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ASSYRIANS IN THE USSR: DEMOGRAPHIC AND LANGUAGE ASPECTS OF THE SOVIET POLICY

Abstract. *The historical Soviet legacy presents us with the positive achievements of state building. The issue of the vital activity of national communities in different chronological periods of the Soviet epoch occupied from a leading to secondary place in the state-party rhetorical programme activities. A striking example of this thesis was the policy of the Soviet government in the Assyrian national minority. When having a low educational and socio-economic level, demonstrating an internally consolidated structure and an indifferent attitude to the Soviet realities, the community was doomed to a tough regulatory policy on the part of the state. **The purpose of our research** is to study the level of mastery of the national language in the projection of the Soviet epoch on the territory of the USSR. This research context was chosen as a direct factor of assimilationist state policy and the artificial change of minority self-identification under the influence of state policy. Determining demographic indicators in a chronological perspective as an indicator of the effectiveness of the state's national policy becomes an integral part of our research task. **The methodological basis** of the study is a statistical method that allows analyzing the dynamics of assimilation processes and drawing conclusions about the imperfection of the demographic accounting of the Assyrians in the territory of the USSR. The publishing of parallel statistical calculations made by representatives of the national minority and regional state bodies reveals the true intentions of the Soviet authorities towards the community. **The Scientific Novelty.** Involvement in the scientific circulation of statistical data of the censuses of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, their correlation with archival materials, contributes to the formation of research effectiveness. These aspects have not yet been the results of scientific research.*

*The author using the statistical and source material draws the following **conclusions:** the Soviet authorities deliberately reduced the number of the Assyrians on the territory of the USSR, through deportation, ban on entry, dispersed resettlement; statistical indicators in the 1920s and 1930s of the actually available number do not reflect the real picture and are significantly underestimated; the Soviet censuses demonstrate the effectiveness of the assimilation policy in relation to the national minority, for almost 60 years more half of the Assyrians used Russian as their native language, in comparing with the pre-Soviet and early Soviet periods when their self-identification was based on 100% mastery of their native language.*

Key words: *the Assyrians, USSR, Soviet national policy, population censuses of the USSR, linguistic assimilation.*

АССИРІЙЦІ В СРСР: ДЕМОГРАФІЧНІ ТА МОВНІ АСПЕКТИ РАДЯНСЬКОЇ ПОЛІТИКИ

Анотація. *Історична радянська спадщина презентує нам позитивні досягнення державного будівництва. Питання життєдіяльності національних громад у різні хронологічні періоди радянської епохи посідало від провідного до другорядного місця в державно-партійній риторичній програмній діяльності. Яскравим прикладом такої світоглядної позиції була політика радянської влади до ассирійської національної меншини. Маючи низький рівень освіти, демонструючи внутрішню консолідовану структуру та індивідуальне ставлення до радянських реалій, громада була приречена до жорсткої регуляторної політики із боку держави. Метою наших пошуків постає дослідження рівня володіння ассирійцями національною мовою у різних часових вимірах радянського періоду. В основу гіпотези дослідження було покладено тезу про наявність прямої залежності штучної зміни самоідентифікації меншини під впливом державної політики. Визначення демографічних показників у хронологічній перспективі як індикатора результативності національної політики держави стає невід'ємною складовою нашого дослідницького завдання. Методологічною основою дослідження є статистичний метод, який дає змогу визначити динаміку асиміляційних процесів та зробити висновки про недосконалість демографічного обліку ассирійців на території СРСР. Презентація паралельних статистичних підрахунків, зроблених представниками національної меншини та регіональними органами державної влади, відкриває справжні наміри радянської влади до громади. Наукова новизна. Залучення до наукового обігу статистичних даних переписів Російської імперії та Радянського Союзу, кореляція їх із архівними матеріалами, сприяє формуванню результативності дослідження. Зазначені аспекти це не були предметом наукових пошуків дослідників.*

Автор на підставі статистичного матеріалу та джерел, доходить таких висновків: радянська влада свідомо зменшила кількість ассирійців на території СРСР, шляхом депортації, заборони в'їзду ассирійцям з інших країн, дисперсному розселенню; статистичні показники у 1920 – 1930-х рр. фактично наявної кількості не відображають реальної картини та значно занижені; радянські переписи демонструють результативність асиміляційної політики стосовно національної меншини, майже за 60 років переважна більшість ассирійців використовували російську мову як рідну, порівняно з дорадянським та початковим радянським періодами коли їх самоідентифікація базувалась на 100 % володінні рідної мови.

