not on historical sources (which are used merely for illustration), but instead synthesize specialist literature into more or less apt models. In creating an “empire of regions” model of pre-revolutionary Russia, the goal is not to replace theories with empirical material.<sup>1</sup> The goal is to concentrate on building explanative models more straightforwardly from concrete historical research. With this in mind, this chapter is based on archival sources. Nonetheless, its topic is not of limited, local, or insignificant character.

There were two attempts at reform in the first half of the nineteenth century that could have been of crucial importance to the administrative structuring of Russia’s imperial territory. Though the reforms were not

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<sup>1</sup> Issues that arise in the comparative study of empires are presented in the following article, prepared on the basis of presentations made in October 2003: L. E. Gorizontov, “Slavianskie narody i imperii v dolgom XIX veke. Razmyshleniia o vektorakh issledovaniia,” *Rossiiskoe slavianovedenie v nachale XXI veka: zadachi i perspektivy razvitiia. Materialy Vserossiiskogo soveshchaniia slavistov* (Moscow, 2005), pp. 115-129.

adopted in their entirety, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of these attempted reforms for the government's imperial strategy, its geopolitical thinking, and regionalism in Russia. They also had a practical importance, leading to concrete decisions and creating traditions that a number of subsequent generations would use.

The first such moment appeared during the second half of the reign of Alexander I, when the government developed a plan for dividing the empire into general governorships and introducing an element of regional (*oblast'*) self-government. For a long time, historians did not research this case. Later, the project came to be appreciated for its true scale, but the plan's practical effects were usually deemed to be limited to the Riazan experiment of General A. D. Balashev.<sup>2</sup> Recent articles by John P. LeDonne demonstrate, however, that the establishment of the general governorships was by no means limited to the discussions among high imperial bureaucracy.<sup>3</sup> The echoes of these initiatives, it might be added, were clearly felt in the 1830s and even later.

The second such attempt at reform is the subject of this chapter. Having studied a set of materials from the Russian State Historical Archive, one can describe the serious efforts by the government at the end of the 1830s to revise the empire's internal administrative borders – borders which dated from reforms carried out under Catherine the Great. Apparently, only the Lithuanian researcher, Darius Staliūnas, has dealt with these attempted reforms, but he limited his research to the founding of the Kovno province without alluding to the existence of a more extensive governmental program.<sup>4</sup>

D. N. Bludov, the representative of the circle around N. M. Karamzin and minister of internal affairs between 1832 and 1839, was the initiator and passionate proponent of these reforms. He put forward a number of designs for changing the borders of the empire's districts (*uezdy*) and provinces (*guberniia*) as well as the relocation of district

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<sup>2</sup> S. V. Mironenko, *Samoderzhavie i reformy. Politicheskaia bor'ba v nachale XIX v.* (Moscow, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> John P. LeDonne, "Administrative Regionalization in the Russian Empire 1802-1826," *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 43: 1 (2002), pp. 5-34.

<sup>4</sup> D. Staliūnas, "Problema administrativno-territorial'nykh granits v 'natsional'noi politike' imperskoi vlasti: Kovenskaia guberniia v seredine XIX veka," *Rossiiskaia imperiia: strategii stabilizatsii i opyty obnooleniia* (Voronezh, 2004), p. 148.

and provincial capitals. He believed that a regular state required order through the unification of its territory: administrative units needed to be roughly equal in population and area, the provinces needed to have their perimeters “rounded out” and to have their capital cities placed near the geographic center of province. Bludov had already done a lot to this end. In 1837, an “Order to Governors” (*Nakaz gubernatoram*) declared the governors to be the “masters of their provinces,” divided districts into police subsections, founded provincial statistical committees, and allowed for the publishing of provincial newspapers called *Gubernskii vedomosti* (Provincial News). Nonetheless, the activities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs when Bludov was minister have not yet been researched in great detail.

Already in the first half of the 1830s, the administrative heads of the New Russian *krai* as well as Vologda and Arkhangel'sk provinces sent requests to the Ministry of Internal Affairs concerning their new administrative borders. Based on these requests, Bludov had already submitted a proposal for the State Council in 1835.<sup>5</sup> Concerning the Western provinces, the changes of their borders were the minister's own initiative, motivated by other concerns. “As to the Western provinces,” Bludov wrote, “I find it necessary to change them not so much for typographic reasons as because of their political attitude toward the supreme government of the empire and its native (*korennyie*) inhabitants.”<sup>6</sup> This decision was in keeping with anti-Polish measures taken after the rebellion of 1830-31, measures that were toughened in answer to the activeness of Polish conspiracies.<sup>7</sup> It was precisely the Western provinces that were doomed to be pushed to the forefront of debate on the changing of Russia's administrative borders.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs prepared three projects concerning the Northern and Western provinces as well as the provinces of New Russia. However, these proposals were not immediately presented to

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<sup>5</sup> Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv (RGIA), f. 1290, op. 4, d. 59, l. 14ob. The main source for this chapter, *Delo po projektu o novom razgranichenii gubernii* is kept in the collection of the Central Statistical Committee of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and contains 64 documents, the last one of which is dated the end of 1844.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 56-56ob.

