

## CHAPTER 2

# Gosplan

## *How to Achieve Spatial Homogeneity*

From an economic point of view, this state will be centralized until the mighty impulse of the proletarian revolution erases national borders once and for all.

—Konstantin Yegorov, 1922

The statement by Konstantin Yegorov, a young and dedicated expert for administrative affairs, reflected the general mood within the State Planning Commission's Section for Raionirovanie (Sektssiia po raionirovaniu) in 1922.<sup>1</sup> This commission, known as Gosplan, was founded in 1921. After the Civil War, the Soviet government had to manage the diverse territorial structure it had inherited from the Russian Empire. For dedicated Marxists, divisions along national lines belonged to the bourgeois past, not the socialist future. However, the Bolshevik government had to find a feasible means of organizing and governing the enormous expanses under its control, in particular because, from a long-term revolutionary point of view, this space would come to encompass the whole globe.<sup>2</sup> The state and party institutions exhibited two contradictory tendencies. On one hand, Gosplan—especially its Section for Raionirovanie—sought to order Soviet space according to inclusive economic characteristics. On the other, Lenin and his comrades had loudly expressed their support for national self-determination to all the peoples of the former Russian Empire. Functionaries at Narkomnats and party officials in Ukraine, as well as in the Caucasus and Central Asia, insisted that this promise be kept.<sup>3</sup> Thus the early Soviet state faced conflicting aims. At the same time, these new ideas had to grapple with holdover imperial

administrative structures, such as Kursk or Voronezh Gubernii, where political leaders were promoting regional identities.

Older historical research on Soviet nationality policy focused on the tug-of-war between the “centralists” around Stalin and the “autonomists” around Lenin.<sup>4</sup> However, this approach provides only limited and biased insight into what was a much broader, more complex debate over nationality, economy, and territoriality during the 1920s. In *Empire of Nations*, Francine Hirsch provides a detailed analysis of the debate over the territorial models proposed by Gosplan and Narkomnats between 1921 and 1924. Both sides agreed on the need to eliminate economic backwardness and resolve the nationality question, but they differed on how to achieve these goals. Gosplan’s experts emphasized economic matters. Their colleagues from Narkomnats put ethnographic considerations front and center.<sup>5</sup> Whether this debate among the experts in Moscow had any tangible effect on the ground in the various regions remains unclear. Hirsch ends her analysis with the dissolution of Narkomnats in 1924. The demise of Narkomnats deprived its experts of most of their institutional funding and their periodicals such as *Zhizn’ natsional’nostei*, but their colleagues at Gosplan were able to continue promoting their ideas throughout the 1920s. I therefore focus on Gosplan’s ideas and their reception in the medium term as the debates related to this reception provide hints as to why the Bolshevik government adopted an affirmative stance toward nationalism instead of economic materialism in administrative practice.

Though the experts at Gosplan did not succeed with their materialist concepts, their terminology, which focused on the economy, greatly influenced the general debate and produced results on the ground. Drawing on this framework and their terminology, I explore the choices experts considered as possible answers and what they had in mind with their “national-ethnographic” and, in particular, “economic” arguments. At first glance, both terms seem to be self-evident, but if we look more closely, we see that they covered a number of different, even contradictory approaches in the Soviet debates. Experts struggled ardently over how to define their content.

Konstantin Yegorov will not only accompany us throughout this chapter but also make repeated appearances later. Throughout the 1920s, he was one of the most prominent and productive men at Gosplan and was widely admired by his colleagues for his dedication and energy.<sup>6</sup> Yegorov’s career was meteoric. After three years of study, he left university without a diploma in 1918, when the Bolshevik

government offered him a number of tantalizing opportunities. Initially, Yegorov was active in the local soviet in Simferopol. After becoming a member of the Communist Party, he started to work with the NKVD RSFSR in 1919. There he dealt with the organization of Soviet power at the local level. Not long thereafter, the commissariat appointed him secretary of the newly established Administrative Commission (AK VTsIK), where he was responsible for the formation of new territorial entities. Moreover, he helped establish the NKVD's cartographic branch.<sup>7</sup> Of course, during the 1920s Yegorov's ideas—like those of his colleagues—evolved from strictly “economic” approaches to more pragmatic ones. At the end of the 1920s, the concepts developed by such experts became highly effective tools in the hands of those who wielded power.

Ambitious experts, such as Yegorov, were respected by their peers, and the Soviet government often turned to them for policy advice. With their expertise, they could influence and shape, as well as channel, the full scope of the debate. Alun Thomas appropriately called them “intellectuals whom the party consulted but could choose to disregard.”<sup>8</sup> Unlike their colleagues in Central and Southeastern Europe, they were bound by the policy lines set by the Communist Party.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, their conceptions of territoriality were the subject of controversies and as a result always in flux. Their most important terms were *razmezhevanie* (delimitation) and *raionirovanie* (territorialization or, depending on the context, regionalization or discretization).<sup>10</sup> Whereas *razmezhevanie* referred to the formation of national borders, *raionirovanie* was applied to the formation of economic and administrative territories. Even though national-ethnographic and economic considerations influenced both types of territorialization, and both types also tended to overlap in practice, the experts were well aware of the fundamental differences between them.

The term *raion* itself, from which *raionirovanie* originated, was highly ambiguous and confusing, even for the experts involved.<sup>11</sup> In early Soviet discourse, it could signify the largest territorial unit (i.e., region), but at the same time also the smallest administrative entity above the rural soviets (i.e., district).<sup>12</sup> Thus it seems necessary to clarify in which sense experts and politicians used the term *raion*. In doing so, I add regional scale or district scale in brackets.

In their daily work, Yegorov and his colleagues could draw from a long tradition of ideas and concepts about how to organize Russian

imperial space into manageable units. Since the eighteenth century, research on the Russian Empire and its geography and climate had been a growing field. In the mid-nineteenth century, the debate became more sophisticated when geographers such as Konstantin Arsen'ev and later Pëtr Semënov-Tian'-Shanskii proposed ordering imperial space according to a bundle of economic, demographic, linguistic, or natural criteria.<sup>13</sup> Aleksandr Chuprov popularized the idea of stimulating economic growth by reordering the territorial structure. The famous chemist Dmitrii Mendeleev also explored such ideas and proposed a model according to which the regions of the Russian Empire were to be conceived as proceeding from a central point. Such centers were to serve as the loci for any territorial reconfiguration so that they could drive economic development.<sup>14</sup> The terms *raion* (derived from French *rayon*—i.e., honeycomb) and *raionirovanie* had been widely used among experts since the early 1890s.<sup>15</sup> On the eve of the twentieth century, Veniamin Semënov-Tian'-Shanskii, Pëtr's son, popularized the idea of dividing the Russian Empire into agricultural and industrial raiony. He also submitted a plan that called for these regions to be implemented from the bottom up, not the top down.<sup>16</sup>

Russia's imperial experts also had a long tradition of studying how to manage the empire's territory, including its colonies in Central Asia.<sup>17</sup> Altogether, this discourse had created a specific body of knowledge by the time the Bolsheviks seized power.<sup>18</sup> Prior to the revolution, the discourse among imperial experts had exerted little influence on "real" policy, but the new regime was much more open to implementing the experts' models on the ground.<sup>19</sup> The prerevolutionary debates were hardly isolated from the rest of the world either. Russian imperial experts had been in close contact with their colleagues in Western Europe and North America. Moreover, the models of spatial planning developed by the German agrarian scientist Johann Heinrich von Thünen and the economist Alfred Weber had influenced the Russian imperial discourse, as they offered approaches to describing and prescribing space.<sup>20</sup> These last two scholars would also influence Walter Christaller and his theory of central localities. This theory later shaped spatial thinking not only in Nazi Germany but also on both sides of the Iron Curtain during the Cold War.<sup>21</sup> Christaller's model had certain similarities with the approaches discussed in the early Soviet state. However, it is unlikely that the Soviet debate greatly influenced Christaller's 1933 thesis.<sup>22</sup> Both models rather coevolved.

