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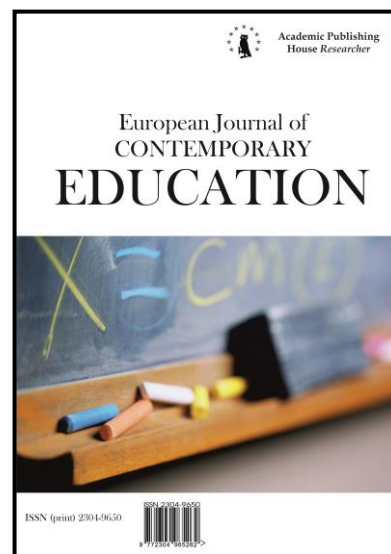
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Education Reforms in the Don Region in 1880–1890 and Host Ataman Prince N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky

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Abstract

Ataman Nikolai Ivanovich Svyatopolk-Mirsky came under harsh criticism, targeted by his contemporaries from the liberal camp, as a persecutor of enlightenment who “has failed to completely abolish science, but not thanks to the lack of enthusiasm.” On the other hand, today's historians urge the academic community to re-assess the figure of the ataman who contributed to opening several new educational institutions on the Don. In our paper, we tried to throw light on the situation by deliberately focusing on the policy of N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky in education. As a result, we found out that numerous close-downs of gymnasiums, initiated by the ataman, and reduced number of students can be explained not so much by political considerations but by criminal and educational reasons, and the process began after 1885, when a gymnasium principal fled Novocherkassk following an attack by his students. At the same time, instead of closed gymnasiums, N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky established technical and vocational schools that were long urgently needed. Our primary conclusion is that although N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky pursued a logical and reasonable educational policy in general, he made a number of mistakes – he excessively cut enrolment in gymnasiums and failed to provide the region with graduates from the network of vocational schools he created.

Keywords: education on the Don in 1880-1890, Don Cossacks, N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky, Novocherkassk gymnasium, ataman technical school, army trades schools.

1. Introduction

The history of education in pre-revolutionary Russia is currently attracting many researchers and provoking heated debates in academia. It is clear that the image of an illiterate and ignorant country, fostered in the Soviet era, does not reflect reality. For example, A.A. Cherkasov

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convincingly showed that by 1914, in the Russian Empire, 80 % of school-aged children had received education at public or private schools or at home (Cherkasov, 2011: 146-147). Meanwhile, it is becoming increasingly obvious that education in the great power was region-specific to a sufficient extent to explore the history of education separately in different regions (Khramtsov, 2018; Shevchenko et al., 2016). The Don Host Oblast was not an exception in this aspect, but works devoted to the education in the area are mixed and inconsistent. For example, A.A. Karpenko, continuing the typical line of the Soviet historiography, writes that most progressive teachers were persecuted by the by reactionary authorities and government efforts to improve education had a forced nature (Karpenko, 2006: 229-256). Contrary to that opinion, L.A. Donskova insists that “the cooperation of the government and civil society on issues related to education in the Don region was very efficient” (Donskova, 2008: 138). From our viewpoint, we can succeed in addressing this contradiction if we change our research methodology by moving from the general works, describing long historical periods and seeking to deliver broad generalizations on the history of Don education, to the works covering more specific aspects, but strictly relying on a wider range of facts. In fact, both A. A. Karpenko, and L.A. Donskova had grounds for the conclusions they drew: over the long chronological period, reviewed in their papers, the situation in the educational system of the Don Host Oblast changed several times, and one of these shifts will be discussed in this work.

In 1860-1870, the Don education, as was the case in the rest of the Russian Empire, showed very rapid progression. A prominent Don statistician, S.F. Nomikosov, wrote about it as follows: “In 1830, there were 1,051 students in the region's educational institutions; in 1835 – 1,080; in 1840 – 1,492; in 1845 – 1,533; in 1850 – 1,798; in 1855 – 1,813; in 1860 – 2,183. Thus, in the first 30 years of the period we selected, the total number of students grew as much as twice plus in the region. On January 1, 1870, there were 13,256 students in total, i.e. their number increased 10-fold over one decade. Henceforth, the growth proceeded not so fast, and by January 1, 1880, the total number of students reached 22,370, i.e. it increased by 69 % in 10 years (Nomikosov, 1884: 575). However, in 1881, a new Don Ataman was appointed. It was Prince N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky. Contemporaries of the liberal camp described him as being almost a caricatural persecutor of enlightenment, comparing him with the characters of M.E. Saltykov-Shchedrin. This is what cadet A.I. Petrovskii wrote on this in his social and political essays using rather a florid language: “Guided by the example of the third (after Derzhimorda and Ugryum-Burcheev) administrator (this is about Saltykov-Shchedrin's Town Governor Perekhvat Zalikhvatsky), but having significantly surpassed him in the scale of his destructive reach, Mirsky has closed (not burned, however, as Perekhvat Zalikhvatsky did) not one but several gymnasiums on the Don, and although has failed to completely abolish science (as this was accomplished by Perekhvat), but not thanks to the lack of enthusiasm” (Petrovskii, 1916: 23). Less emotion, but not less criticism, concerning the fight against enlightenment, which allegedly was waged on the Don in the years of N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky's administration, was expressed in the words of one of the most respected Don historians and local lore experts of the second half of the nineteenth century, A.A. Karasev: “The administration of Prince Svyatopolk-Mirsky (unknown as it may be, however, on whose initiative) has closed: Ust-Medveditskaya classical gymnasium as well as similar pro-gymnasiums in the stanitsas (villages) of Nizhne-Chirskaya and Kamenskaya, as well as parallel classes at the Novocherkassk classical gymnasium, as a result the total number of students in the latter has reduced from more than 700 to less than 300 people” (Karasev, 1899: 113). So, indeed, gymnasium education on the Don was almost completely eliminated under N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky, which brought him notoriety among pre-revolutionary historians of the liberal camp.