<sup>7</sup> L. Gorizontov, “Russko-pol'skoe protivostoianie 19- nachala 20 vekov v geopoliticheskom izmerenii,” *Japanese Slavic and East European Studies* 24 (2003), pp. 103-132.

the Emperor, prompting Bludov to accompany them by an additional explanatory note.

Nicholas I approved these initial proposals on April 16, 1838 (marking them, “fully agree”). Thus, with His Majesty’s backing, a committee was formed of those ministers most interested in the issue. K. I. Arseniev, head of the statistical division of the council of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, chaired the committee’s chancellery. He was one of the pioneers of Russian regional studies. As the crown prince’s tutor, he and his pupil had made a famous trip around Russia to familiarize the future Tsar with the empire’s various regions. It seems that Arseniev had already taken an active part in the adjustment of administrative borders. Attracted to the work of the committee, he “provided detailed... information” for Bludov’s planned revisions.<sup>8</sup>

“Under the general title of Western provinces,” states the relevant proposal, “now (and not for a long time) is meant the provinces recovered from Poland in 1772, 1793, and 1795: the provinces of Mogilev, Vitebsk, Minsk, Kiev, Volhynia (Volyn), Podolia, Grodno, and Vilna as well as the Bialystok *oblast’* claimed by Alexander I in 1807.” The Western provinces had a combined area of about 8,000 square miles and a population of 9,120,817. “The largest portion of this wide strip of the empire consists of ancient property of Russia. Only so-called Lithuania can be limited to the three districts in Vilna province: the districts of Vilna, Troki, and Kovno; all of the inhabitants of these lands, except for the Lithuanians and Zhmud themselves, were for a long time of the same religious and ethnic group [as we were].” Foreign rule had not made them “completely different from Russians in their habits and customs, or even in their civic and religious organization.”<sup>9</sup>

The proposal harkened back through two intervening reigns to the wishes of Catherine the Great, as it was felt that “we have not come closer to the moral unification of Lithuania with Russia” under the reign of Alexander I. Bludov recalled that Catherine “desired that these lands join in one indivisible mass with an unchanging Russia, so that its inhabitants again became relatives of the Russians, became completely Russianized, and that the differences brought about by time and politics disappeared

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<sup>8</sup> RGIA, f. 1290, op. 4, d. 59, ll. 97ob.-98; f. 560, op. 12, d. 77, l. 1ob.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 128-128ob.

forever more." However, according to Bludov, the provinces had been established during Catherine's reign in a "hurried" manner. This criticism was necessary to establish the need for Bludov's own project of administrative changes; Catherine's reforms were highly regarded in upper bureaucratic circles, even a half a century later.<sup>10</sup>

The minister of internal affairs found the basic distinction between the fate of two parts of Eastern Belorussia, areas around the Dvina and Dnieper Rivers that became Russian territory as a result of the Polish partitions: "The lands surrounding the Dvina River, administered by one government and with similar regulations as purely Russian areas... quickly adapted to the new order... While the areas surrounding the Dnieper have not been as quick in joining with Russian areas. Mogilev province was formed entirely out of former Polish provinces and the inhabitants, having not been drawn closer to the Russian nation, were for a long time affected by feelings for their imaginary former freedoms, and kept reminiscing about their noisy *sejmiks*."<sup>11</sup> Bludov took on the task of "giving them new borders, a new composition, so that some territories neighboring purely Russian areas, where feasible, can unite with these areas into one whole."<sup>12</sup> The project expressed confidence that "all of these districts, introduced into an entirely Russian system, would soon lose the last traces of having been ruled by Lithuania and Poland, and would become proud of their Russian name; at least, this can be expected from the new, young generation of inhabitants."<sup>13</sup>

The transfer of a part of one province to a neighboring province was supposed to improve the "national spirit," tying the national periphery to the imperial center. In particular, it was suggested that joining lands from the former *Rzeczpospolita* to Pskov and Smolensk provinces would increase the conversion of Uniates. "These followers of another faith, when put into necessary company with other inhabitants of the province, which have long since been Russian and never parted with the Orthodox church, will probably, even slowly, leave their national and religious biases and, if not in terms of religion, then at least in terms of

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., ll. 128ob., 129ob., 130.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., ll. 128ob.-129.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., l. 131.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., l. 135.

habits and feelings of loyalty to the government, who protects all equally, become purely Russian."<sup>14</sup>

