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## **KORENIZATSIIA AS A MECHANISM OF SOVIET SOCIAL ENGINEERING: TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE OF ETHNIC MINORITIES IN THE KHARKIV REGION IN THE 1920S – EARLY 1930S**

*The article examines the policy of korenizatsiia as an instrument of Soviet social engineering, aimed at accelerating the modernization of society and the purposeful re-profiling of ethnic minorities. Drawing on materials from the Kharkiv region, one of the key industrial and cultural centers of the republic, the study examines the mechanisms by which the professional structures of Jewish, German, Bulgarian, and other national communities transformed in the 1920s and early 1930s. The article analyzes the consequences of the Bolsheviks' destruction of the traditional economic model and the economic crisis of the 1920s, against which the policy of korenizatsiia was implemented. Particular attention is paid to the mechanisms of involving representatives of ethnic minorities in industrial and agricultural sectors within the broader modernization processes. It reveals how the Soviet state, while declaring support for national communities, actually used the system of cooperatives, labor exchange measures, the network of factory-training schools, and involvement in agricultural labor to reshape the professional structure of minority groups intentionally. Although the scale of these initiatives was limited, they demonstrate the authorities' aspiration to create new models of economic adaptation for national groups. The article argues that the policy of korenizatsiia, despite its proclaimed support for ethnic communities, was part of a broader program of state-driven modernization that intervened in the interethnic and socio-economic structures of the region. The restructuring of the professional niches of national minorities was carried out not only as an economic necessity but also as a means of political control, social engineering, and integrating minorities into the Soviet industrial system. The study reveals that Soviet social engineering shaped new trajectories of professional mobility for the ethnic communities of the Kharkiv region in the 1920s–1930s, essentially disrupting the previously complex economic order while simultaneously opening channels of modernization for specific groups.*

**Key words:** ethnic minorities, korenizatsiia, proletarization, occupational structure, social engineering, Kharkiv region.

**Formulation of the problem.** The policy of korenizatsiia, introduced by the Soviet leadership in the 1920s, has traditionally been viewed in historiography as an instrument of Ukrainianization, support for the development of national cultures, and the inclusion of ethnic minorities in socialist construction. However, behind this official rhetoric lay a much broader and more complex mechanism of social engineering, aimed not only at cultural transformation but also at a profound restructuring of society's social and occupational structure. These processes became particularly evident in multiethnic regions, especially in the Kharkiv region, where Jews, Germans, Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, and other ethnic groups lived, each with their own

historical models of social stratification. It was here, in the capital of Soviet Ukraine in the 1920s and early 1930s, that the implementation of korenizatsiia took on an illustrative, experimental character, allowing the region to be viewed as a model for all-Union processes. The study of professional transformations among ethnic minorities during this period reveals the deeper mechanisms of Soviet social engineering, its goals, instruments, and consequences for interethnic interaction, mobility, and social stratification.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** Research on the socio-occupational transformation of ethnic minorities in the Kharkiv region during the 1920s–early 1930s is reflected in the works of several Ukrainian historians. L. Yakubova [25] conducted

a comprehensive analysis of the socio-economic situation of ethnic minorities in the Ukrainian SSR during the 1920s and early 1930s, highlighting unemployment levels, access to education, and the impact of state policy on the redistribution of the labour force. V. Mazur [20] examined the agrarianization of the Jewish population in Ukraine, emphasizing the role of resettlement onto the land and the establishment of agricultural artels in the context of social stabilization and the “re-education” of labour potential. O. Kuchynska [19] focused on the cooperative societies of ethnic minorities, which served as an essential instrument of Soviet social engineering. V. Vasylchuk [1], Yu. Hryshchenko [2], O. Kalakura [18], and others devoted their studies to analyzing the Bolshevik government’s policy of involving specific ethnic communities of Ukraine in Soviet construction. Thus, existing research provides a crucial foundation for understanding the mechanisms by which ethnic minorities were integrated into the Soviet economy and social processes. However, the issue of the deliberate transformation of the occupational composition of ethnic communities in the Kharkiv region remains insufficiently explored.

**Task statement.** The purpose of this study is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the policy of korenizatsiia as an instrument of Soviet social engineering and to determine its impact on the transformation of the occupational structure of ethnic minorities in the Kharkiv region in the 1920s and early 1930s. The research aims to identify the mechanisms through which the Soviet authorities directed the socio-occupational mobility of national groups, altered their structural representation in key sectors of the economy, education, and state administration, and shaped new models of social behaviour and loyalty.