However, modern historiography exhibits signs indicating rehabilitation of the personality of N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky. The process was started by R.G. Tikidjian, who published an article on the Don Ataman. Here, the modern historian, while accepting the fact that “the prince did not encourage the growth of classical education”, at the same time proved that the years of his character's administration witnessed “serious improvement in the primary general education of Cossacks” (Tikidzh'yan, 1998). Later A.A. Volvenko also called on historians to look more carefully not only into the negative, but also into the positive aspects of N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky's work in education: for example, it was under him that the Don Cadet Corps and the Ataman Technical School were established (Volvenko, 2017: 119-120).

We believe that the history of education on the Don in the time of N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky's administration deserves an individual study. The policy adopted by the Ataman really gives reason

to consider him a character with a virtually grotesque caricatural nature, in the spirit of the heroes of M.E. Saltykov-Shchedrin or Soviet propaganda. On the other hand, other elements of this policy allow us to view him as the founder of vocational technical and handicraft education in the Don Host Oblast. In our opinion, N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky struggled to rebuild the educational system in the region, entrusted to him, to make it as efficient and contextualized in the then epoch as possible. However, he was not to succeed in his endeavor, and instead of a holistic system, actually created by the Ataman, historians usually see only its separate parts, and this fragmented approach makes them take such a disagreeable position towards N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky. So, what developments actually took place in the Don education over his administration? We will try to answer this question in our paper.

2. Materials and methods

The resignation of N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky from the post of Don Ataman in 1898 was a controversial event. Shortly before this, the Don nobility submitted Nicholas II a complaint that Cossacks quickly slid into poverty, and petitioned to create a special commission to investigate the causes of this impoverishment (GARO. F. 410. Op. 1. D. 682. L. 1-60b). Although there is no direct evidence that this event and the subsequent transfer of N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky to the State Council are connected, the outcome was the formation in 1899 of "His Imperial Majesty's Commission to analyze the causes that damaged the economic life of the Don Host, and to formulate measures to restore its economic well-being" or "N.A. Maslakovets' Commission" was unsympathetic towards the policy of the former Ataman, who, on top of it, died late in 1898. As the meetings of the commission was paid serious attention to education, its proceedings (Protokoly..., 1899), and the final report (Maslakovets, 1899) are essential sources of information on the subject under review. The book by I. Artinsky "Essay on the history of the Novochoerkassk military gymnasium" is also of great interest. Its author used the now lost materials from the gymnasium archive as a basis to create a picture of the real situation in the vital educational institution on the Don (Artinskii, 1907). In addition, we will turn to the memorandum of retired Colonel A.G. Fatyanov, which contain information on another gymnasium located in the Ust-Medveditskaya stanitsa and is stored in the State Archive of the Rostov Region (GARO) (GARO. F. 46. Op. 1. D. 3282).

As for the methods we employ, given the little known facts we will cover here, we will widely utilize the historical descriptive method. The historical comparative method will help us see whether the educational reforms, implemented by N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky, were efficient or not, and the system method will facilitate an understanding of main ideas at the heart of the Ataman's educational policy.

3. Discussion

As it was shown, N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky is usually blamed for closing most Don gymnasiums and pro-gymnasiums in the first place, as well as for a dramatically decreased number of students in the last surviving Novochoerkassk gymnasium. Although we acknowledge that the decisions were unwise in the long term (we will elaborate on the aspect below), we cannot but point out the facts that drove the Ataman to tough choices.