In their turn, "those areas of Vilna and Minsk provinces that were joined to Vitebsk province were separating from Lithuania and entering the mode of life of Belorussia, which is more accustomed to the system of Russian government, may also soon become similar to the Russians."<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that the use of Lithuania and Belorussia in the previous quote does not denote ethnic territories, but rather historic regions. Vilna province, according to the data of the Ministry of Internal Affairs "consisted of two different parts," that is districts "properly Lithuanian-Russian" [i.e. ethnically Slavic] and those that were "Zhmd or Samogitian" [i.e. ethnically Lithuanian]. The Ministry believed that "each of these parts could create a separate whole." (However, a different solution was included in Bludov's proposal on the Western provinces: "Maybe it would be better for all Zhmd areas to be united with Kurland despite their differences in language, religion, and certain local laws and rights.")<sup>16</sup> The proposal continued that "now, thirty years after Bialystok's unification with Russia, there does not seem to be any reason for the continued existence of a separate Bialystok *oblast'*."<sup>17</sup>

Bludov's proposals did not directly raise any doubts about the further existence of a Belorussian and a Little Russian general governorship comprised of Smolensk, Mogilev, and Vitebsk provinces in the former case and of Poltava and Chernigov provinces in the latter case. However, a closer reading reveals that their continued existence would have been problematic taking into consideration suggested changes that would have united the Left and Right banks of the Dnieper River. "Then Kiev would be in the center of its proposed province and would be more connected to provinces that have long been Orthodox and Russianized, which is especially important now given the existence a university there." Kiev province would "gain a new element of national strength and national spirit whose effect could be important, especially

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., ll. 138-138ob.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., l. 135.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., l. 142ob. The latter idea was also discussed in the 1860s. See Staliunas, "Problema administrativno-territorial'nykh granits..."

<sup>17</sup> RGIA, f. 1290, op. 4, d. 59, ll. 132ob.-133.

during gentry elections."<sup>18</sup> Characterizing Kiev as the "land, so to say, that was the cradle of our Orthodoxy and is sacred by the memory of the ancient Russian mode of life," Bludov referred to the Poles in this regard as belonging to "another tribe" (*inoplemenniki*).<sup>19</sup>

The proposal described Chernigov province as "characterized by the heterogeneous, tripartite character of its population; the northern districts are closer to Belorussia, by characteristics of their land and customs of inhabitants, while the eastern lands are closer to Great Russian areas and southern and western areas are purely Little Russian in nature." The proposal suggested splitting this territory into two provinces—a separate Novgorod-Seversk province had existed under Catherine the Great.<sup>20</sup>

The expansive, populous, and border province of Volhynia presented Bludov with a number of problems. There were serious issues with Zhitomir, the province's capital, as its location was "incomparably worse than Grodno," of which, as we will see later, the strategists in St. Petersburg had a very unfavorable opinion. The proposal claims that the "better and more populous towns in Volhynia province are Starokonstantinov, Dubno, and Zaslav; however, all three are on private property." Novgorod-Volynskii and Vinnitsa were considered as future capitals for the province.<sup>21</sup>

By suggesting changes, as Bludov wrote to Nicholas I, he sought "wherever possible to favor the implementation...of the beneficent intention of Your Imperial Majesty to draw the West closer to the center of the Empire, weakening the feelings of alienation that had recently been discovered to the mutual detriment of Russia's natural sons as well as her adopted kinsmen (*iedinoplemenniki*) of various religions."<sup>22</sup> Notably, Bludov already writes here of "kinsmen."

In the review of the administrative structuring of the Northern Black Sea area, the proposal noted the "general...organism of the New Russian provinces." In view of its "unreasonable size" and the growth of

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, I. 151.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, I. 26.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, I. 151.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, II. 133, 147 ob., 150.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, I. 133 ob.

vagrancy, it was suggested that five provinces be established to replace the current three.<sup>23</sup>

The formation of a province centered in Odessa was planned because all of the inhabitants of surrounding districts considered it “their general center.”<sup>24</sup> It was suggested that a second new province be formed around Taganrog, a recommendation put forward by the governor general of New Russia and Bessarabia, M. S. Vorontsov. “The establishment of this province,” reads the relevant proposal, “would more quickly and more comfortably connect Ukraine and the interior provinces with the lands bordering the [Azov] sea. This would make it easier to execute the blessed orders of His Majesty given to the land of the Don Cossacks.”

To provide a theoretical underpinning to these suggestions, it was argued that the capital of a seaside province should be located on the coast rather than in the geographic center of the province. A note crossed out in the margins, stated that “maybe it will prove not impossible to make Rostov the capital of the land of the Don Cossacks, at least as it is desired by many.”<sup>25</sup> So the needs of the neighboring districts along the Don were taken into consideration when discussing the design of the provinces of the New Russian general governorship.