**Outline of the main material of the study.** The interethnic distribution in the labour market of the Kharkiv region was shaped mainly during the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The estate-based structure of the empire contributed to the consolidation of various advantages for certain national groups within specific sectors of production. The 1897 census revealed that Ukrainians were predominantly engaged in agriculture – 69.95%, while only 13.33% worked in industrial enterprises or were involved in crafts. Their percentage in trade was even smaller – 1.32%. Among Russians living in the Kharkiv Governorate, 57.18% were engaged in agriculture, 18.2% served in the military, 4.57% worked in trade, and 12.94% in various crafts and industrial production [23, p. 188]. The majority of the Jewish population consisted of artisans

and industrial workers, who together accounted for 57.36%. A significant share of Jews was employed in trade – 19.65% [23, p. 192]. Among Germans, the largest proportion – 50.02% – was engaged in agriculture, while 15.92% were artisans or industrial workers [23, p. 190]. Although the French community was relatively small, it held a notable presence in the Kharkiv region during this period. A considerable number – 29.25% – worked as tutors and governesses. The French also actively participated in commercial activity in the Kharkiv Governorate. A high percentage of those engaged in commerce was also characteristic of Poles – 3.15% [23, p. 189]. Thus, the peasantry consisted predominantly of Ukrainians, Russians, and Germans. The merchant class included Russians, Jews, Poles, and French. Within the group of artisans, craftsmen, and industrial workers, a large proportion were Jews, Germans, and Poles.

After coming to power in Ukraine, the Bolsheviks destroyed the former foundations of social existence and shattered the economic mechanisms that had regulated social reproduction. All ethnic groups of the country now had to rediscover and occupy new niches within the system of social production and consumption. The economic policy of the Soviet government from 1920 to 1924 led to a reduction in land use and a significant increase in the tax burden. Urban residents were not in better conditions, suffering from widespread unemployment. In Kharkiv, the problem was exacerbated by the influx of people migrating to major industrial centres in search of work. The unemployment rate varied among different nationalities: Jews – 12.0%, Germans – 11.8%, Ukrainians and Russians – 11.4%, Poles – 10.9%, Belarusians – 10.4%, Latvians – 7.5%, Armenians – 7.1%, Tatars – 3.8%, and 7.0% among other nationalities [24, p. 22]. The elimination of private trade, artisanal workshops, and small-scale craft production led to the mass displacement of members of these communities from their customary spheres of labour, leaving them with insufficient opportunities for rapid integration into the new Soviet economic model.

The proclamation of the policy of korenizatsiia by the 12th Congress of the RCP(b) [22, p. 28] made it possible to prevent the escalation of tensions between the authorities and the national communities of the Ukrainian SSR, as it was received very positively by the latter. They gained hope that the state would reconsider its economic policy. However, it soon became clear that Soviet ethnopolitics was not aimed at regulating real ethnosal and ethnopolitical processes. Instead, it sought to model

them and, consequently, fundamentally reorient them in accordance with the tasks of accelerating the country's socio-economic maturation and the rapid proletarianization of national minorities. In this context, the active promotion of national cooperatives should also be understood: formally intended to support ethnic communities, but in fact designed to restructure traditional economic practices, integrate them into the state command-administrative system, and ensure a controlled transformation of the occupational structure of national minorities in line with the needs of the Soviet economy. The central figure in the artisan population was no longer the individual craftsman but the cooperative artisan. In 1927, there were 8,976 artisan enterprises operating in the city, employing 13,914 people. A total of 6,040 individuals were organized into cooperatives across various branches of the Artisans' Union, with 40% of them representing ethnic minorities. The Loan-and-Savings Society united 2,500 independent artisans, of whom 1,500 were already organized into artels. Considering that half of the artisans affiliated with the Loan-and-Savings Society were also members of the Union of Independent Artisans, it follows that 60–65% of all artisans in the city were incorporated into various types of cooperative organizations [12, fol. 10]. Cooperative artisans found themselves in somewhat better conditions, as they had access to raw materials, credit, and distribution through the collaborative system. In contrast, artisans who remained outside the unions lacked organizational support and resources. In this way, the Soviet authorities effectively created conditions that forced artisans to join cooperatives, since remaining outside the cooperative system rendered their economic existence unsustainable. For example, the Chinese artel "Awakening of the East", established in early 1928, was able to continue its activity only by joining the Artisans' Union [11, fol. 15]. In contrast, the artel "Meteor," which consisted of 19 emigrants from Germany and Austria and remained outside the union, had its activity terminated. All members of this artel were transferred to work at the Serp i Molot ("Hammer and Sickle") factory [13, fols. 86, 88].