The Novochoerkassk gymnasium was a central role model educational institution in its category for the entire Don Host was. However, the time between the end of 1870 and beginning of 1880 is the least successful period for this school. The gymnasium's historiographer, I. Artinsky, went negative in his description, laying gloomy colors on with a trowel. "Students were moved up to the next form in a peculiar way: the promotion was granted not only to the ones with 2½ and 2¼ grade on one or two main disciplines, but even to those with absolute two grade (for example, on mathematics, geography, Latin, French and German), without an appropriate exam after the summer break" (Artinskii, 1907: 286). "The student laxity reached the point where some of 7 or 6 form students performed natural organic functions in the corridor and in the classroom without hesitation" (Artinskii, 1907: 291). However, I. Artinsky more often simply cited excerpts from the reports of gymnasium principals, which were all too eloquent. For example, a gymnasium principal in 1878-1880, I.V. Kansky complained that students completely lacked "assiduity, a skill to the diligent work without interruptions" (Artinskii, 1907: 284). His successor V.Yu. Khoroshevsky (1880-1883) bluntly wrote to his management that "impeccable discipline and good manners are very difficult to instill into the students of the Novochoerkassk gymnasium, who in the vast majority

belong to families that have almost no pedagogical influence on children” (Artinskii, 1907: 290). Moreover, the situation seemed to aggravate over time, and the next director, D.F. Shcheglov (1883-1885), provided a totally pitiful picture: “An assistant class tutor who was told by an attendant that fourth-grade students smoked in a toilet room, and who wanted to go there to stop the students, was grabbed by the sleeve by one of the students who kept him in front of the toilet room until the students who smoked, warned by the cry of this student, did not stop smoking. Two teachers received anonymous letters threatening that they would be killed if they continued to give students bad marks” (Artinskii, 1907: 291).

The situation went far beyond the normal bad behavior of gymnasium students. I. Artinsky attributed this to the fact that gymnasium inspector M.K. Kalmykov not only defended the culprits, but also provoked them to act against measures designed to establish discipline (Artinskii, 1907: 292-293). Moreover, such measures failed to enlist support from society and among teachers themselves, and as a result gymnasium principals were simply driven out, most often through planned press campaigns (Artinskii, 1907: 284-293). In this context, the student performance also predictably dropped: in some classes, the percentage of underachieving students reached 70 % (Artinskii, 1907: 291)!

And principals of the Novocherkassk gymnasium cannot be blamed for whipping up tension. Quite the contrary: until 1885, they were able to put into practice only weak half-measures. For example, already V.Yu. Khoroshevsky began to complain about the “too big population of the gymnasium”, which undermined any attempts to restore order, but under his management the number of classes and students continued to grow, and only D.F. Shcheglov succeeded, despite major objections from the pedagogical council, in accomplishing first close-down actions in parallel classes, and at the moment it was only about preparatory classes (Artinskii, 1907: 289-290). D.F. Shcheglov also tried to introduce a system to spy on students, however, he admitted that this “cause was very challenging and almost pointless” (Artinskii, 1907: 292). Meanwhile, introducing such a spying practice was required not only for political reasons: it accidentally became clear that gymnasium students were regular visitors at brothels, and one of them stole things on a systematic basis (Artinskii, 1907: 292). The end of this story is in some sense indicative of Russia of the 1880s, as a group of students attempted to blow up a principal’s apartment and the gymnasium building itself, and, surprisingly, the public saw it that it was D.F. Shcheglov who was responsible for the situation. After the explosion, D.F. Shcheglov began to fear for his life and in the end actually fled Novocherkassk (Artinskii, 1907: 292).

In this environment, D.F. Shcheglov's successor, A.P. Pyatnitsky (1885-1893), secured support of other officials at the Ministry of Public Education and local authorities. Already in 1886, the initiative of the Kharkov school district facilitated the adoption of the following resolution: “Students at each secondary school in the Novocherkassk city outside the walls of the institution shall be supervised by persons of the teaching staff of all educational institutions” (Artinskii, 1907: 294). Based on this, teachers were now obliged to monitor not only their own, but also other teachers’ students, and they were given special identification cards, and had to arrange special duties in the most visited places (for example, in Aleksandrovsky Sad and on Moskovskaya Street) they (Artinskii, 1907: 294-295). However, N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky, perhaps impressed by an attempt to blow up the gymnasium principal, was not content with this decision and additionally commissioned the local police to control both students and teachers. Its responsibility was to communicate any violations committed by students at an education institution to the head of this institution, as well as “ensure” that teachers fulfill the “right and duty to supervise the behavior” of students (Artinskii, 1907: 295). Meanwhile, N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky personally, according to accounts by I. Artinsky, insisted on the “aristocratization of the Don education”. It meant restricted access to secondary schools for the majority of the population, even from Cossacks, due to drastically reduced enrollment targets (Artinskii, 1907: 296).