In Tavrida province, the Ministry of Internal Affairs proposed that Bakhchisarai be transformed into a district capital. “Bakhchisarai,” reads the proposal for the New Russian general governorship, “as the former capital of the khans, retains and will retain, along with their graves, alienation from everything that is Russian far into the future, if its purely Asian population is not mixed with a Russian population. Naming [the city] a district capital will do great deal of good [to this end].”<sup>26</sup> This, however, never happened, probably because there was an opposing logic that sought to avoid making any town with a non-Russian spirit into an administrative center.

In the case of the “northern provinces,” the Ministry of the Internal Affairs deviated from the widely accepted regional division. In its

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 155ob.-156.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 157ob.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 160ob., 162, 163.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 160.



proposals, the ministry included among the northern Vologda, Olonets, Novgorod, Pskov, Arkhangelsk, and St. Petersburg provinces. According to Bludov, the first three of these “now belonged to the provinces that present the most difficulties to local authorities.” The Ministry’s thoroughly practical approach found expression in the comment that Arkhangelsk province is “important for the government mainly in relations to its commercial and military functions, and, maybe, for administering non-Russian tribes (*inorodtsy*).”

The government returned to the idea of elevating the status of Ustiug Velikii to that of the capital of a planned new province. It stressed the fact that the town at one time had its own princely family and “generously offered asylum to princes in exile...like Dmitrii Shemiaka.” Ustiug “still belongs to the richest and best district capitals in Russia.” Many provincial capitals, such as Petrozavodsk, Chernigov, Vladimir, Viatka, and Grodno, “can not compare with it in terms of their industry or the wealth of inhabitants.”<sup>27</sup>

Bludov’s proposals were sent for comments to other members of the committee, which included the minister of finance, E. F. Kankrin; the minister of state properties, P. D. Kiselev; and the minister of justice, D. V. Dashkov. The minister of finance set a critical tone, being the first to review the proposals, which were only subsequently sent to his colleagues together with the minister’s comments.

“To some extent,” suggested the minister of finance, “some provinces have such different characters that it will be inconvenient to join part of one province to another – such as the Little Russian provinces, which due to Cossacks are so different from others, for example, Kiev province, that unification of such opposing, sometimes adversarial parts cannot lead to the good administration that should be affected in this case, so to say, in dubious manners – not to mention other difficulties.” These other difficulties were already outside of the competencies of the Ministry of Finance. “In terms of finance and state property, important differences exist in various provinces. For example, Kiev province has rental property, Chernigov province has lands granted to the Cossacks, and the New Russian *krai* has neither rental property nor Cossack lands, except for some not numerous estates.” The minister of finance was afraid

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 5, 8-9, 24ob.

of “mixing the characters.”<sup>28</sup> It is notable that the Little Russian provinces and the Southwestern *krai* were used in the documents to illustrate the thesis of mutually opposed neighboring regions.

When considering regional differences, the bureaucratic elite of Nicholas I’s reign was concerned first and foremost with characteristic elements of local estate structures and especially the nobility. In this context, Kankrin’s evaluation went to extremes. “Due to the long existence of the current division of provinces,” he contended, “each has become, so to say, a moral whole or self-sufficient society, in which personal and material connections between the inhabitants are more unified with each other than they are with other provinces. Therefore, any change in the composition of the provinces will cause great disruptions to society.” In particular, Kankrin referred to the fact that “the nobility in different areas do not know each other.”<sup>29</sup> This type of argument blocked the effective use of territorial-administrative division as an instrument of imperial policy and, moreover, contradicted the unifying ambitions of autocracy.

The minister of finance was more convincing in areas related to the specialty of his ministry, writing about losses to the treasury that would unavoidably arise from the administrative reorganization and the growth in the number of bureaucrats. “Every new place,” concluded Kankrin, knowing that such rhetoric would not be ignored in the emperor’s closest circle of advisors, “creates a tax on the people, so to speak.” According to the minister’s calculations, 1,5 million rubles per year would be needed for the establishment of five new provinces “not including initial expenses.” Potential effects on income, such as duties on wine sales, raised special concern.<sup>30</sup>

According to Kankrin, the ease of governing a province depended “not so much on its area... as on the overall size of its population” and “the spirit of its inhabitants.” Provincial capitals, for this reason, should not be located in a province’s geographic center, but in its most populous areas. Distances were not so important: “the only difference will be that letters arrive in one day or a few days later.” Worrying about “round-

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., ll. 41ob.-42.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., ll. 41-41ob.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., ll. 41ob., 42ob.-44ob.

ing out" the territory of any given administrative unit was therefore unnecessary.<sup>31</sup>

The bureaucratic elite ranked provinces according to the difficulty of their administration. "Vitebsk province belongs to the list of rather easy provinces," assured Kankrin. From this he concluded that the "separation of Polotsk province is of no special need." However, from the minister's point of view, Belorussian provinces that had still not recovered from the losses inflicted by Napoleon's invasion presented special difficulties. "Vilna province is rather complicated" in Kankrin's opinion. However, even in this case, a reorganization was not reasonable, because after the creation of a new Shavli province, the Northwestern *krai* would not be united under the rule of one governor general.<sup>32</sup>

Kankrin postulated that "in certain matters, historic recollections could cause the renewal of the name of previous princedoms or provinces; but this did not constitute any significant need."<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, no information is available on the direct connection between this statement of the minister of finance, made in 1838, and an 1840 decree forbidding use of the words "Belorussian" and "Lithuanian" in the names of groups of provinces.

