

TO THE QUESTION ABOUT THE ACTIVITIES OF THE RUSSIAN FOREIGN HISTORICAL ARCHIVE IN PRAGUE 1923-1928

Post-revolution Russian emigration (after 1917) is a unique phenomenon that affected hundreds of thousands of Russian people, who became refugees in many countries in Europe, America and even China. Different archives were established on the basis of the emigrant materials, and one of them is Russian Foreign Historical Archive in Prague. [1]

Beyond all doubt, the idea of establishing a Russian Foreign Historical Archive in the Czechoslovak Republic in 1920th would never had worked out without the support from «Zemgor» – an Association of Russian rural and urban affairs in the Czechoslovak Republic. «Zemgor» was a society of Russian emigre founded in 1921, included former rural and urban Russian leaders whose aims were to provide financial and other support to former Russian nationals on the territory of the Czech Republic. «Zemgor» was logically divided into several departments with a cultural and educational department within, which supported the idea of establishing an archive. Thus the Archive was officially founded in February 1923 as a part of the «Zemgor» library. A governing body was Council consisted of duke P.D. Dolgorukov, general V.V. Chernavin and prominent historians such as professor A.A. Kizzeveter, A.V. Florovsky, etc. More detailed information about staff and structure can be found in the book «Russians in Prague. 1918-1928», edited by S. Postnikov and published in 1928 in Prague. [2]

The creating of the Archive was described in 1928 by a historian A.V. Florovsky, "Proponents of creating Russian Foreign Historical Archive had been inspired by spiritualizing tendency (with a total value not only for the present but also for the very distant future) to protect those historical and archival values, the loss of which would be irreplaceable..." [2]

Was it possible or not to implement that project in a real historical context? Nevertheless, for carrying out the tasks of the Archive, a serious work had to be done. First of all connections were to be established with people who possessed the materials, meanwhile the Russian diaspora was scattered all over the world. For these reasons, the issue of funding appeared to be rather essential, at the same time there was a competition with other institutions that having more financial power sought to acquire the most valuable materials. As a matter of fact, gathering the archival materials of emigration together seemed to be fairly complicated task.

On the one hand, the major goal of the Archive was to search and collect for storage the historical materials related to the history of Russia, especially to the post revolutionary period. On the other hand, the Archive also was sort of a «platform» for scholars - meetings with paper presentations, research discussions and public lectures were periodically arranged there. Also, publishing business became an important activity of the Archive: from time to time works and periodical collections of materials were released. Yet due to the various, often financial difficulties, it was not regularly. In addition, the Archive conducted

research activities: collected information on materials and sources on the history of Russia, which had been stored in other archives, museums, or the book depository, and compiled surveys and indexes. The Academic Committee was headed by Professor A. Kiesewetter, who developed research activities of the Archive rather significantly. [3, c.258; 4, c. 290]

Thereby, despite the complexity of the task, the Archive was in progress rather successfully. Being open in 1923, to 1924 the Archive already became a rapidly developing institution with a network of representatives in Paris, Berlin, and Belgrade, Tunis etc. From the very beginning the name of it was the «Archive of the Russian Emigration», but it was lately renamed for the «Russian Foreign Historical Archive» [1, c.123-125, c.138].

In 1925 the fund had 6608 books; 1701 issues of the magazine; 39759 pages of documents; 40 manuscripts and diaries; 40418 newspapers. According to the information in the report of professor A. Florovsky published in the book «Russians in the Czech Republic», in 1928 the Archive had 15185 copies of books; 21009 journal issues; 180339 newspapers; 218565 sheets of documents; 341 manuscripts and diaries. [2, c. 45]. It is obvious that the growing of the number of stored items had substantially increased by 1928.

Meanwhile, the Archive fulfilled the task of collecting and systematizing the written sources on the history of social movements in Russia in the 19th and 20th centuries (with a focus on the history of the World War I, Revolution 1917, Russian Civil War and post-revolution emigration)[1]. In 1928 the Archive was transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czechoslovak Republic, since that time a new period of the history of the Russian Historical Archive in Prague began. [6]

Although the idea of creating such an archive in the conditions of forced emigration was initially risky but urgent, the creators of it – Russian historians mostly - managed to find support from both “Zemkor” and the Czech government, which made it possible to collect the unique composition for the Archive. The Russian Foreign Historical Archive was able to expand for a short time and ceased to exist by the end of the World War II. Currently a part of the unique archive documents is stored in the Slavic Library in Prague and a part is in the State Archive of the Russian Federation, (especially the complex of historical documents 1924-1947, related to the history and activities of the Archive) [5,6].

References:

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