Ключові слова: СРСР, ассирійці, радянська національна політика, переписи населення СРСР, мовна асиміляція.

The Problem Statement. The Assyrian issue on the territory of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries was never a priority of state policy. The low demographic indicators of the minority took it beyond the primary tasks of the government. The absence of the national state as a guarantor of rights, the low level of education of the population, nationwide socio-political and economic upheavals led to the levelling of the satisfaction of the cultural needs of the national minority. Instead, the Soviet ideological doctrine presented guaranteed opportunities for the comprehensive realization of the Assyrians' needs and their privileged quality of life, compared to compatriots who remained in other countries. Reports on the national and cultural development of national minorities of the USSR presented positive statistical dynamics of indicators, although the de facto situation was fundamentally the opposite. The stereotypical vision of positive changes in the Assyrian national environment as a result of the Soviet modernization has become a scientific and public informational trend of recent times. Scientific works, which aimed at rethinking and presenting the real historical situation, is an urgent task of responsible historical science and scholars.

The purpose of our research was to study the statistical level of mastery of the national language and its correlation with mastery of Russian in the context of self-identification of the Assyrians as a way of worldview. Definition of demographic indicators in a chronological

perspective as an indicator of the effectiveness of the state's national policy is an integral part of our research task.

The Analysis of Sources and Recent Research. The historiographical analysis of research on the issue demonstrates the lack of attention paid by internal and foreign researchers to the research context we defined. The authors of these works use statistical indicators to confirm scientific hypotheses in the context of the descriptive and logical structure of the presentation of their own materials.

The majority of works have regional specificity in the presentation of the material. Among the latter, it is possible to identify the appearance of printed research on the history of the Assyrians who lived on the territory of the former RSFSR (Mykhailov, 2020). In Ukraine, the Assyrian issue also has quality coverage (Margulov, 2017; Margulov, 2016). There are scientific papers, which describe the life of the Assyrians in Georgia during the Soviet period (Margulov, 2021; Mamuka, 2006; Osipov, 2000).

The works mentioned have a regional and republican character and do not reflect the general development trends of the national community. In the presence of the Soviet historiographical heritage, today there is a lack of new conceptual views. Only some works have a generalized presentation of the material, although they present the factual material in a bibliographic and statistical dimension (Sado, 2017). Therefore, there is currently a need for comprehensive scientific research that would reflect the trends of the Soviet state policy in relation to the Assyrian community.

Our attention was focused on national censuses that were conducted in different chronological periods and differed in the political, legal and ideological content of the conduct. For the analysis we considered the statistical indicators of the population censuses of the Russian Empire (1897) and the national population censuses of the USSR (1926, 1939, 1959, 1970, 1979, 1989).

The source bases of our searches are materials presented by archive funds, they are: the State Archives of the Russian Federation, the State Institution "National Archive of the Republic of Adygea", the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, the Central State Archive of Higher Authorities and State Administration of Ukraine (CSAHASA of Ukraine), the Russian State archive of economics.

The Purpose of the Research. The goal defined of scientific research directs us to use the statistical research method. We used official statistical data from state censuses and a parallel count made by the national minority and regional authorities. The correlation of this a mass of information directs the researcher to a critical paradigm of search and results.

The Results of the Research. According to information, in 1891, 2,272 Assyrians lived within the Russian Empire. The geography of their stay included Kara region, Tiflis and Yerevan provinces (Erivan and Sharuro-Daralage county) (Alphabetical list of peoples, 1895, p. 6).

The first general population census of the Russian Empire in 1897 records Syro-Chaldeans or Aysors (Assyrians) who numbered 5,353 (3,353 men). Almost all of them (82.8%) were located in the Caucasus region within Tiflis (1,570 people) and Erivan (2,865 people), partially Elizavetpol provinces. The main part is the native population of the region; the smaller part comes from the neighboring regions of Turkey and Persia. In addition to the Caucasus, the Assyrians settled on the territory of the European part of Russia (45 men and 2 women), in Siberia (17 men), Central Asia (3 men) (Troinitsky & Patkanov, etc., 1905, p. XVII).