Without expressing any enthusiasm concerning the Ministry of Internal Affairs' proposals, Kankrin concluded his commentary with a reminder that there were more important matters than the reforming of the empire's administrative borders. As an example, he mentioned the forthcoming reform of state villages.<sup>34</sup> This eased the task of P. D. Kiselev, minister of state properties, who received Bludov's proposals immediately after they had been analyzed by the Ministry of Finance.

The head of the recently formed Ministry of State Properties supported in principle the idea of "joining certain areas with Polish inhabitants to native Russian provinces for their moral assimilation with Russia." However, Kiselev was skeptical of the practical consequences of Bludov's plans. The project, in Kiselev's opinion, "limited itself to the joining of a very small amount of the total population of the Western provinces

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., ll. 44ob.-45, 46.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., l. 45ob. Shavli is the present Siauliai in Lithuania.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., ll. 45ob.-46.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., ll. 46-46ob.

to Great Russian provinces – precisely up to 250,000 inhabitants of both genders from Kiev and Podolia provinces because the majority of the population in the districts to be separated from Vitebsk and Moligev provinces are Russian.”<sup>35</sup>

According to the minister’s comment, shifting the Belorussian sections of the 1772 border would mean that the Jewish population would now be included in Russia’s interior provinces: in case of reform, the Pale of Settlement would no longer match the provincial borders. Kiselev questioned “what measures must be undertaken concerning Jews who will now appear in large numbers in Great Russian provinces where according the general regulations they are not be tolerated?” Moreover the Lithuanian Statute was still in force in the Western *krai*, from where cases were sent to special departments of the Senate.<sup>36</sup> Kiselev also pointed out the undesirability of destroying the results of general land-surveying.<sup>37</sup>

Kiselev expected that local opinions might considerably change the Ministry of Internal Affairs’ plans which he understood as far from final. The minister of state properties raised the idea that reform might be implemented in stages and suggested beginning with the northern provinces, “where no special barriers can exist; and then, probably, the southern provinces can be reorganized; and, finally, the Western provinces where we mainly face the current difficulties.”<sup>38</sup> “Due to the multiple difficulties of the project,” the decision was made in April 1838 “not to implement simultaneously all of the suggested changes in the entirety of their scope, but to carry out the reforms in stages, beginning with those provinces where the carrying out of such reforms are not foreseen as presenting special difficulties, namely with the northern provinces.”<sup>39</sup>

There were not that many original criticisms left for the minister of justice to make. He evidently was not as emphatic in his opinions as were Kankrin and Kiselev. He feared “double legal proceedings” in one and the same province as well as the violation of existing privileges. He

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 47-47ob.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 48.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 49ob.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 50-50ob.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 15.

also mentioned a number of decisive measures already undertaken to liquidate the regional peculiarities of the Western *krai*, such as the introduction of the use of Russian in legal proceedings and the closing of monasteries. The Ministry of Justice itself did not notice any significant difference in dealing with the provinces, the number of cases being largely proportional to their population.<sup>40</sup>

The minister of justice pointed out that the suggested transfer of part of St. Petersburg province to Pskov province would lead to a drop in prices on estates there, because prices in the capital province were higher. Such a move would no doubt "cause dissatisfaction and protest from the owners." Besides, estate owners in St. Petersburg province "usually spend the majority of their time, if not the entire year in the capital."<sup>41</sup> "The transfer of districts from one province to another," concluded the minister, "should only happen in provinces of similar administration, avoiding, wherever possible, the division of existing districts."<sup>42</sup> It is clear that fulfilling this requirement would negate the political element of Bludov's project.

Reacting to the three ministers' criticism, Bludov drafted an answer in the form of an extensive memorandum that, according to his correspondence with Kankrin, was evidently already completed by February 1839.<sup>43</sup> Apparently, the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs had not expected the projects to receive such a skeptical reception from his ministerial colleagues and was quick to distance himself from any suggestions that he was drafting showy, impractical schemes, a practice that would not have been positively viewed in the upper echelons of government during Nicholas I's conservative reign. "When designing my proposals," wrote Bludov, "I was not taken by a love of innovations" and was far from any "blind and detrimental passion for the new."<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, he was not going to retreat.

Agreeing to reorganize provincial boundaries in stages, Bludov decisively rejected any doubts about the usefulness of redrawing the

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 52-52ob., 53ob.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 54ob.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 55ob.