Labor exchanges played a crucial role in the process of socio-professional restructuring. In conditions of mass unemployment, they became one of the key instruments for regulating the labor market. Through them, the state sought to direct members of various ethnic groups into those sectors where the need for labor was greatest – primarily into industry and skilled technical professions. Labor exchanges not only registered the unemployed but

also actively performed the function of "redistribution centers," offering placements in retraining courses, workers' faculties, vocational schools, and national cooperatives. For example, from September 1929 to May 1930 alone, 1,000 people were assigned to enterprises of industrial cooperatives, state factories and plants, as well as to СІІІ and FZU courses at various plants. In terms of ethnicity, these individuals were predominantly Jewish, Armenian, Tatar, Roma, and others [3, fol. 68]. Complementing the state mechanism of professional mobilization was the society "Dopomoha" ("Assistance"), which, although functioning primarily within the framework of civic initiative, also directed people to cooperatives, artisan artels, industrial enterprises, and training courses. From July 1 to October 1, 1930, it placed 1,132 individuals in employment, including: Jews – 420, Armenians – 15, Poles – 15, Lithuanians – 4, Germans – 2, French – 1, Assyrians – 1, Greeks – 2, Roma – 1 [5, fol. 100].

One of the key mechanisms for transforming the occupational structure of the population in the Kharkiv region was the network of national FZUs (Factory-Workshop Schools). Their establishment was directly linked to the policy of korenizatsiia, which aimed to involve members of national minorities in industrial production and to form a socially and politically loyal working layer from among them. National FZUs provided young people with the opportunity to acquire technical skills in their native language, significantly lowering barriers to entering new professions – especially for groups that had traditionally been underrepresented in the industrial sector. In the 1930–1931 academic year, for example, the city had 12 FZU groups for Jewish adolescents. These were organized at major Kharkiv enterprises: Serp i Molot factory – 4 groups, KhEMZ – 3, KhTZ – 1, KhPZ – 3, and the Tyniakov factory – 2. A total of 322 students acquired industrial skills in these groups. During the 1931–1932 academic year, the FZU school network expanded by three groups, organized at the KhPZ and KHTZ factories, as well as the Kutuzov factory [4, fol. 4; 6, fol. 71]. Through the FZU network, the state implemented a targeted proletarianization of ethnic minorities, preparing skilled personnel for machine-building, metalworking, light industry, transport, and energy sectors. At the same time, FZUs served not only an educational but also a clearly defined social-engineering function: they shaped a new identity for the younger generation – one that was alienated from traditional artisanal, commercial, or agricultural occupations and integrated into the structures of the Soviet industrial economy.

A striking example of targeted socio-professional transformation was the employment dynamics of the Jewish population in Kharkiv's industry. After the implementation of a set of measures aimed at supporting and professionally mobilizing Jews – through the labor exchange system, national cooperatives, FZUs, and the Dopomoha Society – the number of Jews employed at city enterprises increased sharply. According to OBNM data, the number of Jewish workers at 16 major Kharkiv enterprises increased from 2,132 to 3,350 between 1927 and 1928, representing a 63% rise. The change was particularly significant in the strategically important metalworking sector (KhEMZ, KhPZ, Serp i Molot), where the number of Jewish workers increased from 804 to 1,512 – a 74% rise [8, fol. 10 rev.; 17, fol. 230]. These figures indicate that korenizatsiia measures not only declared the integration of ethnic minorities into the Soviet economy but also effectively contributed to a structural shift in employment. For the Jewish population, traditionally associated with trade, crafts, and small-scale artisanal production, the transition to industrial labor meant actual inclusion in new socio-economic niches created by Soviet industrialization. The growing share of Jewish workers in the metallurgy and machine-building sectors became a crucial indicator of the changes sought by Soviet social engineering: the formation of a modern working class from national minorities, integrated into the ideological and productive sphere of the Soviet state.

At the same time, an essential component of Soviet social engineering concerning the Jewish population was the policy of their inclusion in agriculture, which developed alongside industrial proletarianization. The party leadership viewed the inclusion of Jews in agriculture as a means of addressing several strategic objectives. First, it was an instrument of social stabilization, intended to reduce urban unemployment and ease tensions among the Jewish population. Second, the authorities sought to create a “working Jewry,” a new social group integrated into the collectivist agricultural system, loyal to the Soviet regime, and removed from old economic practices. Third, it aligned with the ideological agenda of “re-educating” ethnic minorities through engagement in productive labor, a symbol of Soviet modernity. However, overall, the Jewish population of the Kharkiv region did not show much initiative in resettling to agricultural land. At the beginning of 1928, 27 Jewish families were allowed to relocate: 7 families to the Poltava district, 15 to the Dzhankoi district in Crimea, and five families to Birobidzhan (Far East) [10, fol. 246]. Additionally, in May 1928, 1 Jewish family

was allowed to move to the Yevpatoria district [9, fol. 146], and in September, four single artisans were sent to Birobidzhan [14, fol. 99]. In our view, this was due to the significant expenses and difficulties associated. In the resettlement areas, Jews, most of whom had little experience in agriculture, faced disappointment. As a result, most Jews without permanent employment preferred to survive on temporary earnings rather than struggle to live in the waterless steppe under conditions of economic and domestic hardship. In addition to the Jewish population, Assyrians were also involved in the resettlement campaign in Kharkiv. In 1929, in response to requests from the city's Assyrians, 25 families were resettled to the Kherson district [16, fol. 255]. The government also attached great importance to settling the Roma population and engaging them in agriculture. However, the number of Roma willing to adopt a settled lifestyle and take up farming was small. In the Kharkiv district, by June 1928, only 10 families expressed a desire to pay [7, fol. 64]. Land was allocated for them in the Kherson district, but at the last moment, they refused to relocate [8, fol. 10 rev.].