## Energetic Plans

The Bolshevik regime's first foray into territorial matters created a mess. On 18 January 1918 (31 January 1918, New Style), the Sovnarkom decreed that local soviets could change administrative borders of their own accord. They only had to inform the central authorities of these changes.<sup>23</sup> The new government even proclaimed: "[We] give every population, every volost, every uезд, etc., the opportunity to regroup around the natural centers to which they feel attracted. [We offer them the opportunity] to satisfy their needs for the recovery, prosperity, and relief of their economy."<sup>24</sup> The local soviets heard this call and went straight to work. The result was unprecedented administrative chaos. This did not much affect the Soviet war effort, but as the Red Army gained the upper hand, such administrative-territorial issues became more pressing. From the point of view of the Bolsheviks' ability to govern, this situation could not last.<sup>25</sup> In the meantime, the Soviet economy was in a state of complete turmoil. Economic regulation during the Civil War had proven to be highly inefficient. Nonetheless, the party still sought to establish a new kind of economy that would be one "vast people's workshop," where production would be rationally organized according to an all-encompassing plan.<sup>26</sup>

In Lenin's eyes, the management of the German economy during the First World War provided a model for the future Soviet order.<sup>27</sup> However, in the face of economic collapse, even the most dogmatic Bolshevik had to realize that reliable statistical data and rational administrative structures were preconditions for governing such a planned economy. Experts would have to provide a plan for making Soviet space and all its resources "legible" for the regime.<sup>28</sup> This was one reason why the government over time increasingly curtailed certain elements of local autonomy. After 1920 local and regional soviets within the RSFSR could no longer decide their territorial structure. Every change had to be approved by the center in Moscow.<sup>29</sup>

The revolutionary state tried to acquire geographic, economic, demographic, and ethnographic expertise by funding well-equipped research commissions. It relied on experts who had made their careers under tsarist rule as well as dedicated young people such as Yegorov.<sup>30</sup> The Imperial Academy of Sciences, in particular its Commission for the Study of the Country's Natural Productive Forces (*Komissiiia po izucheniui estestvennykh proizvoditel'nykh sil strany*, KEPS), was transformed into a Soviet institution. The government also funded new agencies to

search for an “efficient” order, such as Narkomnats or the Supreme Soviet of the National Economy (Vysshii sovet narodnogo khoziaistva, VSNKh), which was trying to organize the economy in the wake of the Civil War. As many of these committees and commissions had proven unfit to deal with the challenges of economic collapse since the war, the Soviet government dissolved them, changed their designation, or fired their employees.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, the Soviet regime used the most convenient (and only) method it had to address the challenge of establishing governance: it simply created new bureaucratic structures—and hired people who seemed better qualified. As Lara Douds has shown in much greater detail, commissions and study groups were set up as was politically necessary during early Soviet period. They remained active for as long as their task seemed urgent. When they had carried out their task, or failed to do so, they disbanded themselves or a higher authority liquidated them. In some cases, they ceased work without being formally disbanded.<sup>32</sup>

The first large-scale campaign on behalf of the economy that Lenin and the VSNKh pushed—the GOELRO project—became highly attractive to qualified and dedicated people alike.<sup>33</sup> Relying on existing plans, its main goal was to provide electricity to the population in the European part of the Soviet state.<sup>34</sup> Initiated in February 1920, GOELRO could go back to plans and expertise developed in late tsarist Russia, in particular to the achievements of KEPS. Gleb Krzhizhanskii, an Old Bolshevik and one of Lenin’s friends, supervised the project.<sup>35</sup> Ivan Aleksandrov, a highly respected geographer and railway engineer, provided the blueprint for its administrative implementation. According to this plan, the existing territorial structure of the European part of the Soviet state would be reorganized according to criteria necessary for energy self-sufficiency. This would come to define the structure of new raiony (regional scale).<sup>36</sup> Thus, when territorial experts discussed “economic efficiency” in the early 1920s, they primarily had in mind self-sufficiency in terms of resources for electricity production.<sup>37</sup>

Revolutionary elan was one of the forces driving people such as Konstantin Yegorov. In January 1921, after the Sovnarkom had tasked the Administrative Commission with collecting all of the available data on the Soviet space and developing plans for its territorial restructuring, Yegorov even declared he would create a new order within two months.<sup>38</sup> Unsurprisingly, he failed to keep such an ambitious promise, but this failure was at the same time the starting point for a more

comprehensive approach toward this territorial challenge. And Yegorov was still able to make his mark for his expertise and his zeal.

Over time, the party leadership had to accept that there was no instant solution for the territorial issue on the lower level and economic management writ large. Faced with famine and an uprising in Kronstadt, the party adopted a radical change in economic policy at its Tenth Congress in March 1921—later known as the New Economic Policy (NEP).<sup>39</sup> During the NEP era, Bolsheviks abandoned the economic measures applied under War Communism and reintroduced a limited legal framework for free markets and private enterprise. The party maintained control only over the “commanding heights,” such as large-scale industry and foreign trade.<sup>40</sup> At the very same moment, however, the Soviet government also created Gosplan. The implementation of the GOELRO project was the new committee’s first big task.<sup>41</sup> Krzhizhanovskii became its first head. The leading Bolsheviks thus demonstrated their newfound awareness that basic infrastructure and coherent data were needed to organize a planned economy.<sup>42</sup> It was for this reason that Lenin put so much effort into GOELRO. In their work on this project, the experts involved would also be able to generate valuable statistical data for further planning.

In the spring of 1921, Gosplan hired the most promising experts it could find, including Konstantin Yegorov. In no time, he was one of the most prominent members within Gosplan’s Section for Raionirovanie. Aleksandrov became its head. Following the latter’s ideas, the section developed a framework whereby Soviet space was divided into territories that facilitated the exploitation of local resources and the production of electricity: be it wood, peat, water, coal, or oil. Aleksandrov expected this territorial structure of energy efficiency to lay the foundation for any future political order.<sup>43</sup> Leaning on ideas laid out by Mendelev and others, every raion (regional scale) would have an administrative-economic center and a certain population that would allow for the best possible exploitation of the available potential for energy. Densely populated raiony would be smaller in size, sparsely populated ones larger.<sup>44</sup> This concept of the raiony was organic. They were to take the shape that would best advance their development of energy efficiency.

At the time, the VTsIK and the Sovnarkom were willing to provide ample funding to encourage lively debate within the Section for Raionirovanie. At regular biweekly meetings, experts from different fields—geographers, engineers, statisticians, and economists—were to share,

evaluate, and discuss data related to the Soviet space and improvement of governance.<sup>45</sup> This concentration of expertise promised the most effective form of problem management. Despite all the official attention they received, Gosplan's experts both cooperated and competed with other institutions, such as VSNKh, Narkomnats, and the Central Statistical Administration (TsSU), in their efforts to accumulate and produce knowledge concerning the Soviet space. The Section for Raionirovanie formally existed from 1921 to 1930, but regular staff meetings appear to have ceased after 1924. However, experts such as Yegorov and Aleksandrov often took part in follow-up expert commissions on raionirovanie organized by the VTsIK or the Sovnarkom.<sup>46</sup>

Alongside considerations of energy efficiency, ideas of improving governance became increasingly important in the section's debates. On one hand, old territorial entities inherited from the Russian Empire—for instance, Kursk and Voronezh Gubernii—did not cease to exist but continued to function as administrative structures in the early Soviet state. On the other hand, the Bolshevik government had created ad hoc autonomous territorial entities within the RSFSR, as we saw in the previous chapter. Furthermore, the fate of the formally independent Soviet republics such as Ukraine was not yet clear.<sup>47</sup> In the eyes of Gosplan's experts, this chaotic administrative structure was ill-suited to any kind of social progress. Hence they proposed replacing the existing administrative-territorial framework completely. The *guberniia* (province), *uezd* (pre-reform county), and *volost'* (shire) structure as well as the national-territorial entities were to give way to designed entities of energy efficiency: *oblast'* (region), *okrug* (post-reform county), *raion* (district), and *sel'sovet* (rural soviet). The number of entities were to be reduced at every level. According to Yegorov, about two old volosti would form a new raion (district scale).<sup>48</sup> Thus the administrative staff in the regions could be reduced and simultaneously professionalized. Gosplan proposed a radical solution to address the administrative-territorial mess. Chaotic diversity could be replaced by homogeneous raiony (regional scale) or oblasti.<sup>49</sup> According to this plan, Soviet Ukraine would be divided into two parts, whereas all three of the formally independent Soviet republics in the South Caucasus were merged with the North. Such plans had zealous supporters but also dedicated opponents in the highest ranks.<sup>50</sup>

A closer look reveals that the new, "efficiently" structured oblasti promoted by the Section for Raionirovanie were in large part a cheap marketing trick. In the case of the envisioned Central Black Earth



Oblast, the imperial Kursk, Voronezh, Orël, and Tambov Gubernii were simply merged into one unit with their existing borders. The same happened with the gubernii in the northeast.<sup>51</sup> The Caucasian Viceroyalty (*namestnichestvo*), an extraordinary administrative-territorial entity within the Russian imperial framework in the southern margin, was simply transformed into a “new” oblast.<sup>52</sup> However, neither the proponents nor the opponents of raionirovanie pointed out this fact. They all silently acquiesced to this borrowing from the imperial administrative system, as they did with the terminology. The imperial military often used the terms *okrug* and *oblast'* to designate zones under special military rule like those in Batum Oblast or Sukhum Okrug.