<sup>43</sup> RGIA, f. 560, op. 12, d. 77, l. 24.

<sup>44</sup> RGIA, f. 1290, op. 4, d. 59, l. 64ob.

administrative map. Not all provinces, he claimed, had a special spirit. Statements about a "moral whole," wrote Bludov, "maybe to a certain degree justified in relation to the central provinces, though not to all, but... it could hardly be applied to the provinces of New Russia and Vologda... The New Russian *krai*, organized much later, presents so far neither a sense of unity among its population nor the agreement and unity in the direction of popular activities which are evident in the interior provinces. Given the recentness of the region's settlement, its ethnic variety, and the great variety of its nature, there are no specific local and in some places, even social ties yet, except of those arising from being under the direction of one governmental center."

Vologda province deserved to be reorganized "not only in respect of its vast area, but also and more importantly because of the different qualities of its population, industry, property relations, and the spirit of its inhabitants." Its western regions' agriculture delivered produce to St. Petersburg, Moscow, Novgorod, Yaroslavl, and Kostroma provinces. Only three districts had estate owners and local nobility. The eastern regions were settled only by state peasants, *polovniki* (share-croppers), and non-Russian Komi (*zyriane*). The population here is occupied with crafts, fishing, forestry, and the maintenance of trade ties with Arkhangelsk, the Urals region, and Siberia. "It even has more ties to this most distant *krai* than to the other half of its own province," concluded Bludov.

"The Western provinces," continued the minister of internal affairs, "may constitute more or less this moral whole or a self-sufficient, almost separate society, much like certain central Russian provinces... but it is exactly this separateness or self-sufficiency which are not in agreement with the general needs of the empire... that seems to justify" the plan.<sup>45</sup>

Catherine the Great realized her provincial reform for more than ten years, though the task facing her was in no way less grandiose in its scope than was Bludov's plan. Bludov saw the necessity of polling the opinions of the officials of the affected regions, but also noted that the Ministry of Internal Affairs' plans had been based in part on local information and were in some cases even instigated at the initiative of regional administrations. At the same time, since opinions gathered from

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., ll. 57-58ob.

the regions tended to be contradictory, the central government needed to take the initiative. In fact, in creating provinces, Catherine the Great did not act “consultatively, but authoritatively.”<sup>46</sup>

Neither the Cossacks nor the Jews gave Bludov any reason to pause. According to him, the Cossacks formed only a little more than one-third of the population of Chernigov and Poltava provinces: “Adding a few Little Russian districts with Cossack population to Kiev province would not lead, in my opinion, to such discomfort and difficulties as is now created... by the lack of a Russian spirit and Russian nationality on the right bank of the Dnieper.” It had been a long time since a Russian had been elected the head of the provincial nobility in Kiev province. The minister called upon his colleagues to “allow the Russian nobility to affect... the people.” “The unification of some parts of Little Russia with other provinces is nothing new,” reminded Bludov, characterizing the left bank of the Dnieper as consisting of “purely Russian districts.” As far as the Jews were concerned, Bludov did not intend any shift in the borders of the Pale of Settlement, confirming that it would not be extended beyond the four new districts of Smolensk province.<sup>47</sup>

Going on the counterattack, the minister of the internal affairs pointed out that “many of the central, properly Russian, provinces” were also in need of reform. Moreover, he promised to pay due attention to provinces in the eastern part of European Russia. “In the eastern edge of the Empire,” his sights fell on Saratov, Orenburg, Perm, and Viatka provinces. He suggested creating a new Samara province in the “lower Volga lands” based on the region’s rapid settlement over the previous thirty years.<sup>48</sup>

Ministry of Internal Affairs’ papers as well as the proposals by other ministries and local opinions contain a large number of statements explaining the insufficient management, possibilities to optimize regional administration, and corresponding obstacles.

A few months after receiving comments on his proposals, Bludov left the post of minister of internal affairs, at first replacing D. V. Dashkov as minister of justice, and then heading the Second Department in the emperor’s Chancellery and the Department of Laws of the State Council.

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 58ob.-61.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 68-69.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 70ob.-71.

Bludov's successor at the Ministry of Internal Affairs was A. G. Stroganov, the former governor general of Chernigov, Kharkov, and Poltava provinces, who appealed to allow the former minister to continue participating in the work of the committee, an appeal that was sanctioned by the emperor in January 1840.<sup>49</sup>

Answering a request from N. A. Protasov, procurator of the Holy Synod, in October 1839, K. I. Arseniev noted at the end of his secret letter that "...I consider it my duty to inform Your Excellency that these proposals will probably never be realized and therefore you could hardly base any your consideration on them."<sup>50</sup> Perhaps, K. I. Arseniev, one of the most competent regional specialists, did not belong to the list of enthusiastic supporters of the project elaborated in the Ministry of Internal Affairs where he served.