The historiographer of the Novocherkassk gymnasium (by the way, a priest in his primary profession) expressly showed negative attitude to the measures taken by the Ataman, specifically emphasizing the fact that from 1885 to 1892 the number of students went down in the gymnasium from 534 to 225, i.e. more than half of all parallel classes were closed (Artinskii, 1907: 299). It is meaningful that he provides a very glossy and concise record of the events after 1885, especially as compared with the highly detailed descriptions of previous years, referring to the fact that “for reasons that are quite understandable, we have to present this period of the gymnasium's life only

in a brief manner and in very general terms” (Artinskii, 1907: 298). However, I. Artinsky concentrates on the fact that by 1906 the authorities still had to restore parallel classes, and the gymnasium had 543 students “in the days of old” (Artinskii, 1907: 300).

The situation with the Don gymnasiums after 1885 can be suggested by the documents of the local gendarme department, which were published in the Soviet time with a purpose to denounce the tsarist government. In 1888, the head of this department, Colonel Strakhov, reported to superior officers the following: “No proper supervision was exercised for these (those studying in the Don gymnasiums) youth, their tutors included persons of immoral and dubious political views. As a consequence, all these institutions, especially the district gymnasiums in the stanitsas of Ust-Medveditskaya and Nizhne-Chirskaya, were hotbeds of harmful ideas and revolutionary centers. The dissoluteness of youth knew no limit. <...>. But over the next two years, all these outrages were brought to an end. The district gymnasiums in Nizhne-Chirskaya and Ust-Medveditskaya have been closed down, and the rest have stopped admitting students whose status and upbringing do not comply with the goals of secondary education. The inspection department has been set in proper order, the senior officer and teaching staff has been totally replaced. Instead of the closed district gymnasiums, a technical school and a trades school are opened in Novocherkassk. Both of these institutions enjoy the special attention of Prince Svyatopolk-Mirsky and are managed with outstanding excellence” (Nash krai, 1963: 469). As it becomes clear after reviewing the facts given by I. Artinsky (who was never a supporter of N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky), this gendarme report does not at all imply the cruelty of the local authorities towards Don education in 1880, as the Soviet historiography tried to show. Until 1885, the education quality, even at the model Novocherkassk gymnasium, was extremely poor due to the lack of discipline – students threatened teachers and tried to kill the principal, and only with the introduction of the most stringent measures, the authorities managed to stabilize the situation. By the way, these measures were implemented not in 1881, with the start of counter-reforms in Russia, but following a certain event, the flight of gymnasium principal D.F. Shcheglov from Novocherkassk in 1885, who feared for his life. It is the standpoint taken by I. Artinsky on this issue which we view as the most balanced one: the priest sympathized with the principals of the Novocherkassk gymnasium and considered establishing order at the facility as a crucial step, but he condemned the most odious government decisions, such as police control of teachers or reduced numbers of students by 50 %.

However, the last decision taken by N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky was also grounded on significant facts. As we can see from the above gendarme report, a technical school and a trades school were launched on the Don instead of the closed gymnasiums. Of course, one can try to interpret these steps as efforts of a reactionary ataman to eradicate classical education. But a different vision seems more reasonable to us. The point is that by the 1880s the Don Host Oblast simply could not offer sufficient opportunities for numerous graduates of local gymnasiums, while it urgently needed specialist practitioners in many professions. We discovered a memorandum of a retired colonel A.G. Fateev, written in 1898 and stored in the State Archive of the Rostov Region. We are not so much interested in the key objective of the memorandum (to drive the work of N.A. Maslakovets’ Commission in a specific direction), as in some facts provided in it concerning the Ust-Medveditskaya gymnasium. A.G. Fateev wrote: “The experience of the former Ust-Medveditskaya gymnasium, which existed more than 3 decades, illustrated that even among the graduates of this school, who later received a higher education, more than half do not see service in the Don Host, despite their willingness and efforts to devote their capabilities to the benefit of their home land. For example, let us give the names of former students at the Ust-Medveditskaya gymnasium in the number of 41 people, specified in the list enclosed hereto, with the description of their qualifications and locations. (The entire list was compiled using private information and, of course, is not in the least exhaustive, and moreover, it covers the time period from 1872 until the closing of the gymnasium in 1895). Of those with university education, who were alumni of the same gymnasium and serve in some position in the Host, there were about 10 doctors and as many lawyers and that is all” (GARO. F. 46. Op. 1. D. 3282. L. 15-150b). Thus, the graduates of this educational institution, who achieved the most notable success, preferred to develop their careers outside the Don Host Oblast. A similar situation, according to I. Artinsky, evolved in the Novocherkassk gymnasium (Artinsky, 1907: 305-306). In principle, a situation where graduates of Don gymnasiums built their careers in other provinces, was not bad in itself, especially as A.G. Fateev noted: “Instead, people with a university degree from other provinces and the Kingdom

of Poland are assigned for service in the Don Host Oblast” (GARO. F. 46. Op. 1. D. 3282. L. 150b). And yet N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky’s decision not to open new gymnasiums instead of the closed ones, but establish vocational schools that could train professional needed by the Don, was quite logical.