The majority of the Assyrians in the first years of their life on the territory of the Russian Empire had foreign citizenship and did not claim to change it. Despite constant oppression

in Turkey and Persia, they did not consider Russia as a place of permanent residence. They settled in the border regions despite the strategic potential of the entire territory of the empire. The state also did not see any prospects for their mass migration because of their low economic and educational levels in the presence of an internal demographic resource. Statistical indicators confirm the hypothesis that the Assyrian community preserves a communal traditional patriarchal way of life, such as living in compact enclaves, excluding women from socio-economic activities, and the absolute indicator of mastery of the national language speaking (Zub (Rudenko), 2014, pp. 16–18).

The census recorded 100% mastering in the national language of all interviewed respondents. As for the resettlement of the Assyrians on the territory of the empire, they preferred to be placed on the countryside. Thus, 24.41% of the respondents lived in cities, and 75.58% – in counties. This thesis can be confirmed by the fact that the ratio of sexes in cities was 1:5.25 (one woman for five men), and in counties – 1:1.25. In our opinion, these statistics testify to the permanent character of residence in the territory of county (rural areas) and situational in cities (pendulum labour migration) (Troinitsky & Patkanov, etc., 1905, pp. 18–19).

Based on the statistics of the Census, it can be concluded that 1898 men and 102 women had self-employment (37.36% of the total population). Employment indicators testify to the existence of patriarchal practices in the national environment. This is directly indicated by the percentage of employed women – 5.1% of the total female population, compared to only 5.3% of employed men. Employment is characterized by a low educational level of employment: in agriculture sector there were 604 men and 25 women, in sphere of activities and private service, including servants and day labourers there were 204 men and 24 women, in work on arrangement, repair and maintenance of housing, construction there were 494 men, in trade operations were engaged 141 men and 1 women. It should be noted that the number of employed men significantly exceeded the number of employed women and family members. Only in agriculture this proportion had an inverse coefficient. Such an imbalance indicated that employment in agriculture was traditional for the general mass of the Assyrians, where they felt comfortable, which encouraged them to reproduce family relations. Other employment was seen as temporary or perspective, mastery of which was undertaken by men without families or by single men.

Despite the general low level of education among the Assyrians, there were isolated cases of participation in the intellectual sphere of employment. Four people were employed in administration, court, police, four people were employed in public and estate services, five people were employed in educational and educational activities, and five people were employed in medical and sanitary work. One hundred forty one persons engaged in various types of commercial activity (Troinitsky & Patkanov, etc., 1905, pp. 354–355).

The system of planned management of the Soviet economy needed clear statistical indicators. Based on this need and taking into account the fact that statistics were considered a priority during the crisis, the Soviet authorities decided to conduct the All-Union Population Census (1926). The determination of the respondents' nationality was based on self-identification and self-determination. Based on its data, the statistical situation changes fundamentally - the territory of the Caucasian republics stopped to be the only enclave of the Assyrian resettlement.

The census records 9,808 Assyrians (5,139 men and 4,669 women) on the territory of the state. That period 3,430 and 3,022 women chose the urban way of life, 1,709 and 1,647 women chose the rural way of life. If according to the census statistics of 1897, 75.58%

of the Assyrians lived in rural areas, then in 1926, the census records that 34.21% of the Assyrians lived in rural areas. It should be noted that the decrease in the indicators of living in rural areas occurred due to the expansion of the geography of the settlement of the Assyrians on the territory of the USSR, mainly in urban conditions due to the influx of a large number of refugees from the territory of Persia and Turkey. Thus, in the RSFSR, 1,290 men and 1,182 women lived in cities (in rural areas there were 209 men and 162 women); in the Ukrainian SSR, respectively, there were 455 men and 400 women (in rural areas there were 3 men and 2 women), in the Transcaucasian SFSR there were 1672 men and 1431 women (in rural areas there were 1497 men and 1483 women), in Belarusian SSR there were 2 men and 4 women, in the Uzbek SSR there were 8 men and 5 women, in the Turkmen SFSR there were 3 men (Vsesoyuznaya perepis naseleniya, 1928, pp. 12–13). In the city, there were 881 Assyrians women per 1,000 people, and 964 Assyrians women per 1,000 people in the countryside. In general, this indicator was 909 Assyrians women per 1000 men in the state (Vsesoyuznaya perepis naseleniya, 1928, p. 132).