From a document dated 1841, we know that the committee was already occupied then with "reforming the Western provinces and that the redrawing of the borders of the northern provinces... had been temporarily stopped."<sup>51</sup> Despite the previous decision to begin with the Northern provinces, the committee in the end preferred to begin by defining a "new establishment for the Western provinces," focusing first of all on the Northwestern provinces, which seemed the most difficult, but also the most politically urgent. In this way, the order of the reforms was determined not by the ease with which they could be implemented, but by their political importance. Obviously, "political views" took precedence over administrative priorities. The latter led to the transfer of Chigirin district from Kiev province to the New Russian *krai*. However, the reduction of more than 100,000 Orthodox residents from Kiev province noticeably worsened the balance of power in the region where, in the view of St. Petersburg, the Russian-Polish conflict was the dominant concern.<sup>52</sup>

Bludov's "western" proposal, added by Stroganov, as well as a memorandum from F. Ia. Mirkovich, governor general of the Northwestern *krai*, again figured in a committee meeting held on May 3, 1841. The

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., l. 95.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., l. 94ob.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., l. 86.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., l. 27.



main practical result of the committee's years of activity was the dissolution of Bialystok *oblast'* and the creation of Kovno province (1843). The ministers concluded that, given "Bialystok *oblast'*s limited population (260,000 inhabitants) and its small area (162 square miles), there was no justification for the *oblast'*s existence as a separate administrative unit." Also in Vilna province "the northwestern... districts (Samogitia and Zhmud) differ from the rest and constitute a separate whole, having their own national lifestyle, their own local tongue and traditions deeply rooted among inhabitants who respect them more than positive laws." The necessity of separating these districts from the rest of Vilna province was also supported by the "huge" size of the province's population.<sup>53</sup>

The aim was to remove ethnically Lithuanian territory from the Western *krai*. As previously mentioned, its unification with Kurland as part of the Baltic provinces was also admitted. Kovno province with its minimal Eastern Slavic element, populous Polonized *szlachta*, and strong Catholic element presented the greatest problems of all areas in the Western provinces.

Nowhere, with the possible exception of Volhynia, were there as many options put forward for the locations of provincial capitals as in the Northwestern *krai*. The motivation for the eventual choice was unexpectedly non-political in nature. General Mikrovich suggested making Brest a provincial capital. The committee, for its part, spoke out in favor of Bialystok. "Bialystok," records the committee journal, "has recently benefited from a significant increase of industrial immigrants from the Kingdom of Poland. The city is evidently improved and in its current condition is already equal to that of many provincial capitals. If lowered to the level of a district capital, it will no doubt lose the momentum of this development to the detriment of the entire surrounding region." As an *oblast'* center, Bialystok had all the state establishments necessary for a provincial capital, as well as a lyceum and a boarding school for young ladies. As far as the main alternative to Bialystok was concerned, the committee commented that "Brest, remaining a district center, will never lose its importance, having already made itself into a crucial center in the military sense."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> RGIA, f. 1287, op. 24, d. 629, ll. 6, 7-7ob.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 6ob.

Bludov at first suggested uniting the ethnically Lithuanian districts into a province with its capital in Shavli, the geographic center of the would-be administrative unit. The committee preferred Rossieny, “the best and richest town in Samogitia,” which was admitted by Bludov as well. Much emphasis was put on the quality of not only provincial capitals, but also district ones. For example, Keidany was proposed as a district capital in the planned Rossieny province as “the richest *mestechko* in all of Lithuania with the wharf on the Nevezh River and 2,500 inhabitants.”<sup>55</sup>

Since the proposals called for Grodno province to be reduced to two districts, Grodno and Lida, the very necessity of it was eliminated. So the town of Grodno was in real danger of losing its status as an administrative center. “The town of Grodno,” concluded the committee, “does not provide any benefit for the administration of the province. It is located on the empire’s very border, on the very edge of its province, so that, despite the province’s not overly great length, there are towns located more than 200 *versts* from the provincial capital.”<sup>56</sup>

Many plans for transferring administrative centers were destined not to be realized. No new provinces were ever named after Bialystok or Rossieny, while Grodno remained a provincial capital.

As can be seen, the practical results of the large-scale program—a project that Bludov planned to expand to an even greater territory in the near future—were not great. The benefits of creating the new structures were not so large as to warrant the large cost involved in making the changes. Other priorities took precedence over the political agenda: for example, the previously mentioned reform of state villages (which, by the way, also hindered the Russian colonization of the western parts of the empire, another imperial project).<sup>57</sup> The rejection of the implementation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs’ plans was not principal in character and echoes of these plans can be found in the activities of future administrative schemers.