Moreover, the two schools organized in Novocherkassk was only a starting point to in an initiative to create a complete network of vocational educational institutions in the Don: in 1890, the Ataman succeeded in the opening of another 5 army trades schools in districts, with a mission to “promote the knowledge of crafts among Don Cossacks, required to make articles of clothing and equipment for Cossacks joining the service” (Protokoly, 1899: 253). As a result, by the end of the nineteenth century, 21 vocational technical and craft institutions operated on the Don: the Ataman Technical School, 6 army trades schools and 14 trades departments at district vocational schools (Protokoly..., 1899: 252). These delivered training to about 600 Cossacks, and liberal members of N.A. Maslakovets’ commission, who were quite critical of the Ataman who had already been removed from the position, passed the following verdict against the vocational school system, created by him: “Although the number of trades schools is not large, one cannot nevertheless consider that the number of their students belonging to the military estate is also insignificant, if only to define such an organization for the area as to contribute to the use of the knowledge obtained for local demand” (Protokoly..., 1899: 252).

The need to create a network of vocational schools in the Don region was debated since at least 1860, but only when N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky did implement real measures in this area. Don scholars and public figures not so much insisted on technical schools but on the much needed agricultural training facilities. For example, a prominent statistician, N.I. Krasnov argued in 1863 that “it is only through improvements of education levels and early introduction into the basics of farming from school days that we can inspire Cossacks to accept better methods of agronomy; neither the example of landowners, nor huge profits received by tenant merchants have been able so far to change the farming system used by Cossacks” (Krasnov, 1863: 250). An even more definite opinion on this issue was expressed by a fellow statistician S.F. Nomikosov: “Providing arrangements for issuing cheap credits to farmers and opening several agricultural schools presents no particular difficulty. <...>. Schools are an essential need judging from the backwardness of the masses, and this means that even if the people invent more rational agricultural methods themselves, the process will perhaps take a very long period of time. The masses need an example, and an example can only be given by a school or a farm with agricultural methods designed specifically for small homesteads” (Nomikosov, 1884: 729). S.F. Nomikosov, however, also defended the need to create vocational schools as well, despite the fact that this initiative would imply serious spending from the government: “The entire issue related to vocational schools can be reduced to the following: are there sufficient funds available to open such schools? If the funds are available, the question of costly maintenance is an idle question; if funds are not available, idle is the very question of opening schools” (Nomikosov, 1884: 738). Interestingly, this scholar, who had connections with N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky (his major work, “The Statistical Description of the Don Host Oblast”, as the cover read, was published by the order of the Ataman), just advocated the need to expand vocational rather than general education among Cossacks: “Supporters of general education can say that it is better to have three public schools than one vocational facility, but we think just the opposite, for it is better to have one artisan, or some kind of handicraftsman, than three scribes who have no idea where to use their school knowledge” (Nomikosov, 1884: 738). Therefore, the valid grounds behind N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky’s idea are beyond doubt, and even his liberal opponents agreed that the Don Host Oblast was short of craftsmen. However, difficulties were connected with implementation, and we will turn to specific examples to confirm the statement.

The intention to launch the higher institution of the newly created vocational schools – the Ataman Technical School – crystallized already in 1872, long before N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky came to the Don. In Novocherkassk, at that time a fund-raising campaign was even rolled out to set up a similar educational institution, of which the city felt “a pressing need”, and the Oblast government and the zemstvo administration (zemstvo – an elective council responsible for the local administration of a provincial district in czarist Russia) promised their support (Kratkie svedeniya..., 1895: 3). Unfortunately, the collected sum was insufficient, and in 1881 it was even decided to shelve the technical school plan for an indefinite period. The project was bailed out only thanks to the personal involvement of N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky in 1882, who resumed work on it and

secured guaranteed financing from the government to build the proposed educational institution ([Kratkie svedeniya..., 1895: 4](#)). The school book, which came out in Novochoerkassk in 1895, even announced the incumbent Ataman a major creator of the school, which obviously did not correspond to reality. The active construction phase started only after the death of Lieutenant Colonel Dyakov in 1885, who bequeathed his considerable fortune “to the establishment and reasonable maintenance of a technical school” (please, note the curious fact where N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky was credited with others’ merits) ([Kratkie svedeniya..., 1895: 4](#)). Still, the role of N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky in creating the new educational institution cannot be underestimated, although it was not always positive: for example, on his initiative the physical classrooms of the two abolished gymnasiums were handed over to the vocational school ([Kratkie svedeniya..., 1895: 7](#)). The Ataman was an honorary trustee of the vocational school and personally chaired the meetings of the board of trustees. Therefore, it is the Ataman Technical school that we can consider an example of what he sought to receive education ([Kratkie svedeniya..., 1895: 7-8](#)).