Demographic indicators were positively affected by the migration waves of refugee masses in 1914 – 1918. During this period, uncontrolled population flows (mainly refugees) moved to the territory of the Russian Empire, radically changing the socio-economic and statistical indicators of the national minority. Not having access to land resources and means of production, they were forced to merge with the masses of the population of the state in the urban environment. The educational level of the population is also changing. In 1926, 2,476 Assyrians people (25.2%) recognized themselves as literate, including 1,704 (33.2%) men and 772 (16.5%) women (Vsesoyuznaya perepis naseleniya, 1928, pp. 106–107). Similar statistics are presented in the territory of the European part of the RSFSR, where the percentage of educated Assyrians men in the republic is 30.6%, the percentage of educated the Assyrians women is 16% (Vsesoyuznaya perepis naseleniya, 1928, p. 48). It should be noted that the developers of the census defined the definition of “literate” as “the ability to read means as understanding printed words, at least by syllables, the ability to write means the ability to write one’s own surname.” Thus, this indicates the basicity of the educational level (Vorobyev, 1938, p. 33).

As the native language of the Assyrians, the developers of the census recognized the New (Novo) - Syrian language. In the instructions for conducting censuses, it was determined that the native language is the language that a person knows best or in which he or she speaks constantly. The Novo-Syrian language was recognized on a national scale by 15,510 Assyrians people. To compare the ratio of nationality and native language, we should take into account the population of the Transcaucasian SFSR where the existing Assyrian population was 6,083 people and the New Syrian language was spoken by 6,055 Assyrians people (Vsesoyuznaya perepis naseleniya, 1928, pp. 32–33). In other republics, there are many more speakers of the New Syrian language than ethnic Assyrians. In this, in our opinion, there are reasons to assert the discrepancy between the determined number of the Assyrians and their actual presence on the territory of the Soviet state. This discrepancy is also influenced by the fact that in the All-Union Census of 1939, the Assyrian language was native to the Lakhluks (ethno-linguistic group of the Jews). This approach complicates statistical calculations of the existing Assyrian population.

The positive growth dynamics of the country’s Assyrian population raises questions for researchers. Despite the nationwide format of the census and the high level of its preparation, there are inconsistencies that are given both by state bodies and national public institutions. In the address to the Executive Committee of the Comintern dated January 21, 2021, the head

of the Central Committee of the Assyrian Socialist Party of Transcaucasia determined the number of the Assyrians residing in the territory of Soviet Russia as 45,000 Assyrians people (RSASPH, f. 495, d. 1, c. 51, p. 127).

According to the report of the North Caucasian Regional Executive Committee dated February 17, 1926, there were 10,000 Assyrians there (NA Republic of Adygea, f. P21, d. 1, c. 21, p. 288). Another example that points at statistical inconsistencies is the result of the survey of the Assyrians on the territory of the USSR. It was made by O. Bit-Shumun, the head of the House of Peoples of the East (Kyiv) in 1926. According to his observations, 10,000 Assyrians lived on the territory of the Ukrainian Republic. Later, this figure passed to the republican reporting and calculations of the size of the Assyrian population (CSAHASA, f. 166, d. 4, c. 974, p. 46; SARF, f. 3302, d. 1, c. 255, p. 121). According to "Hoyad-Atura" (all-Soviet Assyrian public organization), as reported on January 13, 1926, there were 16,000 Assyrians who lived in the RSFSR; there were 9,000 Assyrians people who lived in the Ukrainian SSR; there were 4,000 Assyrians people in the Armenian SSR; there were 6,000 Assyrians people in the Georgian SSR; in the Azeybarzhan SSR there were 3 000 Assyrians people (SARF, f. 3302, d. 1, c. 186, p. 7). The geographical differentiation of sources and their status indicates the significant shortcomings of the Soviet statistical accounting of the population.