Attempts to optimize the New Russian *krai*’s administrative borders continued. Samara province was eventually founded in the middle of the

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<sup>55</sup> RGIA, f. 1290, op. 4, d. 59, ll. 142ob.-143ob.; RGIA, f. 1287, op. 24, d. 629, l. 8.

<sup>56</sup> RGIA, f. 1287, op. 24, d. 629, l. 7.

<sup>57</sup> L. E. Gorizontov, *Paradoksy imperskoi politiki: Poliaki v Rossii i russkie v Pol'she (XIX-nachalo XX v.)* (Moscow, 1999), p. 125.

nineteenth century; then Ufa province appeared. A number of plans for reforming the Western *krai* were drawn up following the Polish crises of the 1860s, including projects drafted by societal representatives. Justifying his plan to “erase” the historical border of 1772, I. S. Aksakov referred back to the Ministry of Internal Affairs’ work from the second half of the 1830s, about which he, evidently, knew as a state official responsible then for carrying out government inspections in various regions.<sup>58</sup>

More important, however, is that the material upon which this chapter is based allows a number of general questions dealing with the study of the autocratic government’s regional strategies to be posed. Economic factors seemed to have played an important role – commercial interests, economic specialization, and the possibilities of transport routes were given very serious consideration in government circles. Furthermore, these materials are essential for studying the history of the cities. Perspectives for the development of each involved city were evaluated on the basis of numerous considerations. On the other hand, the transformation of a city into an administrative center provided it additional possibilities for development. A very promising task is to construct a model of the empire that would reflect the degree of each region’s complexity as the authorities viewed it. Kimitaka Matsuzato suggests a classification of Russia’s general governorships, divides them into “economic” ones, which were primarily occupied with routine management, and “ethno-Bonapartist” ones, which served primarily as instruments for implementing policy towards nationalities.<sup>59</sup> I disagree about the inclusion of the Little Russian general governorship existing prior to 1856 in the former group and about the proposed understanding of interior provinces in the nineteenth century.<sup>60</sup>

However, at the provincial level such a division can be actually traced. The government clearly thought of the provinces in order of the difficulty of their administration. These difficulties may have differed in

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<sup>58</sup> See: Gorizontov, “Russko-pol’skoe protivostoianie...;” I. S. Aksakov, *Pis’ma k rodnym. 1844-1849* (Moscow, 1988).

<sup>59</sup> See his review of Valentyna Shandra’s monograph in *Ab Imperio* 2 (2002), pp. 605-616.

<sup>60</sup> L. E. Gorizontov, “Retseziia na: Shandra V. *Malorosiis’ke heneral-hubernatorstvo 1802-1856. Funktsii, struktura, arkhiv*. Kyiv, 2001,” *Belorussia i Ukraina: Istoriia i kul’tura. Ezhegodnik 2003* (Moscow, 2003), pp. 373-382; L. E. Gorizontov, “Vnutrenniaia Rossiia i ee simvolicheskie voploshcheniia,” *Rossiiskaia imperiia: strategii stabilizatsii...*, pp. 61-88.

nature, but the most problematic regions were all characterized by the acuteness of their ethnic issues. In planning changes to administrative borders, the main idea was to unite sections of a “difficult” province with sections of an “easy” one. Thus, western Belorussian districts were to be joined with eastern Belorussian districts, while eastern Belorussian districts might be joined to “native Russian” provinces. The Left Bank Ukraine was to be united with the Right Bank Ukraine.

The still widespread thesis that pre-revolutionary Russia did not take ethno-national characteristics into consideration when designing the empire’s administrative divisions is in need of revision. It is more proper to speak of two contradictory tendencies; each of them followed its own reasoning – an administrative-territorial fixation on national territories and the mixing of different national elements. In this connection, the relationship between regional and national policy in the Russian empire deserves special attention.

One extreme was represented by the opinion that each province formed a sustainable unity, especially via its corporate nobility (for interior Russia). The other opinion was that there was a complete lack of any feeling of regional togetherness (for the New Russian general governorship). In a number of cases (i.e., the Western *krai*) unifying regional identities were recognized as being harmful to the empire. The Ministry of Internal Affairs did not, during the middle of Nicholas I’s reign, have plans to reorganize the general governorships, but serious changes in the territorial division of administrative units could not but have affected their fate.

Even Bludov’s most ambitious plans did not reach areas beyond the European part of the Russian Empire and were therefore marked by a certain eurocentrism. It was exactly in the European part of the empire that the government mainly sought to optimize its territorial organization. Notably, Bludov’s proposals called for the empire to be reformed from the periphery inwards, towards the center. From the point of view of the administrative structure, including its territorial organization, the central provinces could not – despite what was publicly believed at the time – serve as the model to be adopted for unification.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> L. E. Gorizontov “System zarządzania Królestwem Polskim w latach trzydziestych-pięćdziesiątych XIX w.,” *Przegląd Historyczny* 4 (Warszawa, 1984), pp. 711-730.