Initially, Gosplan's experts ignored objections to their territorial vision. At the first meeting of the Section for Raionirovanie on 26 May 1921, Mikhail Vladimirskii, an Old Bolshevik and chairman of the Administrative Commission, made his position quite clear: “The most important principle of how to build up the oblasti is the development of industry and the exploitation of resources. . . . The nationality question somehow impedes the whole thing and demands a revision of the borders. [Officially] the principle of nationality should be fundamental, but after a certain time, our work will demonstrate the necessity of an economic foundation.”<sup>53</sup> After Gleb Krzhizhanovskii interrupted him and asked what was to be done with the existing national entities, Vladimirskii replied that “from an economic point of view, a national entity as such is hardly rational. Perhaps it will be possible to separate national and cultural entities from economic raiony [regional scale].”<sup>54</sup> Vladimirskii saw no contradiction in the coexistence of national autonomy and economic territorial entities. In this way, he came close to Austromarxist ideas of separating national from territorial issues, promoting an inclusive attempt to deal with the nationality question.

The majority at the Section for Raionirovanie did not neglect national aspects or the idea of a federation per se, even though their mental map of “Russia” encompassed not only the RSFSR but also the South Caucasus and Ukraine.<sup>55</sup> In their eyes, the existence of national-territorial entities was a historically transient phenomenon. The Soviet state had to respect the right of self-determination, but at the same time, all territorial units had to follow a much more important goal: the construction of socialism. As it proved difficult to unite scattered national communities into a functional administrative unit, section experts gave energy self-sufficiency and aspects of governance priority over national-ethnographic considerations.<sup>56</sup> Aleksandrov made this clear with regard to Soviet Ukraine when he told his colleagues that

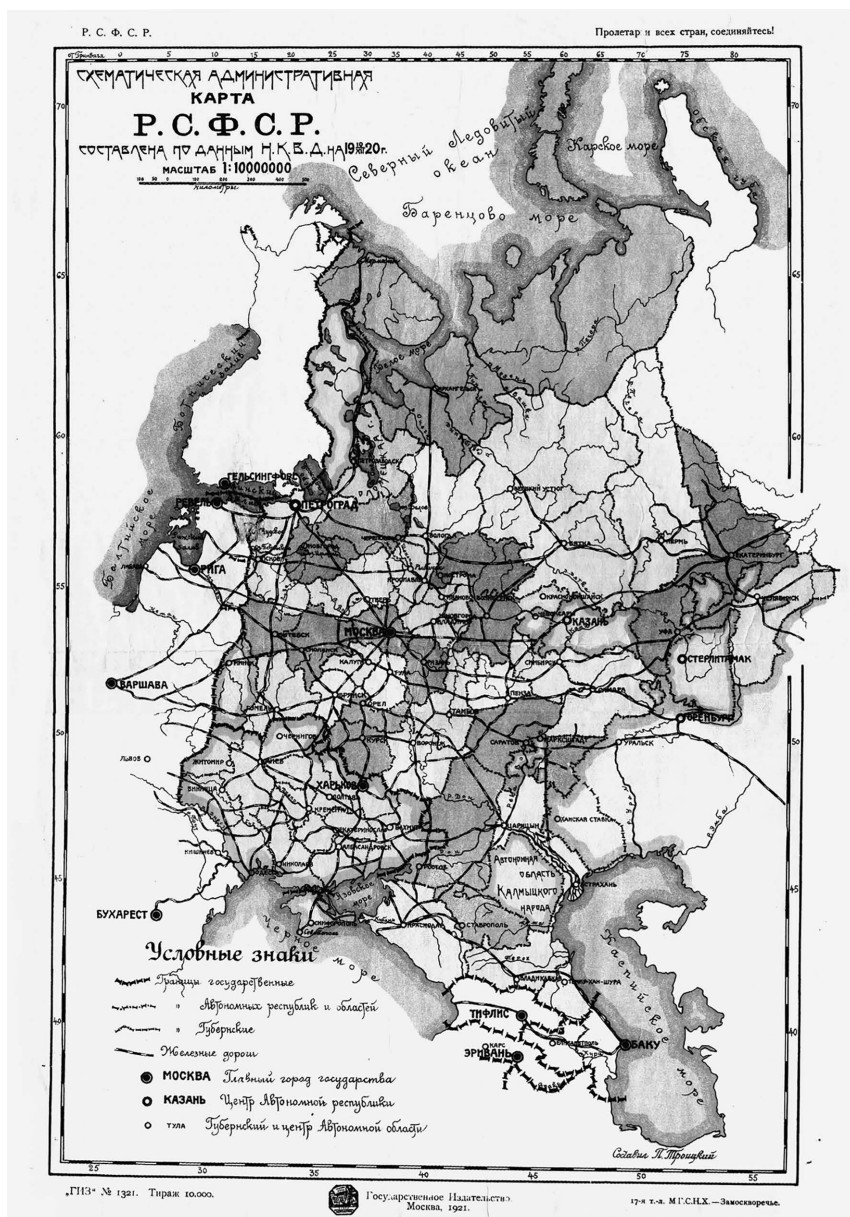
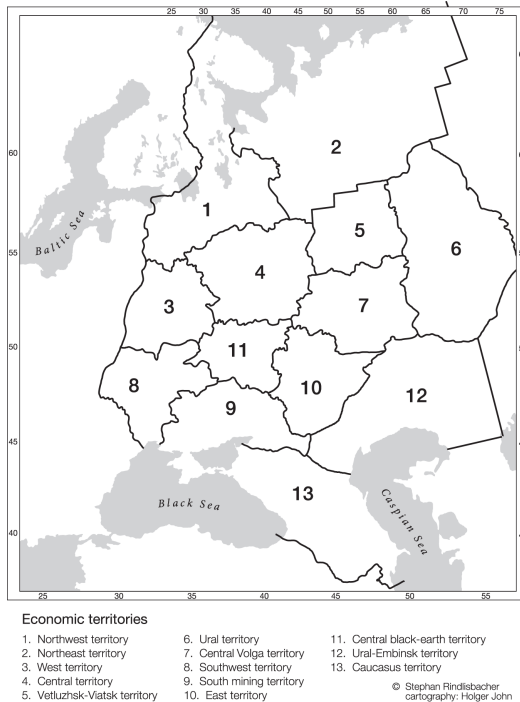


FIGURE 4. Contemporary administrative map of the RSFSR, 10 December 1920.