The migration policy of the Soviet leadership in relation to the Assyrians was not stable: it was from comprehensive support and assistance to restrictions and prohibitions. We analysed the order to the heads of the political departments of the Red Army dated November 8, 1920, which stated the need for educational work among representatives of the peoples of the East. It was about disseminating information about the Soviet government, promoting a positive attitude towards the Soviet reality, and conducting communist propaganda (RSASPH, f. 495, d. 154, c. 65, p. 1). In 1927, at a meeting of the commission of the Council of Labour and Defense, a secret decision was made to refuse the resettlement of 20,000 Assyrians from Upper Mesopotamia to the USSR (SARF, f. 364p., d. 7, c. 11, p. 3).

The results of the 1937 population census of the USSR raise a number of debatable questions among researchers. The census was conducted in January of 1937, and in September its materials were recognized as "incorrect". The annulment of its results under the conditions of a totalitarian state management system leads the researcher to the negative indicators of its verification for the state. According to this census, the number of Assyrians was recorded at 3,214 people. The census statistics indicated that 3,164 Assyrians lived on the territory of the Armenian SSR (Zhyromskaya & Kiselev, 1996, pp. 83–86).

The decrease in demographic indicators may indicate the fact of massive undercounting of the Assyrian population. Demographic indicators were negatively affected by re-immigration sentiments, for example, in the report on the results of the operational work of the ODPU employees in the Armenian SSR, migration sentiments of the Assyrians to Turkey and Persia were recorded (CA FSB, f. 2, d. 8, c. 679, pp. 181–319). The following document can be cited as proof of this fact.

In a conversation with People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs M. M. Litvinov, Iran's ambassador to the USSR Saed noted the fact that the Iranian government was forced to accept 40,000 Iranians who are not adapted to life in the country and have no means of livelihood. A large percentage of these persons are the Assyrians and the Armenians born in the USSR. A request was also formulated for the filtering of 1,200 Iranians whom the NKVD was going to additionally deport (RFFPA, f. 06, d. 1, c. 1, pp. 215–217). In the report note of the instructor of the Presidium of the Central Central Committee A. Yelbayev to the head of the Central Committee of the USSR M.I. Kalinin has information about the number of the Assyrians living

on the territory of Moscow in 1936 – 2,500 people. From the description of the minority, he noted the backwardness of cultural and mass political and educational work, international education, remnants of national customs and religious education (Vermenych, 2022, pp. 158–175). That period the All-Soviet Assyrian newspaper “Dawn of the East” dated December 2, 1936, number 1343 described the resettlement of 25,000 Assyrians to the land (SARF, f. 3302, d. 1, c. 26, p. 97). According to the data of the All-Union Union of the Assyrians there were 35-45 thousand Assyrians in people lived in the USSR in the 1930s (SARF, f. 3302, d. 2, c. 65, p. 22). The contradiction of the statistical indicators demonstrates the discrepancy between the actual and the number of the Assyrian population determined by the census.

The All-Union Census of 1939 records the presence of the Assyrian population on the territory of the USSR at 20,256 people. Of which, 14,273 people (70.5% of the existing national population) lived in cities, and 5,983 people (29.5%) lived in rural areas; 14,870 people (73.41%) chose Assyrian as their mother tongue, 4,304 Assyrians people spoke (21.24%) Russian, 893 Assyrians people (4.4%) used the language of the Union Republics, 189 people (0.93%) spoke other languages. In cities, 4,759 women (68.23%) and 4,993 men (68.40%) considered Assyrian to be their native language, in rural areas they were 2,704 men (85.50%) and 2414 women (87.94%). The Russian was spoken by 1906 Assyrians women and by 1,938 Assyrians men. In rural areas they were 2,704 men and 2414 women (RSAE, f. 1562, d. 336, c. 1056, pp. 1–10).

The census demonstrates a new geography of Assyrian settlement. On the territory of the RSFSR there were 6,452 people (3,224 men and 3,228 women) who lived in cities, and there were 1,080 people (697 men and 383 women) who lived in rural areas. It was 37.18% of the total number of the Assyrians in the USSR. In the Georgian SSR there were 3,742 people (1,962 men and 1,780 women) who lived in cities and 965 people (518 men and 447 women) who lived in rural areas. It calculated 23.23% of the total number of the Assyrians on the territory of the USSR. In the Armenian SSR there were 400 people (230 men and 170 women) who lived in cities, and 2,880 people (1,420 men and 1,460 women) who lived in rural areas, which was 16.19% of the total number of the Assyrians on the territory of the USSR.