As an organization, the Ataman Technical School was a lower mechanics and engineering school, but for two important exceptions. First, contrary to the accusations against N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky of the fight against democratized education, he simplified the access to the school: at similar educational facilities of the Russian Empire, applicants were required to submit course completion certificates from two-year rural schools, while everyone, who during a special test of knowledge demonstrated that their level was consistent with the course of such schools, even if the applicant had never attended any institution, was accepted to the Ataman Technical School ([Kratkie svedeniya..., 1895: 8](#)). Secondly, the course was extended from 3 to 4 years, but the 4 year was exclusively allocated for practical training, so that graduates could develop the skills acquired during the basic course ([Kratkie svedeniya..., 1895: 8](#)). Hence, the new school was also accessible to the Cossacks from distant stanitsas, who prepared for the exam themselves, and those who graduated from it were supposed to excel competitors from similar schools in their proficiency level.

And indeed, education at the Ataman Technical School proved to be very relevant for the South Russian labor market. The above book of 1895 about the school contains a list of its graduates, and it shows that many of them earned 600, 900 and even 1,200 rubles a year ([Kratkie svedeniya..., 1895: 59-60](#)). For comparison, a Don public figure, V.Ya. Biryukov, estimated that the annual income of an average Cossack family in the Khopersky district, consisting of 8 people, both males and females, including 2 adult male workers, amounted to 158 rubles 50 kopecks, and all the property of such a family to 897 rubles. ([Protokoly, 1899: 116-117](#)). However, the stumbling-block was that, as it was the case with gymnasiums, the most successful graduates of the Ataman Technical School continued their professional development outside the Don Host Oblast or in non-Cossack Taganrog and Rostov-on-Don, while Novochoerkassk, let alone stanitsas, received few benefits from the newly opened school. In addition, graduates of the school often joined the Host shortly after finishing their studies, and there they could not apply their talents. More detailed statistics looks like this: in 1892, first 20 graduates left the ataman school, of which as of 1895 there was no information about 1, 2 died, 6 were on the military service, 1 returned to his stanitsa to help his father with household chores, 2 worked in Novorossiysk, 4 in Rostov-on-Don and only 4 in Novochoerkassk ([Kratkie svedeniya..., 1895: 58-60](#)); the second wave of graduates (1893) was slightly smaller, it numbered 13 people, of whom as of 1895 there was no information about 1, 3 were on the military service, 1 returned to his stanitsa to help his father with household chores, 2 worked in Novorossiysk, 2 in Taganrog, 2 on the railways (1 of them outside the Oblast), 1 in Bryansk and only 1 in Novochoerkassk ([Kratkie svedeniya..., 1895: 60-61](#)); finally, the third wave of graduates consisting of 13 people left the school in 1894, and as of 1895 there was no information about 2, 2 were on the military service, 1 continued training outside the Oblast, 4 worked in Rostov-on-Don, 1 on the railways and 3 in Novochoerkassk ([Kratkie svedeniya..., 1895: 61-62](#)) (some plants on the list had no location specified, and so we proceeded from the fact that if in one case the list refers to the “Glebov plant” in Rostov-on-Don, other cases refer to the Rostov-on-Don Glebov plant, while the plants without locations operated in Novochoerkassk). It is clear from the above that less than a quarter of graduates of the Ataman Technical School remained to put the acquired skills for the good of Cossack districts in the Don Host Oblast. The situation could have become somewhat better over time thanks to those who returned to the Host, but some of them managed to find profitable positions outside their home stanitsas and Novochoerkassk prior to the conscription:

for example, Vasily Alekseev found work in Armavir, earning 50 rubles a month ([Kratkie svedeniya..., 1895: 58](#)).

The outcome of opening army trades schools was even less satisfactory. Here is what the officer of the Host Staff, A.I. Ulyanov wrote about them in 1899: “With these schools established on the Don, every military district set a goal to provide the Don population with professionals who learned several types of crafts and could with greater success and at cheaper prices make various articles of clothing and equipment for Cossacks liable for military service, but in fact it has become clear that the existing program of drill sessions and general educational curriculum for students at these schools takes a lot of time at the expense of deeper training of practical crafts and better ability to accept various external orders, mainly articles of equipment for young Cossacks, and as a result, the schools are now producing many Cossacks prepared for entering the cadet school or for clerical jobs in these units, rather than for artisanship for these units” ([Protokoly..., 1899: 256](#)). The officer worked in the Host administration and toned down his account rather than exaggerated the situation: the final report of N.A. Maslakovets’ commission included very discouraging figures. According to them, out of 542 Cossacks who graduated from army trades schools between 1890 and 1898, only 32 opened their own workshops and 84 became workers at other masters, i.e. only 21 % of graduates were truly engaged in the profession they were trained ([Maslakovets, 1899: 104](#)). 22 % never made use of the acquired skills, and the majority, the remaining 57 %, either utilized the knowledge sporadically, for extra earnings, or did their military service ([Maslakovets, 1899: 104](#)).