**FIGURE 5.** Economic raiony according to the scheme proposed by Gosplan in November 1921.

this republic “does not have anything to unify it in economic terms, and we shall never favor national interests instead of economic ones.”<sup>57</sup>

The section faced particular opposition from supporters of national-territorial approaches. The latter even declared that the section’s ideas were colonialist and exploitative of local populations and national communities.<sup>58</sup> In the first years of Soviet power, the word “colonialism” was associated with the policies of the old regime. The Bolsheviks distanced themselves from any notions of subordinating certain people to others.<sup>59</sup> Experts like Yegorov, however, tried to give the old term a new, positive spin. As opposed to former times, he saw raionirovanie as a program of state-sponsored economic development that would benefit everyone.<sup>60</sup>

With little fanfare, the Bolshevik government solved the basic territorial problem. Against broad opposition, it brought up the section’s territorial plans for internal discussion.<sup>61</sup> In a joint Commission for Raionirovanie under VTsIK Chairman Mikhail Kalinin, experts from Gosplan and Narkomnats, as well as various representatives from the

regions, met to discuss the issue between November 1921 and February 1922. In light of certain constitutional barriers, they concluded that national entities could not be split between two economic raiony (regional scale).<sup>62</sup> The representative of Narkomnats on this commission, Gustav Klinger, put this quite bluntly: "Soviet power has proclaimed the principle of self-determination, and [this principle] must be preserved. Raionirovanie provides the base for the utmost prosperity of autonomous national entities in economic affairs."<sup>63</sup> Hence national considerations were formally prioritized over economic ones. This decision had a long-lasting effect. Ukraine would remain a single administrative unit. Moreover, representatives from both Georgia and the Kuban region opposed the plan to unite the whole Caucasus region within a single unit like that of the old imperial viceroyalty.<sup>64</sup>

### **The Momentum of the Margins**

The months and years that ensued were particularly productive for the Section for Raionirovanie, but it had to deal with growing opposition to its initial ideas of energy efficiency. Its staff accumulated statistical materials and supervised territorial restructuring first in the RSFSR and then throughout the entire Soviet state. In these first years, section members produced a remarkable number of publications. However, party support for the section's plans was starting to wane. After a prolonged and heated debate within the party leadership, the Twelfth Party Congress in 1923—where *korenizatsiia* policies were institutionalized—accepted the new territorial structure, but only halfheartedly: "The introduction of a new system of administrative-territorial division needs a careful approach and a long time for its implementation. . . . The [congress] considers the plan . . . that Gosplan and the Administrative Commission of the VTsIK have developed a preliminary working hypothesis. Based on practical experience, it needs further revision and development."<sup>65</sup>

One of the areas where the new, scientific way of ordering Soviet space could undergo further revision and development was the Ural region.<sup>66</sup> Gosplan's experts had planned to base energy production on coal and hydroelectric dams as a means of developing the local metallurgical industry.<sup>67</sup> Raionirovanie started here in November 1923 and ended in March 1924. The newly formed oblast encompassed about 1,450,000 square versta (1,300,000 square kilometers, roughly the size of today's France, Germany, and Poland combined)

and had slightly more than six million inhabitants. By reducing the number of administrative units, the state could save huge sums on salaries, at least on paper. All heavy industry came under the auspices of a single conglomerate (*trest*) that could supervise resource exploitation and electricity production. It almost goes without saying that Ural Oblast was not realized fully in accordance with Gosplan's original vision. Its experts had to adapt their plans due to the existence of ethnonational entities. The Bashkir Republic refused to join this Ural Oblast. So section experts had to reconfigure the territory of this oblast several times. This solution for the basic territorial problem in favor of ethnonational considerations led to new challenges in practice.<sup>68</sup>

The North Caucasus was another area where Gosplan, together with regional party and state institutions, introduced a new territorial framework in 1924. Here the experts planned to base the territorial entity's economy on petroleum and coal.<sup>69</sup> Even more so than in the Ural region, the result differed drastically from the original vision. In the first draft, the Caucasus region was to form a single economic unit. However, the South Caucasus was never part of any real discussion, as even the party leadership favored the option of leaving the South Caucasus separate within the Transcaucasian Federation.<sup>70</sup>

The experts made adaptations within the "rational" four-tier administrative frame of Gosplan when they added the krai as a particular kind of oblast. This term was directly borrowed from the old imperial vocabulary. There it signified "borderland," as in Turkestan Krai. Initial draft plans for the Southeastern Oblast (*Iugo-vostochnaia oblast'*) shattered when they faced the topographical challenges and ethnic diversity on the ground.<sup>71</sup> In 1924 the politicians and experts came up with this new-old term and concept when they presented the idea of the North Caucasus Krai (*Severo-Kavkazskii krai*). The designation should indicate that this was no ordinary oblast, but an entity with certain privileges, including autonomous national territories.<sup>72</sup> The North Caucasus was—in ethnographic terms—the most diverse within the Soviet state. Thus, in the first attempt to rationalize this space, the government created several national entities, such as the Karachaevo-Cherkes or the Chechen Autonomous Oblasti, but then subordinated them to the krai center in Rostov-na-Donu.<sup>73</sup> Dagestan was not attached to the North Caucasus Krai until 1931. In the end, the krai's borders resulted from a merger of economic and national-ethnographic considerations.

In the years to come several other kraia took shape within the RSFSR: for instance, the Siberian and the Far Eastern ones. In cultural, economic, and political matters they could virtually gain the same rank as the union republics.<sup>74</sup> In the case of the North Caucasus Krai, their leaders and experts would be the main agents competing with the Ukrainian representatives for assets and territory. As we will see below, the former often had better ties to Moscow.

People and space emerged as clay that Gosplan's experts could shape, even if this was not their primary intent. In practice, regional experts could not take part in the planning in Moscow. This lack of mobilizing appeal outside of Moscow-based expert circles would be one of this concept's key weaknesses. This was in stark contrast to the nationalist party activists who constantly circulated between the center and the margins. Though the experts in Moscow tried to distance themselves from the old regime, their attitude toward the people on the ground remained the same. Before 1917, the division between gubernii, uezdy, and volosti had been established top-down out of strategic, fiscal, and judicial considerations.<sup>75</sup> This basic structure went back to the reign of Peter I (1689–1725) and was later extensively reformed under Catherine II (1762–1796), as the tsaritsa tried to establish an enlightened administration for her empire with gubernii and uezdy. The basic assumption behind their formation was that a certain number of people should live in each territory, and the regional administration would have to levy taxes. The military, stationed in the central town, was supposed to be able to deploy anywhere within a given entity in a certain amount of time.<sup>76</sup> However, a plethora of various other territorial schemes for postal services and telegraphs, education or water management later coexisted alongside this imperial administrative structure. Moreover, certain parts of the empire, like the Kingdom of Poland, the Grand Duchy of Finland, the large Caucasian Viceroyalty, or the Turkestan Krai were under particular types of administration.<sup>77</sup> In the early Soviet debate on raionirovanie, demographic and strategic factors still played a role, but these were not mentioned any more than the borrowings from the old framework of gubernii. The major difference between the old and the new regime—and all the experts involved highlighted this—was that economic aspects played a subordinate role in the old imperial administrative-territorial structure. Now governance, economic development, and resource extraction within a certain territory stood front and center. Soviet power had to be brought closer to the people so as to better manage and mobilize all productive forces. The party

later adopted this approach for the slogan “face the village” (*litsom k derevne*).<sup>78</sup>

The Bolsheviks created the Soviet Union as a federal state at the end of 1922, but the number of constituent entities, as well as their administrative hierarchy, remained unsettled. Initially, there were only four union subjects: the Belarusian Republic (BSSR), Ukraine (UkrSSR), the RSFSR, and the Transcaucasian Federation. With the decision to form a federal union, the party leadership made concessions to the periphery.

Even though Gosplan experts in Moscow favored a close economic union between the RSFSR and Ukraine, their Ukrainian colleagues reformulated territorial ideas in their own way.<sup>79</sup> In June 1925, the chairman of the Ukrainian Administrative Commission, Ivan Cherliunchakevych, was invited to give a presentation to colleagues in Moscow. There he once again rejected Aleksandrov’s idea of dividing Ukraine politically into two large territorial “energo-economic” entities: “No variants of such a division of Ukraine are feasible due to national and political considerations. They divide it into an industrial [i.e., Russian-speaking] and an agricultural [i.e., Ukrainian-speaking] part. This would create a split between the [Russian] proletariat and the [Ukrainian] peasantry and pose an obstacle to developing the political line of the peasantry.”<sup>80</sup>

The Ukrainian leadership was seeking to organize its territory’s economy around a single administrative center, namely the capital of the UkrSSR in Kharkiv (Kiev became the capital only in 1934). But Ukraine’s experts did introduce their own territorial order inspired by Gosplan’s ideas. From 1923 to 1925, the old administrative units inherited from the Russian Empire were completely dissolved and gradually replaced by what Ukrainian planners considered rational and feasible for their republic: a system of okruga (okruhy), raiony, and rural and urban soviets (*sil’rady/mis’rady*). Before the reforms, the UkrSSR had had twelve gubernii (hubernii), 102 uezdy (povity), and 1,989 volosti; after the reforms, it had forty-one okruga (okruhy) and 632 raiony.<sup>81</sup> The population of an okrug was usually 400,000 to 600,000 people; exceptions were made for regions around large urban centers such as Kharkiv or Kiev. The size of the raiony depended on their economic function: agricultural ones were bigger than mixed or industrial/urban ones.<sup>82</sup> Though the territory of the Ukrainian SSR was completely restructured in accordance with concepts developed by Gosplan, it endured as a national entity—and that is the most important point.<sup>83</sup>

