

## ADMINISTRATION IN THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

---

**Assoc. Prof. Emanuil Kolarov, Dr.iur., M.Eur.St.**

Department of Public Law,

“Angel Kanchev” University of Ruse

E-mail: [ekolarov@uni-ruse.bg](mailto:ekolarov@uni-ruse.bg)

**Abstract:** *The paper reviews the key stages of establishment and development of governance in the Russian state. The main aspects thereof are the prerogatives of the central authorities, in the main the King (Zar), to exercise executive power, and the aims to distribute these competences to other representatives of the state at central and at territorial (regional and local) level. Facing diverse challenges from inside (internal opposition and public order) and from outside (foreign invasions, international trade, colonialism and wars) state governance and administration needed to be adapted and reformed in order to keep exercising its activities and to be efficient to support the position of the Russian state as one of the Great Powers. Following the historical development of the state and political system of Medieval and New-age Russia we assume that there are several main periods in historical development of its administrative system – early period (from the establishment of the state to the 17<sup>th</sup> century), absolutist period (from 17<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> century), reformist period (from mid 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century). The soviet (especially the communist) periode and the post-communist period will be subject to another study and publication.*

**Keywords:** Administration, Governance, Russia, Distribution of Powers, Authorities, Effectiveness, Reform

**JEL Codes:** L10, L11

### Introduction

The Russian State is interesting from different perspectives. It is unique for its development through diverse and often counterpointing periods – from tough absolutism and centralism to massive decentralization, from authoritarian and totalitarian regime to open and democratic attempts. Blinking back to the whole more than 1000-year history of that state we could find this struggle of effectiveness to keep the state one, stable and capable to resist to all internal and external challenges. It is a history of steady reforms that Russian reigns needed to introduce or to try to make in order to sustain to those challenges. As Russian scientists point the state power in Russia was always “ideocratic” – either political ideology or religion made its main basis, and it was exercised autocratically while law needed to keep vital some ideal aims [1:9].

The aim of this paper is to show the periods of development of Russian administration and state governance and to stress on the main features of that system through the respective time. For the model we use the periods of Russian history. According to established Russian historical science [1:7] the history of the state passes through several main periods:

- Ancient period – 9-12<sup>th</sup> century
- Early medieval period with establishment of first Russian principalities – 12-14<sup>th</sup> century
- Moskow state – 15-17<sup>th</sup> century
- Russian Empire and Absolutism – 18-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century
- Russian Empire and Reformism – mid 19-beginning 20<sup>th</sup> century
- Russian bourgeois republic – February-October 1917
- Establishment of socialist state – October 1917-1920
- Transitional period – 1920-1930
- State and party socialism – 1930-1960s
- Period of crisis of socialist state – 1960-1990s

As we can see the history of Russian state is featured by transistions and radical changes and this causes instability of state institutions. Instability and the need to use force to maintain law, order and established structures of the state influenced on administration and state governance. Moreover, as historians state, development of Russian society and economic relations depended on natural and climate features of the aeria which were different to what in the West caused more intensive agricultural activities and more productivity of villagers' works. Shorter pasture time of the year made economical development slower than in the rest of Europe [2:12].

For our aim to generalize the development of Russian administrative structure we could apply the following general periodization having regard and keeping in mind the achievements of Russian historical science:

- Early period – from the first states established on the territory of Russia (9<sup>th</sup> century) to the establishment of the Empire in 17<sup>th</sup> century;
- Absolutist period – the period of the Russian Empire to the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century;
- Reformist period – the Russian Empire from mid 19<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century;
- Communist period – the Russian state from the October Revolution in 1917 to the downfall of the Soviet Union in 1990;
- Contemporary period – from 1990s and establishment of the Russian federation.

Due to the more complex and challenging attempts in providing legal basis of the transitional times and changes in ideology and forms of the state in the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century and the new approach after the constitutional reform in the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century we will overview the time of the beginning of Russian statehood to the centralization in 15-16<sup>th</sup> century in the current paper. We will continue in additional paper to discuss absolutis administration and reformism till the first decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century. And in further publications we will present the periods of Russian administrative development in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### § 1. First principalities (9-10<sup>th</sup> century)

It appears to be a hard task to describe and to generally form the structure of Russian administration during the first centuries of existence of the state. Historical sources are not very detailed, they are mainly foreign – e.g. Byzantine chronics [3:248] – and relate not so much to the history of that state while providing information of conflicts, competition and attempts to raise influence of Eastern Roman Empire, especially through religion, to those pagan but militarily strong tribes. Thus, some sources note on the military campaigns of princes Oleg and Svetoslav to Nord Black Sea shores and to Constantinople and the invasion into Bulgaria in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

For that early period there are notices about several principalities on the territory of what now is partially territory of European Russia – like Kiev Rus, Novgorod Principality, Ladoga, Polock, Pskov, Vladimir, Suzdal, Rostov, Chernigov, Galich territories, later Moscow Principality. This particularity of the early states makes indefinite and instable administrative structure for the struggle between these territories for existence and resistance to the foreign invasions (normanic, tataro-mongolic). It is obvious that the early societies of those formations were typical Slavic tribal structure – the *military democracy* [1:14] while society formed a *common* (all important decisions were made commonly by all grown men). From that time main administrative functions were exercised by the prince (*knjaz*) and his military guards (*druzhina*) – the latter was used to maintain order and to collect tributes by subordinate tribes and settlements. Practically the first typical state formation is dated 882 when Novgorod prince Oleg takes over Kiev and unites the triitories under his sciptre in what we now call Kiev Rus.