In the Ukrainian SSR there were 2,087 people (1,046 men and 1,041 women) who lived in cities and 114 (106 men and 8 women) who lived in rural areas. It calculated 10.86% of the total number of the Assyrians on the territory of the USSR. In the Azerbaijan SSR there were 1,197 people (621 men and 576 women) who lived in cities, and 618 people (317 men and 301 women) who lived in rural area; it was 8.96% of the total number of the Assyrians on the territory of the USSR. In the Byelorussian SSR there were 227 people (124 men and 103 women) who lived in cities, 8 men in rural areas, which is 1.16% of the total number of the Assyrians in the territory of the USSR. In the Kazakh SSR there were 67 people (34 men and 33 women) who lived in cities and 59 people (50 men and 9 women) who lived in rural area. It presents 0.62% of the total number of the Assyrians on the territory of the USSR. In the Turkmen SSR there were 13 people (6 men and 7 women) who lived in cities, which was 0.06% of the total number of the Assyrians on the territory of the USSR. In the Kyrgyz SSR, 9 people (3 men and 6 women) lived in cities, which was 0.04% of the total number of the Assyrians on the territory of the USSR. In the Tajik SSR, 4 people (3 men and 1 woman) lived in cities, 2 men lived in rural areas, which was 0.02% of the total number of the Assyrians in the territory of the USSR (RSAE, f. 1562, d. 336, c. 1056, pp. 10–100).

According to the results of the 1959 census, there were 21,803 Assyrians on the territory of the USSR. Among them, 14,021 (64.3%) people considered their native language as the

language of their nationality, 6,360 (29.1%) people used Russian as native language, and 1,422 (6.5%) another language. If we consider these indicators by gender we can see the following: among men (they were 10,910 people of the total number of the Assyrians in the territory of the USSR) 6,830 Assyrians people considered the language of their nationality to be their native language. The Russian language was native for 3,298 people; other languages were used by 782 Assyrians people. Among women who were 10,893 of the total number of the Assyrians in the territory of the USSR 7,191 Assyrians women considered the language of their nationality to be their mother tongue, the Russian language was native for 3,062 Assyrians women, another languages were used by 640 Assyrians women (The results of the All-Union population census of 1959, 1962, pp. 185–186.)

According to the 1970 census, there were 24,294 Assyrians in the USSR. 15,662 people (64.4%) considered the language of their nationality as their mother tongue, 7,267 (29.9%) spoke Russian, and 1,365 (5.6%) – another language. Of the total number of the Assyrians, 11,229 Assyrians people spoke Russian. The nature of their resettlement was as follows: 9,927 men lived in the city. Assyrian was the native language for 5,784 people, Russian was used by 3,572 Assyrians people, and the language of another nationality was spoken by 571 Assyrians people. There were 9,965 Assyrians women who lived in the city.

The Assyrian language was the native language of 5,989 people; the Russian language was spoken by 3,419 people, the languages of another nationality were used by 557 Assyrians people. In rural areas, these indicators made up the following picture: there were 2,249 people. Among them Assyrian was the native language for 1971 people; Russian was native for 154 people, the language of another nationality was used by 124 people. There were 2,153 women who lived in rural areas. We can see that 1,918 women spoke Assyrian as their mother tongue, 122 women spoke Russian, and 113 people spoke the language of another nationality (Maksimov, 1973, pp. 11, 21–125).

The analysis of indicators draw us to the conclusion that in cities among the Assyrians for whom the national language was their mother tongue there were 59.1% population, the Russian language was spoken by 35.1% Assyrians population, in rural areas similar indicators were 88.3% and 6.2% respectively.