The idea of raionirovanie was also discussed in the Transcaucasian Federation by Gosplan’s local branch, ZakGosplan. According to its

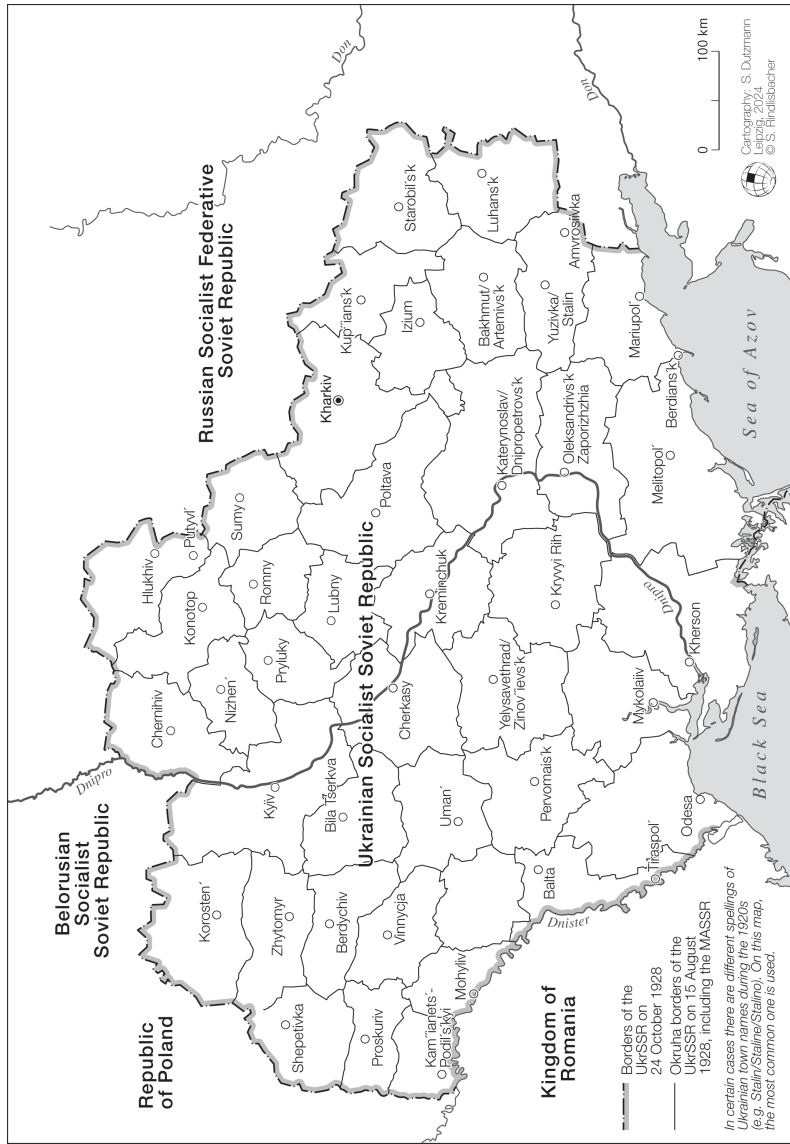


**FIGURE 6.** Map of the gubernii (hubernii) of the UkrSSR in 1921.

chairman, Filipp Makharadze, the okrug would also be the central feature: “In drawing the okrug, we should take into consideration not only the current economic situation and forms of economy but also plans for its further development and restructuring. Thus raionirovanie on a large scale has to consider the general okrug framework of an economic plan, as if it were its territorial expression.”<sup>84</sup> Despite this reasonable assertion, ZakGosplan produced comparatively few tangible results, and it faced stubborn resistance from the three Transcaucasian republics. Its own Section for Raionirovanie proved to be particularly feeble.<sup>85</sup> In this situation, regional experts stepped in and proposed their own approaches.<sup>86</sup>

Georgian experts like A. Gegechkori—though grateful to Moscow for the “brotherly advice”—preferred homegrown models of territorialization: “The Russian example has not been able to convince us in every detail. This is why we cannot simply copy it. We have reduced its broad framework, its scale a little. We took only the principle and basis for its modeling from the other parts of the [Soviet] Union.”<sup>87</sup> Due to Georgia’s geography, regional experts and politicians in 1925–1926 introduced their own two-tier administrative system of *uezdy* (*mazra*) and *temi* (*t’emi*) instead of Gosplan’s four-tier system of oblast, okrug, raion, and rural soviet.<sup>88</sup> According to the plans of Georgian experts,





**FIGURE 7.** Map of the okruga (okruchy) of the UkrSSR in 1928.



**FIGURE 8.** Map of the oblasti of the UkrSSR in August 1937.

temi would combine the functions of the raiony and the rural soviets, as they would better fit Georgia's mountainous topography.<sup>89</sup> Thus geographic considerations, not energy production, took center stage in Georgian experts' debates. For instance, the villages in a certain valley that had traditionally formed a "natural" unit were merged and designated as temi.<sup>90</sup>

Armenian experts also proposed their own model, seeing *uezdy* (*gavar*) and *uchastki* (*gavarak*) as ideal for their republic. They highlighted the fact that configuration of the territory had to take into account the general lack of economic capital. Therefore, experts here felt the approaches taken in Ukraine or the RSFSR were not really that helpful. Furthermore, they emphasized that a unified approach was not at all desirable for the South Caucasus region. The temi might appear useful in Georgia, but such a structure would make no sense for Armenia. Thus they concluded that "all of the [Transcaucasian] republics must have the possibility of finding their own solution to this important question."<sup>91</sup>

Whereas in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus regional Gosplan experts struggled over how to order state administration, their colleagues in the Kyrgyz ASSR worried about how to create such structures from scratch. In this remote region of Central Asia created after

the national delimitation in 1924, the experts tasked with raionirovanie did not dare discuss electricity production. In the southern and the western part of Kyrgyzstan only larger settlements had access to the mail and telegraph networks. Thus it seemed impossible to maintain and improve steady contact between the capital in Frunze (today Bishkek) and most of the volost administrations, never mind rural soviets, in a reasonable amount of time.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, the administrative borders before 1917 had been deliberately fluid, as they were structured around aspects of tribal belonging. As the local population was mobile and tribal networks flexible, the Russian imperial administrative structure had been in constant motion.<sup>93</sup>

"The aspect of kinship is key for the realization of raionirovanie."<sup>94</sup> This was the main statement by Vladimir Dublitskii, the leading expert for Kyrgyzstan in 1926. He therefore proposed a three-tier system of *kanton—volost—rural soviet* as most appropriate. In such an administrative division, at least the centers of the kantony would have access to postal and telegraph services.<sup>95</sup> On a volost level, Dublitskii then proposed to separate Kyrgyz and "European" entities to avoid "misunderstandings" between the communities and to enable access to secluded Kyrgyz communities in order to mobilize them for the Soviet project.<sup>96</sup>

In this remote region of the Soviet state, aspects of geography, nationality, and aspects of governance completely eclipsed the once purely economic considerations of raionirovanie. Dublitskii considered the three-tier structure of *kanton—volost—rural soviet* as temporary and to be ultimately replaced by a two-tier of *raion—rural soviet*.<sup>97</sup> However, governmental structures had to be built first. Therefore, he openly told his colleagues that raionirovanie in Kyrgyzstan needed more state spending, not less.<sup>98</sup>

Experts like Dublitskii projected that successful raionirovanie would take at least twenty-five years in Kyrgyzstan. They identified two decisive factors for this long-term state-building. On one hand, there were not enough Kyrgyz cadres to fill the administrative positions. They had to be trained first. On the other hand, in many regions there were simply no settlements where a local administration could establish itself. Field surveyors and geographers had first to find spots suitable for development into a regional center, and then such prospective centers had to be connected with the basics of modern statehood: roads, postal stations, and telegraph stations.<sup>99</sup>

The cases of Ukraine, the South Caucasus, and Kyrgyzstan demonstrate how regional experts reformulated Gosplan's concepts of

raionirovanie in the mid-1920s. This process did not represent a simple “degeneration” of Gosplan’s initial concepts, as Z. Mieczkowski once claimed, but rather its successful adaptation by a heterogeneous polity.<sup>100</sup> At first, raionirovanie had been closely related to GOELRO, but then the concept evolved into a much broader debate, one involving numerous voices, over how to master the multitude of spatial challenges. Experts in Moscow had little choice at the time but to adapt to this development.<sup>101</sup>