In the administrative structure of that state is to be noted that the main figure was the prince. On locations – towns and some important centres – the local feudals, but some territorial entities had kind of autonomy (town commons and village commons). The latter had also some police functions

to maintain public order, but also some financial and material functions – to decide on local taxes and property. The common was competent to assume the military force (*opolchenie*) in state of war. Despite this central authority had a representative for the matters of tributes – *volostel* (*namestnik*, *steward*).

After baptizing in Christianity from Constantinople in 988 by prince Vladimir the church stated to play an important role in the political life but in administrative, too, since it became one of the crucial feudals in the state. The church led by *mitropolite* was able to collect *decimal tax* and to conduct *canonic court*. From that time (1054) dated the first collection of early Russian laws – Russian Justice (*Russkaja Pravda*) [1:21].

## § 2. Pluralistic administration (11-15<sup>th</sup> century)

In the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century the Russian society transformed into medieval feudal stratification where the prince was suzerain and his vassals were the *bojars* – feudals who were invested administrative and military functions. Additionally, bojars participated into the prince's council and court – *svema*, the feudal council.

Enlargement of Russian territory in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century caused more complicated territorial administrative division – in calculations concerning population and tribute – on ten (*desjatskij*), on hundred (*sotskij*) or on thousand (*tujsjatskij*) persons. These administrative services remain in Kiev and Novgorod until 14<sup>th</sup> century.

In those times were used some collective forms of decision-making of most important conclusions or of comprehend administrative executive decisions. *Veche* (general assembly) was a body to make highest decisions on law, war and peace, supreme court. *Duma* (prince's council) supported the prince in governmental and executive functions; his particular competences are disputed in the historical science [1:32].

And some territories remained to certain extent autonomous – like the Novgorod and Pskov – that formed entities more like Venice and Genova, called by Russian historians *feudal republic* governance [1:59]. Most important role played the *veche* and *boyars council*, the latter prepared the works of the *veche*. Administrative functions had the *posadnik* who was elected for one or two years and together with the *knjaz* exercised the executive authority. Additionally, the *tujsjatskij* and the archbishop had not only military and respectively clerical functions but also involvement in control over trade – the first dealt about trade relations while the latter exercised control over measures. Local self-government was granted to territorial divisions like *volosti* (villages) and *pjagini* (towns) that were around a *kraj* (*konets*, *canton*). In the struggle for more independence one of these territories – around Pskov – succeeded to form an independent state; and its territory was additionally divided into counties (*okrug*, *guba*).

In 13<sup>th</sup> century under Mongol rule Russian principalities became vassals to the Golden Horde. Unlike the previous manner of tax collection through tax redeemers to the lands of Novgorod, Kiev, Vladimir were sent official tax collectors of the Horde. Mongol Khan's official representatives kept an eye to the domestic rule of the vassal Russian princes.

In 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century part of Russian principalities came under the ruling of Lithuania and Poland later after Liublin Union 1569 – under ruling of Rzeczpospolita. In that time part of that territory was overtaken by Moscow principality. Within the Polish ruling institutions and governmental manners were introduced – *Pan-Rada* (Ruler's Council) and *Great Sejm* (Assembly). It was the time when some unlikely for the rest of Europe institutions of state governance were active on the territory of those Russian principalities that remained in Rzeczpospolita – like Senate and Sejm at central level and at regional and local – *sejmiki*, voevodships, *povets* and *volosti*. And respective bodies – at central level the King elected, and at territorial – voevods, seniors, *rad*-members (counselors), *burgmeisters* (*mayors*).

Scientists find two periods in development of state tradition in Novgorod in that early age. The first one – 12-13<sup>th</sup> century – when the state was more town-state in which the town Novgorod

governed the surrounding territories. And the second period – 13-15<sup>th</sup> century – when it became more similar to other Slavic states of Central Europe with its state institutions and social structures [4:15]. Central figure of the state institutional structure was still the *prince* but the communal council (*veche*) was more under the influence of local feudal aristocrats – *boyars*. This state was more commercial town-republic similar to Hansa union towns, or Italian town-republics and this influenced to the more open and pluralistic manner of governance, administration and decision-making [5:59].

### § 3. Way to centralization (15-17<sup>th</sup> century)

All the above-mentioned shows that unification of Russian territories and stability in the state would be possible only by more centralization and strong central state power. The process begins with the aims of the Moscow principality to dominate in the struggle against foreign invasions – tatars and mongols, lithuanians and poles, german knights. With takeover the dominance by Moscow changed the role of *boyars* who became relatively independent at their domains but their privilege was granted by the *Great Prince* for their service in the State Council (*Duma*) and duty in the army or administration [1:85].