Already A.I. Ulyanov attributed the failure of the initiative to put army trades schools into normal operation to the wrong purpose set for him by N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky. The curriculum for the schools, approved personally by the Ataman, planned to train army artisans who would then supply Cossacks with required accoutrements ([Protokoly..., 1899: 253-254](#)). Accordingly, it was expected that the Cossacks who graduated from the course would be assigned to the first stage regiments (where Cossacks did first four years of the 12-year term in the Host) as craftsmen but not as combatants. At the same time, the graduation standard numbers were not correlated with the actual demand experienced by Cossack units: the latter hardly exceeded 73 people a year, while vocational schools provided 107 professionals each year ([Protokoly..., 1899: 255](#)). To make things worse, even of these 73 craftsmen, actually needed by the Host, part served outside the staff, receiving much smaller salaries, and a request to revise the staff organization sent from the Don as early as in 1889, remained unanswered for an entire decade ([Protokoly..., 1899: 255](#))! However, the project supposed that graduates of army trades schools would work in the Host, but as there were no vacant positions for all, some returned home “without having adequate skills in crafts to independently compete with local artisans, even in the context of modest needs of a stanitsa” ([Protokoly..., 1899: 252](#)). At the same time, specialists in the crafts that Cossacks needed in their domestic activities were not trained at army trades schools at all. Following this line, A.I. Ulyanov proposed reducing the number of the vocational schools to 4, but drastically expanding the number of occupations they offered by introducing civilian professions, as well as by cutting drill training and general disciplines and giving graduates more hands-on knowledge so that they could compete with stanitsa craftsmen ([Protokoly..., 1899: 256](#)). N.A. Maslakovets’ commission also pointed out that it was absurd to appoint graduates of the vocational schools as lower-rank drill soldiers in active units: “Having served for four years in the ranks, the latter grow completely out of the habit of handicraft labor, and, upon return from the army, they look for work at home or elsewhere in another field” ([Maslakovets, 1899: 104](#)). The commission members also offered to reform the system of the army trades schools but they went to even greater extremes than A.I. Ulyanov. They offered to leave only 2 facilities, and the rest should not be closed but transformed into civilian vocational schools designed to train craftsmen relevant to stanitsas. These craftsmen should be granted the right to pay off the military service ([Maslakovets, 1899: 105](#)). Summarizing the episode with the army trades schools, we would like to give the most illuminative quotation about them, whose author was N.A. Maslakovets himself: “The army trades schools, operating in the Host as institutions with highly specific craft training limited to making articles of soldier uniforms and equipment for purely military purposes, exceed the corresponding demand; in the sense of meeting the needs of the Don Host to improve technical knowledge and appropriate craft training facilities for the Cossack population, they fail to achieve the desired goal” ([Maslakovets, 1899: 104](#)).

As a result, the best performance was demonstrated by the most unpretentious educational institutions of the vocational training network created by N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky. These were the craft departments at district vocational schools. Unfortunately, it is because of their unpretentious profile and efficient work, only limited information on them survived to this day. So, we will use the words of another member in N.A. Maslakovets' commission, a representative of the Oblast Zemstvo Committee, A.S. Yezhov. "The craft departments teach wheel joinery, smithcraft and metalworking, in the amount needed by the local population, and those who complete the course, do not lose in most cases their connection with family trades, and if they are naturally talented and fairly well-trained, they gradually become independent artisans, or they are engaged in the profession in their free time from farm work, and, despite the meager funds spent on these departments – 350 rubles per year – their value is lost (judging from the context, it is a misprint here. It should read "significant") among the population, so it now only remains to support the departments and facilitate the training activity through somewhat greater spending and no further patronage is required for the schools" ([Protokoly..., 1899: 252](#)). The commission's final report was somewhat more critical of the craft departments, but the criticism was reduced to the statement of the same fact that "the requirement of the universal army conscription for Cossacks poses the same difficulty in maintaining the willingness among those who received craft training to carry on professional activities after military service, as it was noted by us in relation to students of army trades schools" ([Maslakovets, 1899: 104](#)). However, with respect to the quality of training at the craft departments and the choice of specialties at them the rest of the commission members agreed with A.S. Yezhov: "Due to the fact that the craft departments at public vocational schools teach students crafts, most needed in the household of a Cossack, the number of people who, having received basic training in the crafts at public vocational schools, continue with it either in their own homesteads, or in workshops of other craftsmen" ([Maslakovets, 1899: 104](#)).