When the implementation of raionirovanie got underway in 1923, regional actors saw a chance to revise the existing territorial framework in pursuit of their own interests.<sup>102</sup> Their goal was to enhance the productive forces under their control, even if doing so came at the expense of neighboring Soviet territory.<sup>103</sup> Belarusian politicians were the first to successfully exploit Gosplan’s designs for their own ends. After the Peace of Riga in 1921, the Belarusian SSR had shrunk in size to only six *uezdy* of the former Minsk Guberniia.<sup>104</sup> With support from experts such as Yegorov, Belarusian politicians laid claim to parts of the Vitebsk, Gomel’, and Smolensk Gubernii, all of which were in the RSFSR. Their main argument was not national affiliation or language but sustainability in terms of energy efficiency as propagated by Gosplan. The BSSR was supposed to encompass what Gosplan had proposed in 1921 as the Western Economic Oblast.<sup>105</sup> The RKP(b) Politburo supported these Belarusian claims not only for economic but also for propagandistic reasons: to promote Soviet national policies among the Belarusian minority in Poland. Thus territories from the RSFSR were added to the BSSR in two phases, one in 1924 and another in 1926. The Politburo merely stipulated that the BSSR should respect the rights of the Russian and Jewish “minorities” in the areas in question, meaning schools should not be the target of Belarusification.<sup>106</sup> This border drawn in the mid-1920s later evolved into the international border between Belarus and Russia we know today.

Observing this promotion of Belarusian territoriality, experts at the Ukrainian Planning Commission (UkrDerzhplan) seized the opportunity to call for revisions as well. For instance, they proposed attaching Putivl’ Uezd, then in Kursk Guberniia, to Ukraine, as this territory nearly formed an RSFSR enclave between Hlukhiv and Sumy.<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, Ukrainian experts proposed the transfer of Millerevo Uezd from Voronezh Guberniia in the east, as geologists had recently discovered a large field of black coal there.<sup>108</sup> The Industrial Section at Gosplan in Moscow even considered adding the southern parts of Kursk Guberniia

to Ukraine. The thinking here was to unite the regional sugar industry within a single union republic.<sup>109</sup> Their colleagues in Ukraine swiftly adopted this idea with gratitude.<sup>110</sup> The regional experts of Kursk Guberniia, for their part, tried to make use of the raionirovanie vocabulary to oppose such a territorial change at the expense of “their” economic assets.<sup>111</sup>

Soon the Ukrainian republic and Russian regional administrations were engaged in a contest over territory. Ukrainian state and party institutions, the Ukrainian Central Executive Committee (Vseukraïns’kyi tsentral’nyi vykonavchyi komitet, VUTsVK) in particular, promoted a large-scale border revision, while the regional administrations of the RSFSR in Kursk and Voronezh opposed these proposals. The functionaries in the North Caucasus Krai even lobbied to attach some parts of the Ukrainian Donbas to the RSFSR. The party and state leadership had to intervene and partly decree and partly negotiate solutions for these territorial claims and counterclaims. In the end, both sides could realize at least some of their initial plans at the expense of the other side. Overall, however, Ukraine drew the poorer hand in this contest for territory. We will see in much greater detail in the next chapter why the party leadership would show itself much less sympathetic to Ukrainian claims than those from the Belarusian side.

After 1923 raionirovanie affected the peripheral regions of the Soviet state, whereas the core around Leningrad and Moscow continued with the old imperial administrative system. The historian Vladimir Kruglov suspects that this delay was also due to the ongoing power struggle at the top of the party. In 1924 Lev Kamenev and Grigorii Zinov’ev were heads of the regional party structures in the Moscow and Leningrad Gubernii respectively. Through raionirovanie they would have had the chance to broaden their power base, posing a dangerous challenge to other party leaders.<sup>112</sup> Thus the administrative-territorial reforms were introduced in the core regions only after the struggle for power had been decided in Stalin’s favor.

## The Evaluation of Raionirovanie

In 1925 Gleb Krzhizhanovskii considered the results of raionirovanie a success, even though regional actors had adapted Gosplan’s original concepts to suit their own prerogatives. He concluded: “Gosplan’s project provided the basic principles for dealing with the national structure of the Union. We have established a framework that—if the

system of raionirovanie is correctly implemented—allows the national autonomies and republics to keep their rights and gain a firm ground for their individual development, as well as to fulfill their functions as members of the Union.”<sup>113</sup> Despite this rather positive assessment, Gosplan’s experts could not keep all of the promises once so loudly proclaimed.

Konstantin Yegorov had an insatiable hunger for data on the raionirovanie process. To feed this hunger, he initiated a large survey of the newly created raiony (district scale) in early 1926. He developed a questionnaire and sent it to the oblast executive committees (*oblastnoi ispolnitel’nyi komitet*, OIK) in the RSFSR and to the union republics’ administrative commissions, which in turn saw to its dissemination down to the local level.<sup>114</sup> The questionnaire contained seventeen specific items regarding the functioning of each raion administration. The raion executive committees (*raionnyi ispolnitel’nyi komitet*, RIK) first had to provide information about their staff and offices and explain the changes that had taken place vis-à-vis the previous *volost* administration. Then the RIKs were asked about their connection to the *okrug* center and other state institutions. Finally, the RIKs were to describe how they had prepared and carried out raionirovanie. They were also to discuss its impact on daily life and indicate whether there had been cases of discontent among the population and whether the raion borders and the center of the raion were adequately and clearly defined.<sup>115</sup> The set of questions reveals just how much Yegorov gave priority to the functionality of the new administrative units and the improvement of local governance.

While examples of replies have yet to turn up in the central archives of Soviet-era records in Moscow, responses from twenty-one of the twenty-seven raiony have been found in the records of Kharkiv Okruha (*Okrug*), held in the State Archive of Kharkiv Oblast.<sup>116</sup> Most depict a positive mood. They confirm that raionirovanie went well, that the administration was functioning, and that the population was content with raion administration services, including education, health care, libraries, veterinary medicine, and so on. However, some RIKs pointed out that, due to the poverty of their raion, cultural projects required larger subsidies from the center. In everyday practice, such budgetary dependency on higher authorities (i.e., Moscow) was an important feature of Soviet federalism.<sup>117</sup> A comparison of the responses from the raiony of Kharkiv Okruha shows that they tended to fulfill Yegorov’s expectations.

That said, a closer reading also provides indications that one of the main goals of raionirovanie—to save funds by rationalizing the administrative structure—was not realized. Even though most RIKs in Kharkiv Okruha reported that fewer people were working in the local administration compared to the volost era, they openly said that new, better-qualified raion personnel earned about 50 percent more than former volost employees. Other data indicated a similar pattern throughout the union.<sup>118</sup>

Sometimes, the responses provided deeper insights into how the Soviet administration worked. Answering a question about local participation in raionirovanie, the report from Bol'she-Pisarevskii Raion humbly stated: "The [Ukrainian] Central Administrative-Territorial Commission carried out raionirovanie in 1923. Raionirovanie was not decided within the raion. It was not a decision of the local assemblies. The population perceives raionirovanie as the correct way to strengthen the Soviet apparatus."<sup>119</sup>

After reading such replies, Yegorov began to realize that the original idea of raionirovanie had not achieved its goal of mobilizing the population for the Soviet project. Nationally organized entities were much more successful when performing transformative power. Like the national politicians who had adapted to the structuring ideas of raionirovanie, Yegorov began to alter his approach to nationalism and its role in the Soviet state.<sup>120</sup> He concluded that central administration and national autonomy had to go hand in hand.<sup>121</sup>

Konstantin Yegorov's new, more decentralizing approach to raionirovanie faced strong institutional opposition. The Bolshevik administration had certain misgivings about measures that could lead to decentralization, directly or indirectly. They saw too much local autonomy as a potential threat to Soviet rule. Some local actors might forget how to play the multilayered game of power. Thus representatives from the Commissariat for Post and Telegraph Services, and from within Gosplan, argued against any dispersal of authority.<sup>122</sup> This concern prompted the All-Union Commission for Raionirovanie (Komissiiia po raionirovaniu TsIK SSSR), chaired by Saak Ter-Gabrielian, to invite experts from throughout the union to share their views about raionirovanie at a conference in Moscow on 17 May 1926.<sup>123</sup> Konstantin Yegorov was also in attendance and stood out as one of the conference's most active participants.