In central administration appear new figures that pave the road to later complication of the administrative system in ministries and clerks. Two of the new functions were *okolnichy* (first adviser in governmental affairs) and *kaznichy* (book keeper) [1:86]. These functions correspond to what later would be *cammeralist* idea of centralized state governance. In the 15-16<sup>th</sup> century administration became together with the enlargement of the state and concentration of more power into the hands of the Great Prince (later the King – the Zar) more complicated in order to answer to the needs of more intensified internal and external relations. There were formed various positions united into royal *court's service*.

### Conclusion

Although in brief, it appears that at the early age of existence of Russian statehood the governance is more open and pluralistic lacking of powerful center – both on government and on territory. This makes the state instable and weak facing external challenges of foreign invasions and competition with neighbouring political entities for more resources. The weakness is overwhelmed through slow centralization and concentration of state power in the hands of the ruler, and stabilization of territorial integrity and enlargement of the territory of the state causes the need for more administrative servants in the center (in the capital) and in the territorial divisions.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Isaev, I.A. (2004). History of Russian State and Law. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Moskva: Jurist (**Оригинально заглавие:** *Исаев, И.А. 2004. История государства и права России. Третье издание. Москва: Юрист*)
- [2] Selunskaya, N.B. (2015). Explanation of the Features of Historical Process in Russia: Reflections on the Book by L.V. Milov "In the Footsteps of Passed Times". In: Rus, Russia: Middle Ages and Modern Times. Vol. 4. Fourth Readings in Memory of Academician of the Russian Academy of Science L.V. Milov. Materials of the International Scientific Conference. Moscow, October 26 – November 1, 2015. Moscow: M.V. Lomonosov Moscow State University (**Оригинально заглавие:** *Селунская, Н.Б., 2015. Объяснение особенностей исторического процесса в России: размышления над книгой Л.В. Милова „По следам ушедших эпох“. В: Русь, Россия: Средневековье и Новое время. Выпуск 4: Четвертые чтения памяти академика РАН Л.В. Милова. Материалы к международной научной конференции. Москва, 26 октября – 1 ноября 2015 г. Москва: Московский государственный университет им. М.В. Ломоносова*)

[3] Grec Sources for Bulgarian History. Vol . 5. Sofia: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Press. 1964 (**Оригинално заглавие:** *Гръцки извори за българската история. Т. V. Изд. БАН. С. 1964*)

[4] Florya, B.N. (2015). Two periods of development of state and society in the territory of Novgorod. In: Rus, Russia: Middle Ages and Modern Times. Vol. 4. Fourth Readings in Memory of Academician of the Russian Academy of Science L.V. Milov. Materials of the International Scientific Conference. Moscow, October 26 – November 1, 2015. Moscow: M.V. Lomonosov Moscow State University (**Оригинално заглавие:** *Флоря, Б.Н., 2015. Два етапа в развитието на държавата и обществото в Новгородската земя. В: Русь, Россия: Средневековье и Новое время. Выпуск 4: Четвертые чтения памяти академика РАН Л.В. Милова. Материалы к международной научной конференции. Москва, 26 октября – 1 ноября 2015 г. Москва: Московский государственный университет им. М.В. Ломоносова*)

[5] Berendts, E.N. (1898). Attempt to system of Administrative Law. Vol. 1. Review of History of Administrative Law and History of its Literature. Jaroslavl: Typo-lit. E.G. Falk (**Оригинално заглавие:** *Берендтс, Э., 1898. Опыт системы административного права. Т. 1: Вып. 1: Обзор истории административного права и истории его литературы. Ярославль: Типо-лит. Э.Г. Фальк*)

Starilov, J.N. (1998). Administrative Law. History, Science, Subject, Norms. Voronezh: Voronezh State University Press (**Оригинално заглавие:** *Старилов, Ю.Н., 1998. Административное право. История, наука, предмет, нормы. Воронеж: Издательство Воронежского государственного университета*)

Titov, J.P. (ed.) et al. (2003). History of Russian State and Law. Moskva: Velbi Ltd. (**Оригинално заглавие:** *Титов, Ю.П. (ред.) и съавт. 2003. История государства и права России. Москва: ООО „ТК Велби“*)

Babenko, V.N. (2016). History of Home State and Law. Moskva: Justitia (**Оригинално заглавие:** *Бабенко, В.Н. 2016. История отечественного государства и права. Москва: Юстиция*)

Konopleva, L.L. Development of Russian Administrative Law. In: Journal of Ural Institute of Economy, Governance and Law, No. 2/2016, Ekaterinburg (**Оригинално заглавие:** *Коноплева, Л.Л., 2016. Развитие Российского административного права. В: Вестник Уральского института экономики, управления и права, бр. 2/2016, Екатеринбург*)

Докладът отразява резултати от работата по проект No 2024-ЮФ-01, финансиран от фонд „Научни изследвания“ на Русенския университет.“