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**Assessment re the PhD dissertation by Rakhmetolla ZAKARYA, “The policy of the Soviet government towards European emigrants and immigrants (20-40s of the xx century)”, 2023.**

In the interwar period, many leftist intellectuals and many more workers from the West considered the newly created Soviet state, either out of ideologically predetermined expectations or as a consequence of crises in the Western economies, a point of attraction. The USSR itself was aware of this potential and strove to recruit skilled workers and experts with the aim of fostering economic reconstruction and development, in particular after the Civil War and in the NEP period, but also in the context of the 5-year plans. However, both the limits of the Soviet economy and infrastructure, but also Stalin’s mistrust against possible Western influences set tight limits to Western immigration. While in 1922-25 and 1930-32 together, more than a million Western workers applied for immigration into the USSR, the numbers of those admitted to the Soviet state was much more modest as were their living conditions in comparison to the pictures promoted by Soviet propaganda. With the advent of Stalinism, Western immigrants became collective targets of suspicion and prosecution and many of them were killed or worked to death in the GULag. Soviet immigration policy and the fate of immigrants have been a topic for research in the (post-)Soviet space and in the West for decades. Nevertheless, due to the dimensions of the problem, its comprehensive and complicated nature and archival restrictions, questions still remain open.

Here Rakhmetolla Zakarya’s thesis sets in to tackle some of these questions on a general level, but also with a special geographical focus on Kazakhstan. This geographic case study is particularly valuable, as the Kazakh ASSR and from 1936 SSR was an important destination of Western (agricultural) immigration, but also later Soviet deportations. The author has studied the Russian and essential Western scholarly literature as well as memoirs plus archival holdings in Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation.

After a brief introduction into the state of research, the research questions and into the structure of the thesis, the thesis consists of three parts: The first analyzes the forming of Soviet migration policy, its legal bases, the institutions involved (such as e.g. MOPR – Red Help a.s.f.) and the main categories of immigrants. The Soviet state was one of the first to create contemporary immigration legislation; the latter was repeatedly changed in order to conform with the economic and political interests of the Soviet government. The second chapter deals

with labor migration from European states into the USSR as well as with the specifics of Kazakhstan as a destination of migration. The third chapter sheds a light on the living conditions, support and then prosecution and finally destruction of many immigrants by the Soviet regime.

The thesis analyzes the changing attitudes of the Soviet regime toward immigration, both from a domestic perspective, with respect to the creation of the planned economy and Stalinism, and from an international one, paying respect to the consequences of the rise to power in Germany of National Socialism. The manuscript does not fail to point to the contradictions in the Soviet treatment of immigration and to address the consequences of these policies and therefore expands the state of research and adds significantly to our understanding of the problem. The author is to be commended for this.

Unfortunately, the reviewed copy of the thesis had no full bibliography which is why its completeness cannot be verified. The main body of the manuscript is complete, although by Western standards for dissertations, the references are here and there a bit general or general. However, by other standards, they seem to be sufficient and in general to be correct.

Therefore it is possible to admit the dissertation for defense.

With best wishes



Wolfgang Mueller