The presentation on the territorial structure in Central Asia laid out the panoply of diversity that existed on the ground. Iosif Magidovich,

an ethnographer and leading expert with the TsSU reported on his experiences. He first complained that experts like himself had no authority to make political decisions, as he and his colleagues were able only to “advise” regional politicians.<sup>124</sup> Even though these politicians had completely changed the map of the region during national delimitation, the territorial entities beyond the republic or oblast level remained the same. In the former region of Bukhara, the old *vaialat* were simply renamed *okrug*, while the old *tuman* received the designation *raion*; in the former Khorezm, the *shiro* was renamed *raion*.<sup>125</sup> The renamed units created confusion when they merged within the new Uzbek republic. According to Magidovich, the challenges were even more striking in Kyrgyzstan, where administrative structures in imperial times had relied on local kinship: “There *volosti* emerge spontaneously, and they split into parts spontaneously, depending on relations among the different Kyrgyz tribes. When these tribes want to unite in a *volost*, they unite. If you visit this *volost* for research, it could happen that they had decided to split into two *volosti*. I could provide you a list of such *volosti* that we only recently discovered. There are even more, about which we still have no idea.”<sup>126</sup> During discussions of Magidovich’s report, Yegorov and Ter-Gabrielian argued that the collection of more data was necessary before the commission could make any valid recommendations.

After the report on Central Asia, a heterogeneous delegation gave an account of *raionirovanie* within the Transcaucasian Federation. The first speaker from ZakGosplan, a certain Grigorian, started by directing attention to the lack of self-government under the old regime.<sup>127</sup> This stood in stark contrast to the *zemstvo* system of self-government in most European parts of the Russian Empire. According to Grigorian, it was for this reason that most people were distrustful of state institutions in the South Caucasus. Geography and a sparse population made the task even more difficult.<sup>128</sup> As discussed above, the heterogeneity of this region was already reflected in the terminology: Georgia was divided into a system of *uezd* (*mazra*) and *temi*, Armenia into one of *uezd* (*gavar*) and *uchastki* (*gavarak*), Azerbaijan into one of *uezd* (*qəza*) and *daira* (*dairə*).<sup>129</sup> This intricate territorial structure, Grigorian continued, was the result of history and nature. This heterogeneity and the funding spent on local administration were unique to the union. Maintenance of this administrative structure consumed 50–70 percent of the regional budget. Taken together, this posed a challenge to regional governance, as Grigorian concluded: “[It] makes the popularization of



state power on the ground impossible, as this power does not possess any material means.”<sup>130</sup>

Grigorian's claim that greater centralization was needed met with stiff opposition from his Transcaucasian colleagues. Barzian of Armenia and Ingorokva of Georgia defended their republics' existing administrative-territorial structures. Ingorokva again highlighted the *temi*-system as most suitable to Georgia's geography and went on to deny any connection between the territorial structure and the spending on local administration: "The example of Switzerland demonstrates this. As we all know, Switzerland has a complex territorial system with two levels: the municipality and the canton."<sup>131</sup> In effect, he was insisting that the existing structure, which relied on prerevolutionary administrative borders, would be able to advance Georgia's further development.<sup>132</sup> Concluding this discussion, Yegorov thanked the Transcaucasian participants for their comments and added that the main goal of *raionirovanie* was to strengthen Soviet power. The nomenclature used for territorial units seemed to him a secondary matter.<sup>133</sup>

Throughout the Soviet state, *raionirovanie* continued slowly but surely. In the autumn of 1926, experts and politicians developed a new territorial structure for Uzbekistan. The mixture of different entities was to be replaced with a threefold system of *okruga*, *raiony*, and rural soviets. The seven *oblasti* were replaced by ten *okruga*, the twenty-three *uezdy* by eighty-seven *raiony*. All *volosti* and their equivalents were dissolved.<sup>134</sup> Saak Ter-Gabrielian saw the new territorial units as "independent economic organisms," as they adhered to existing irrigation systems. Moreover, the new territorial configuration was expected to reduce the number of employees in the local administration from 14,000 to 13,500.<sup>135</sup> However, the whole Uzbek project was marred by a major incongruity: the Tajik ASSR—at that time still part of Uzbekistan—was not part of the reform. In this particularly remote region, the prerevolutionary units simply continued to exist.

From Moscow's perspective, this regional adaptation of *raionirovanie* portended growing chaos where dysfunctional local administrations wasted valuable state funds.<sup>136</sup> Some experts at Gosplan were especially disappointed with the results. One anonymous author complained in 1928 that national-ethnographic considerations had completely supplanted Gosplan's initial vision. Even though it was scientifically sound, opposition from Bashkiria, Ukraine, and the South Caucasus undermined its implementation.<sup>137</sup> Moreover, he complained that the

TsIK Commission for Raionirovanie in Moscow had no real power, and local opposition could easily obstruct its efforts. He concluded ironically: "We can hardly call raionirovanie of certain territories a process of economic raionirovanie, where the word *raionirovanie* itself is derived from *raion* in the sense of an entire economic oblast (krai). It is rather an administrative raionirovanie, where *raionirovanie* comes from the word *raion* in the sense of a small administrative-economic unit, between uезд and volost."<sup>138</sup> The crux of his argument was that the Soviet experts had replaced one inefficient administrative heterogeneity with another.<sup>139</sup> Such diversity could be understood as an obstacle. More discipline and more centralization were possible answers. According to this point of view, frustration with this chaotic and uncoordinated territorial policy contributed to the major shift in Soviet politics that would later become known as the Cultural Revolution.<sup>140</sup>

During the manifold adaptation of raionirovanie in the peripheries, spatial concepts of the Bolshevik leadership in Moscow evolved as well. The politicians in Moscow began to abandon ideas of an organic regional territorial structure in favor of more active central planning. Therefore, the state and party leadership would channel resources and people to develop a certain region not bottom-up but top-down. The state was expected to take a much more active role in developing the Soviet system as a whole.

These signals from the top provoked a shift in thinking among the territorial experts as well. Between 1926 and 1928 Yegorov, Aleksandrov, Vladimirskii, and others regularly organized discussions at the Institute of Soviet Construction (Institut sovetskogo stroitel'stva) within the Communist Academy (Kommunisticheskaia akademiia). There they reformulated their ideas of how to deal with the spatial diversity of the Soviet state. At the beginning of these discussions in May 1926, Yegorov openly admitted that Gosplan had been too eager to promote its idea of self-sufficiency in terms of energy efficiency. His colleagues agreed.<sup>141</sup> The challenge facing them now was to find an efficient, scientific way to deal with the existing economic, national-ethnographic, and geographic challenges. Nonetheless, they remained bound by a clear ideological perspective, as Vladimir Dosov, a representative of the Kazakh ASSR, demonstrated: "Autonomy is not an end in itself. Neither the soviets nor Soviet structures are ends in themselves. Our final goal is the withering away of the state, but obviously, current conditions demand the independent existence of separate kraia and raiony [regional scale]."<sup>142</sup>

The experts, however, had started to shift their focus from regional agency back to top-down governance. In the process, some of Yegorov's colleagues even threw their previous dogmas overboard. In February 1928 Vladimirskii openly asserted: "We will not be able to achieve raionirovanie based only on logical constructs and theories, however strong they are. They cannot create a country's administrative structure, especially not in the country where we are now. . . . We are faced with the conditions of a transition period, when all of the newly constituted raiony [regional scale] are again beginning to constitute themselves anew."<sup>143</sup> Vladimirskii further noted that such raiony should not be seen in terms of self-sufficient organic entities but as instruments, as means of transmitting orders for Soviet construction between planners in Moscow and workers on the ground. For him territorial units were now, first and foremost, to be the means of implementing the planned economy.<sup>144</sup>

Gosplan's institutional influence would reach its zenith with Stalin's rise to power. He wanted to catch up with the advanced capitalist states in the West within only ten years.<sup>145</sup> With the idea of a five-year plan, Gosplan offered him what he desperately needed—a blueprint for instant economic growth.<sup>146</sup> With Stalin's blessing, Gosplan became an almighty planning body. Its competitors in the field of expert policy advice were restructured (KEPS in 1930), dissolved (VSNKh in 1932), or attached to Gosplan (TsSU in 1930). Thus Gosplan played a key role in hollowing out the NEP and accelerating the forced collectivization of agriculture.<sup>147</sup>