4. Conclusion

In 1898, A.G. Fateev that we have mentioned above wrote: "No higher educational institutions are available in the Oblast (Don Host Oblast) to satisfy the intellectual needs of the population. Of the secondary educational institutions we have: one classical gymnasium in Novocherkassk with 277 students (figures taken from the teacher's calendar for 1897) and three real schools: in Novocherkassk with 192 students, in Uryupin with 207 students and in Ust-Medveditsa with 78 students. <...>. For comparison, let us take the number of secondary general education facilities in neighboring governorates, without taking into account secondary vocational institutions, namely: Voronezh governorate – 1 classical gymnasium, 3 pro-gymnasiums and 1 real school; Kharkov governorate – 5 classical gymnasiums, 2 pro-gymnasiums and 3 real schools; Yekaterinoslav governorate – 4 classical gymnasiums, 1 real school; Astrakhan governorate – 2 classical gymnasiums and 1 real school and Saratov governorate – 3 classical gymnasiums and 3 real schools. So, our vast Don Oblast with its population is far more impoverished than our neighbors in terms of general education" ([GARO. F. 46. Op. 1. D. 3282. L. 14-14ob](#)). Indeed, this representation had full resemblance to reality, and the development of secondary general education in the Don Host Oblast, which had never showed great performance in the area, marked a backsliding in the time of N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky's administration: If the Don gymnasiums taught 1,059 people in 1881 ([Nomikosov, 1884: 577](#)), by 1895 the only surviving gymnasium retained 225 students! Moreover, students of the gymnasium, when they visited public places, were officially watched by teachers and police, the local gendarme department specifically focused on remedying their discipline, and the Host authorities complicated access to classical education for people "by their status and upbringing not compliant with the goals of secondary education". At the first glance at the history of the Don secondary education, one can easily agree with the conclusion suggested by pre-revolutionary liberal researchers, namely to the conclusion that N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky was almost a caricatural reactionary and could become a character in M.Ye. Saltykov-Shchedrin's works.

However, the reality, as usual, turned out to be much more complex. We found out that by 1885, when the Host authorities and gendarme department mounted their attack at the Don gymnasiums, the level of education at the facilities was very low (in some classes, the number of underperformers reached 70 %!), and the student behavior did not correspond even the same liberal requirements. Eventually, the intervention of the authorities followed not after the launch of

counter-reforms in Russia, but after the students attempted to blow up the gymnasium and kill the principal who in the end fled Novocherkassk. On the other hand, it is the great number of the students that hindered any steps to restore order among them, and a certain reduction in gymnasium enrollment reasonably suggested itself. Of course, one can discuss the excessive rigidity of N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky's measures aimed at the Don gymnasiums, as well as the fact that after the Ataman was removed from the positions, the previous number of students was gradually restored. However, these measures were dictated by the circumstances and were a logical and consistent reaction to them.

In addition, the same A.G. Fateev wrote: "The initiative of His Grace former Host Ataman Svyatopolk-Mirsky established trades schools in each district, whose operation required significant sums spent by the Host. Without denying the usefulness of these schools, but considering the popular demand, we cannot but admit that the number of the existing facilities is excessive" (GARO. F. 46. Op. 1. D. 3282. L. 18). N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky not simply closed the gymnasiums, but set up vocational educational institutions instead of them, and by the end of his administration a network of such facilities was extended to cover the entire Don Host Oblast. The need for Cossacks to acquire specialist technical and craft knowledge was long overdue, and even political opponents of the Ataman did not deny the expediency of the vocational schools he opened. Their number reached 21. In fact, the Ataman built a unique education system on the Don, different from the rest of Russia, which was supposed to give Cossacks not so much general as practical knowledge. Perhaps he was guided by the words of a statistician, close to him, S.F. Nomikosov, who argued that "it is better to have one artisan, or some kind of handicraftsman, than three scribes who have no idea where to use their school knowledge". The best graduates of the Ataman Technical School, created by N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky, actually confirmed this idea with earnings of up to 1,200 rubles a year.

However, the system of vocational educational institutions established in 1880-1890 was not fully in line with the needs of the Don region. Perhaps another reason, why N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky closed the gymnasiums, was the fact that their best graduates later worked outside the Cossack territories of the Don Host, but the students of the Ataman Technical School did the same. As for the army trades schools, these were really oversupplied, and the training provided at them was too technical. As a result, only 21 % of their graduates chose to work solely in their specialty. Finally, the craft departments at the district vocational schools received totally inadequate funding to fully unlock their potential. And in the end, the network of vocational schools, created by N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky, was not entirely useless for the Don, but was unable to replace the network of the gymnasiums that he eliminated and that was gradually rebuilt after the death of the Ataman.

Therefore, in fact N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky proceeded from quite practical and consistent logic – undoubtedly conservative as it was – in his educational reforms, and the question whether his reforms did harm or offered benefits to the region is a worthy subject for a separate study. Of course, reducing the number of gymnasiums was not a right step, but the network of technical and army trades schools established instead compensated this error of the Don Ataman. Thus, we can understand the educational policy of N.I. Svyatopolk-Mirsky only if we adopt a comprehensive approach, because its positive aspects were inextricably linked with negative ones, and without closing the gymnasiums, it would have been impossible to open so many vocational schools on the Don.

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