As a result of the 1979 census of the USSR, the number of the Assyrians was determined at 25,170 people. From this indicator, 13,813 people (54.8%) considered the Assyrian language to be their native language; 9,791 Assyrians people (38.89%) said it was the Russian language as their native language, and 1,566 people (6.22%) spoke the language of other nationalities of the USSR. 10,499 Assyrians people were fluent in the Russian language, and 5,390 people spoke a language of another nationality of the USSR (Makarova, 1984, pp. 78, 134, 135). The situation with national language identification is worsening, as indicated by the fact that even in the territories of compact living in rural areas (the Armenian SSR), only 56.8% of 6,183 Assyrians indicated the Assyrian as their native language, and 34.3% pointed Russian as their native language.

According to the results of the 1989 census, 26,160 Assyrians lived in the USSR, among whom 15,584 people (59.6%) spoke the national language, 8,313 Assyrians people (31.7%) spoke Russian, and 2,263 (8.6%) Assyrians people spoke the language of the peoples of the USSR (Isupov, 1990, p. 37).

It should be noted that similar processes took place among other nationalities that lived dispersedly on the territory of the USSR and were hostages of state policy. To confirm this thesis, we can cite statistical indicators of the Gypsies according to the Soviet censuses.

In 1897, they demonstrated 100% mastery of their native language (Troinitsky & Patkanov, etc., 1905, p. 7). In 1939, the Gypsy language was spoken by 55.3% as their mother tongue and 21.8% population said it was Russian (Polyakov, 1992, pp. 79–80). In 1959, 59.3% of the total national population considered the Gypsy language to be their native language; 1970 they were 70.8%. In 1970, Russian was considered as native language by 53% Gypsy population (Maksimov, 1973, p. 10).

The Conclusion. As we can see the percentage of fluency mastering in the Russian language and its identification as a native language among the Assyrians depended on the active phase of modernization of the Soviet state, i.e. the peak indicators were presented in the 1920s and 1930s with further expansion. This period there was a fundamental change in national self-identification in the direction of active russification as a way of everyday life. Each subsequent census records a progressive decrease in the number of speakers of the national language and an increase in the Russian-speaking component, regardless of the geography of settlement on the territory of the USSR. Those processes were more intense in the urban environment, and were less intensively in places of compact residence (rural areas).

During less than half a century of living in the Soviet state, almost half of the Assyrians people deformed their linguistic identification. When refusing to use and study the national language, the minority confirmed the “successful” course of the Soviet national experiments. The growing number of the Assyrians who lived in the USSR, according to census, hides the true statistical information. In fact, it was the process of depopulation. During the 1920s and the 1930s, the Soviet authorities contributed in every possible way to the artificial reduction of the existing Assyrian population on its territory. The community was dispersed throughout the state without the possibility of compact living, which in the conditions of intensified industrialization testified to the prerequisites for gradual assimilation.

The positive results of russification were possible owing to an active state policy and had standardization in relation to representatives of all national minorities. The crisis of socio-economic life against the background of revolutionary events, the course towards industrialization of the state contributed to the priority of redistribution of internal labour reserves. The issue of labour shortage was solved by the redistribution of resources from the village to the city and, in the case of the Assyrians, testified to the artificial destruction of the national and cultural and traditional practices of an everyday life.

Mass reorientation to the urban way of life also took place during the period of the 1920 – 1930s, during the active phase of modernization of society. Preservation of territories of compact residence in rural areas did not become an ethno-consolidating factor for the Assyrian community, which was dispersed throughout the territory of the USSR. Despite the formation of formats of national-state management (collective farms), the percentage of russification was significant. Such situation testified to the conscious policy of the state to limit the use of the national language. Under conditions of forced life in an urban environment, the Assyrians became participants in “standard” assimilation practices in the absence of other alternatives.

In the short term, the Soviet modernization did not bring a qualitative educational and professional high level to the national community, nor did it positively affect the well-being of the Assyrians. Acting as a tool for the unification of society, it was aimed at reformatting the national mental and cultural identity in the context of state policy. The period of the transitional stage to the real industrial era, reinforced by state ambitions and international conjuncture, left no choice between state needs and the preservation of national and

cultural identity. This was a conscious choice of the Soviet leadership under the conditions of the existence of an authoritarian and totalitarian model of public administration. The consequences of these processes were linguistic assimilation and the progressive reduction of the Assyrian community on the territory of the USSR.

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