In addition to resettlement, land from the collective fund and local allocations were provided for those wishing to engage in agriculture. By the end of 1926, there were 40 Bulgarian gardening cooperatives [21, p. 166] and 3 Jewish agricultural artels [15, fol. 168; 8, fol. 32 rev.; 16, fol. 144] operating in the Kharkiv region. For Bulgarians, for whom gardening was a traditional occupation, this appeared as a natural path of development. In contrast, for the Jewish population, historically unconnected to agricultural labor, the establishment of three agricultural artels was the result of a deliberate policy to involve them in farming. Similar to the policy of industrial proletarianization, this initiative aimed to establish a new model of economic behavior that aligned with the strategic needs of Soviet society while also strengthening political control over ethnic minorities.

**Conclusions.** The analysis demonstrates that the interethnic distribution in the labor market of the Kharkiv region, which was formed in the second half of the 19th century and early 20th century, significantly determined the starting positions of national communities during the era of Soviet transformations. The imperial system of estate-based and professional niches deeply entrenched the traditional model of employment for ethnic minorities. These structures proved unsuitable in the new socio-economic reality, leading to widespread unemployment and increased socio-economic instability. By proclaiming the policy

of korenizatsiia, the Soviet authorities introduced a comprehensive set of measures aimed at radically restructuring the professional composition of the population. Its actual goal was not so much the support of national minorities as their industrialization, proletarianization, and integration into the command-administrative economic model. The cooperation of artisans, the creation of national cooperatives, the activation of labor exchanges, workers' faculties,

and FZU vocational schools became instruments of social engineering, systematically displacing the population from traditional forms of employment and integrating them into industrial sectors. In parallel, ethnic minorities were drawn into agriculture, complementing the overall scheme of social reconstruction, which sought to eliminate prewar social stereotypes and create a "new" Soviet social profile for ethnic communities.

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## Гончарова О.С. КОРЕНІЗАЦІЯ ЯК МЕХАНІЗМ РАДЯНСЬКОЇ СОЦІАЛЬНОЇ ІНЖЕНЕРІЇ: ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЇ ПРОФЕСІЙНОГО СКЛАДУ ЕТНІЧНИХ МЕНШИН ХАРКІВЩИНИ У 1920-Х – НА ПОЧАТКУ 1930-Х РОКІВ

Стаття розглядає політику коренізації як інструмент радянського соціального інжинінінгу, спрямованого на прискорену модернізацію суспільства та цілеспрямоване перепрофілювання етнічних меншин. На матеріалах Харківщини, одного з ключових промислових та культурних центрів республіки, досліджено механізми трансформації професійної структури єврейської, німецької, болгарської, та інших національних громад у 1920-х – на початку 1930-х років. Проаналізовано наслідки руйнування більшовиками традиційної економічної моделі та економічної кризи 1920-х років, на фоні яких відбувалося впровадження політики коренізації. Особливу увагу приділено механізмам застосування представників етнічних меншин до промислової, та сільськогосподарської сфер у контексті модернізаційних процесів. Розкрито, як радянська держава, декларуючи підтримку національних спільнот, насправді використовувала систему кооперації, заходи бірж праці, мережу закладів фабрично-заводського учнівства, застосування до землеробської праці для цілеспрямованої перебудови професійної структури меншин. Хоч масштаби цих ініціатив були обмеженими, вони демонструють прагнення влади створити нові моделі економічної адаптації національних груп. Доведено, що політика коренізації, попри декларовану підтримку етнічних спільнот, була частиною ширшої програми модернізаційного втручання держави у міжетнічні та соціально-економічні структури регіону. Перебудова професійних ніш національних меншин здійснювалася не лише як економічна необхідність, а й як засіб політичного контролю, соціального конструювання та інтеграції меншин у радянську індустріальну систему. Стаття демонструє, що саме радянська соціальна інженерія визначила нові траєкторії професійної мобільності етнічних спільнот Харківщини у 1920–1930-х рр., значною мірою зруйнувавши попередню багатоукладну структуру, але водночас відкривши канали модернізації для окремих груп.

**Ключові слова:** етнічні меншини, коренізація, пролетаризація, професійна структура, соціальний інжинінінг, Харківщина.

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