Raionirovanie became one of the catchwords during the Cultural Revolution. Examination of the stenographs from the Fifteenth Party Congress in 1928 and the Sixteenth Party Congress in 1930 shows that almost everyone within the party leadership used the term. However, this widespread usage in party discourse was ambivalent. For Stalin, it provided a code for advancing his own policies as he consolidated his power. Hence he proclaimed in June 1930: "The aim of raionirovanie is to bring the party-soviet and economic-cooperative apparatus closer to the raion [district scale] and the village. Thus we have the means of deciding in a timely manner the biggest questions in agriculture—that is, its elevation, its restructuring [*rekonstruktsiia*]. In this sense—I repeat—raionirovanie has been a huge gain for our entire construction process."<sup>148</sup>

Given the fixation on rapid industrialization and collectivization, additional expert debates appeared as at best an obstacle. For this

reason, territorial experiments and debates over the rational organization of territory came to an end. At the beginning of 1930, numerous expert committees were dissolved. After the Shakhty show trial against “bourgeois specialists” in early 1928, the GPU (political police) purged the “old” Gosplan of many of its experts. Gleb Krzhizhanovskii had to resign in 1930 and was replaced by Valerian Kuibyshev, one of Stalin’s confidants.<sup>149</sup> In the midst of the Cultural Revolution, all of the territorial structures served the purpose of transmitting orders from the planners in the center to the people on the ground. National entities would serve as necessary interfaces. These were the guiding principles of the last major territorial restructuring.

Whereas the first attempt at raionirovanie took almost a decade, the second took only weeks. With the scratch of a pen, all of the okrug administrations were abolished throughout the union and their tasks transferred to the raiony in August 1930. A few large entities now governed a multitude of raiony. The state and party leadership sought to reallocate funding from administration to economic projects and to shorten the chain of command.<sup>150</sup> In the Ukrainian SSR, for example, the 40 okruga (okruhy) and 625 raiony from 1928 were replaced by 7 oblasti and 358 raiony in 1932.<sup>151</sup> This reorganization offered Stalin a priceless opportunity to reshuffle regional and local cadres and install his loyal followers on every level of state power.<sup>152</sup>

The abolition of the okruga was a top-down decision. This time, senior politicians, not experts, decided how to reshape the Soviet Union’s administrative-territorial framework. Regional authorities received the order to introduce this reform with little opportunity for discussion. For instance, the Armenian Republic had been administered by a system composed of uezdy and uchastki between 1921 and 1929.<sup>153</sup> In 1929 the eight uezdy were replaced by five okruga. In 1930 Moscow entrusted a Zakkraikom commission with preparing and implementing a system that would considerably reduce the number of territorial entities in Armenia. As a consequence, a one-layer administrative system with twenty-seven raiony (*šejan*) was established.<sup>154</sup> It was no great surprise that this rushed restructuring only exacerbated the existing administrative chaos on the ground. It was often left unclear who had to carry out which responsibilities. For example, in Armenia and Georgia, village teachers had to wait months for their salaries. Another goal of this reform was to distribute the cadres from the okruga to the raiony, so that they could support the five-year plan on the ground, but most of them were hired by the administrations of the republican capitals

instead.<sup>155</sup> Thus practical expertise became even more centralized, contrary to the designs of politicians in Moscow.

Within the “new” Stalinist Gosplan, there was no place for enthusiastic experts like Yegorov. In 1930 he lost his job and most of his influence. However, he did not fall victim to Stalinist repression but received a managing position in the rubber industry in Moscow.<sup>156</sup> When Stalinist experts used the term *raionirovanie* after 1930, they focused on the command economy. Thus their planning commissions saw the territorial structure as a means of transmitting orders to the locals. Each raion was to produce what seemed best to the politicians and experts.<sup>157</sup> Their goal was to increase output and support the industrialization effort. The needs of the people on the ground played a secondary role at best. In implementing this command economy, the planners in Moscow merged Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan into a region that was supposed to provide cotton for the growing industrial sector. Kazakhstan was designed as a single economic region that was to produce grain and breed livestock.<sup>158</sup> Combined with forced collectivization, such plans had tremendously adverse consequences for the population.<sup>159</sup>

Anyone trying to initiate a new fundamental debate on territorial issues—be they economic or national—had to fear repression. The Ukrainian political elite faced this new hardline policy during the Kuban and Skrypnyk affairs in 1932, as did their comrades in the South Caucasus during the Great Terror four years later.<sup>160</sup> Nonetheless, changes in the territorial structure were possible and often carried out within Soviet republics and autonomous oblasti as long as they did not interfere with the borders of the national entities. Party and state organs regularly adapted administrative-territorial structures to projects related to needs of the planned economy.<sup>161</sup> Thus *raionirovanie* as such did not end with the abolition of the okruga in 1930–1931. It remained a valuable administrative tool until the dissolution of the USSR in 1991.<sup>162</sup>

At the beginning of the 1930s, however, the ideas behind *raionirovanie* ossified. Oblasti and raiony could be divided or merged according to the needs of the planned economy, but the productive debate over the criteria governing how the state could or should be structured faded away. In general, the number of oblasti grew after 1931 as their larger variants soon proved to be inefficient. For instance, the UkrSSR consisted of only seven oblasti in 1932 but had fifteen in early 1939. Whereas administrative borders within republics and autonomous units changed quite often, the Soviet state reconfigured or dissolved

larger national territories only in exceptional cases as they served as the backbone of the Stalinist power structure. Nationality in the Soviet Union increasingly gained an essentialist quality. With the introduction of the passport system and the obligatory entry on nationality, every Soviet citizen was assigned a marker that proved nearly impossible to change.<sup>163</sup>

Under Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet leadership transferred some types of economic planning back to the union republics and initiated an administrative-territorial reform. After his fall in October 1964, however, many of these reformist efforts were reversed. Thus the synthetic (economic and ethnonational) Soviet administrative-territorial framework endured (with minor changes) until the Soviet Union's demise a quarter of a century later.<sup>164</sup>

## The Ossification of Soviet Modernization

At the outset of the 1920s, the Bolshevik government realized that it would not be able to govern the new Soviet state, its economy, its population, and its space without a well-developed plan based on accurate statistical data and a well-thought-out administrative structure. To obtain such data and produce a territorial framework for the new state, Moscow initially had to rely on Russian imperial expertise for *raionirovanie*. At the same time, with the introduction of the NEP, the Bolsheviks also created a nemesis to the free market—Gosplan. In the beginning, the GOELRO campaign and the debate on how to structure the Soviet state were intricately linked. In Gosplan's Section for *Raionirovanie*, well-paid experts collected and discussed data with the goal of managing the diversity of Soviet space with the greatest efficiency. They proposed a new model of homogenous territorial units that were to be self-sufficient in terms of energy production and to encourage local economic initiative. However, the experts wisely kept to themselves the fact that their "new" framework relied largely on the old imperial *guberniia* structure and its borders.

Regional and national politicians adapted the *raionirovanie* discourse to their own ends. In doing so, they offered viable conduits between the center and the margins in everyday practice. The experts in Moscow revised their ideas accordingly. Nevertheless, Gosplan's territorial vision had yet to exhaust itself. From a midterm perspective, the discourse on *raionirovanie* liberated itself from the GOELRO campaign and had a tremendous impact on the administrative-territorial restructuring of

the early Soviet state. Gosplan's concepts materialized on a regional level. The Belarusian SSR, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan provided illustrative examples of this point. At the same time, experts from the center, such as Yegorov, continued to develop their ideas and plans. As many regional participants adapted the terminology provided by Gosplan to their needs, the experts in Moscow began to strengthen the role of the regions in economic development.

In the long term, the idea of a strong central institution like Gosplan regulating the whole economy gained the upper hand. Regional solutions conveyed the impression of administrative chaos and wasteful spending of state funding. People acting at various levels of the state bureaucracy and the party apparatus saw this administrative heterogeneity as an obstacle. Thus they grew more receptive to slogans for greater discipline and a "strong hand" at the helm. Under these conditions, *raionirovanie* mutated from a technocratic term into a convenient slogan for cadre reshuffling. Hence Stalin and his comrades were able to adopt this power tool for their own ends.