

## EARLY SOVIET ECONOMIC BORDER CONTROLS: EAST-WEST DIMENSION\*

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### **Abstract**

In most studies early Soviet borders are explored as sites of confrontational interactions between the newly created communist state and local communities. Alternatively, they emerge in scholarly research as spaces of illegal transborder exchanges and commodities transfers, resulting in the loss of official revenues and gains for informal economies. Later, in increasingly politicized contexts, these interactions resulted in the gradual “cleansing” and “sealing” of borders. The current article argues that to regain control over the borders during their transition from bridgeheads of the revolution and commodity transit zones to hermetically sealed barriers and fortress walls that occurred throughout the 1920s - 1930s, the Soviet state for some time struggled in vain to discipline not only local communities, which used the newly created borders for their own means, but multiple border controllers themselves - border guards, but primarily the customs apparatus located along Russia’s lengthy borders. For almost a decade in the specific conditions of Eastern and Northwestern Soviet border sectors, the latter refused to abide to increasingly restrictive working conditions, abandon their privileges and rights, and to submit to the new border control agency - the Soviet Main Political Directorate (GPU).

**Keywords:** Soviet border control, borders of “secondary concern”, interagency rivalry, informal alliances, centre-periphery problems.

### **Introduction: Russian Borders in a Eurasian Space**

Throughout the ages multiple problems arose in attempts to delimit, secure, and control clear and stable Eurasian international borders, resulting in their repetitive redrawing. For example, currently some Russian borders around enormous territories previously annexed from neighboring states in the course of Russian imperial expansion, such as Ukraine, the Baltic States, Central Asia and South Caucasus, are now international borders with sovereign states. Other borderlands, such as far Eastern territories and Russian Karelia, sharing Russian administrative borders, are firmly entrenched in the vision of the Russian national state with distinctly weakened political and economic status while their external frontiers are properly ‘sealed.’

Soviet legacies of international border-drawing in the border areas of these regions are immense. Current Russia’s boundaries with China and Finland are conceptualized as inflexible lines and are still massively securitized. However, with

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the absence of a balance in the Russian border policy between strategic defense interests, security and control, and international transborder cooperation remains a poignant issue in both the Russian Far East and the Northwest [12: 414-415].

Low operational capacities of transborder infrastructures, such as customs management, has dramatically influenced the effectiveness of cross-border exchanges in these regions [16:73; 13: 11-18; 17: 271-301]. Their weakened economic and political status, abandoned military facilities in border districts, and desolation of sparsely populated border territories - also a Soviet heritage - makes evolution of Soviet border controls an important issue to explore from a historical perspective.

The current article, summarizing the bulk of the research on the ‘ensemble’ of early Soviet borders<sup>1</sup>, contains a comparative study of the early Soviet ‘border project’ in Russian Karelia (the case of the Soviet-Finnish border) and the Russian Far East (the case of the Sino-Soviet border under the FER, and later *Dalrevkom* administrative structures) - both marked as “borders of secondary concern” in documentation of the early Soviet period. It argues, that to regain control over the borders during the *transition* of their role from bridgeheads of the revolution and commodity transit zones to hermetically sealed barriers and fortress walls that occurred throughout the 1920s - 1930s, the Soviet state for some time struggled in vain to discipline not only local populations, which used the newly created borders to their own means, but multiple border controllers themselves - border guards, but primarily the customs apparatus of Russia’s lengthy borders. For almost a decade, the latter refused to abide to increasingly restrictive working conditions, abandon their privileges and rights, and submit to the new border controlling agency - the State Political Directorate (GPU)<sup>2</sup>.

Geographical boundaries of current study in its Eastern dimension are determined by the territories, which were part of the administrative subordination of the Far Eastern regional authorities on the land border with China. In the pre-revolutionary period these were the southern, most populated and economically developed areas of Amur Territory (Priamursky krai), in early Soviet times- respectively, the regions of the Far Eastern Republic (later FER), Far East region (*Dalnevostochnaya oblast*) (1922-1925) and the Far Eastern Territory (*Dalnevostochnyi krai*) (since 1926). In accordance with modern administrative-territorial arrange-

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<sup>1</sup> Usually, early Soviet borders are explored as sites of confrontational interactions between the newly created Communist state and local communities, later subjected to gradual ‘cleansing’ and ‘sealing,’ [7; 10; 23] or as spaces of illegal transborder exchanges and commodities transfers, resulting in the loss of official revenues, and gains to informal economies [19].

<sup>2</sup> Formed from the Cheka, the original Russian state security organization, on February 6, 1922. Despite the fact that from 1923 to 1934, instead of the GPU, the agency was called the OGPU (under the Council of People’s Commissars of the USSR), the term GPU remained in the names of its local branches. The name “GPU” (not “OGPU”) was also widely used later, in the 1920s and the first half of the 1930s, in colloquial speech, and in fiction.

ments, the study area includes the southern territories of the Amur Oblast, the Primorsky and Khabarovsk Territories (*krayev*) and the Jewish Autonomous Oblast.

The Finnish-Russian border is the roughly the north-south international border between the Republic of Finland (a member of the European Union) and the Russian Federation. From its northern endpoint - a hill called Muotkavaara, where the borders of Norway, Finland and Russia meet, extending deep into the depths of the frosty ground, it cuts through 1340 kilometres of uninhabited taiga forests, rivers and lakes, and sparsely populated rural areas until it meets the Baltic Sea on the South [8:13]. On the shore of Gulf of Finland there is a maritime boundary between the respective territorial waters, terminating in a narrow strip of international waters between Finnish and Estonian territorial waters. Current research focuses on the border strip within the framework of the Karelian Labour Commune (established in 1920), and later the Karelian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (created in 1923).

### **The Early Soviet “Border Project” as a Conceptual Change**

The shift from the Russian Empire to the Soviet Union had a tremendous effect on how state borders were conceptualized and secured. Concern over security in protecting the socialist project from capitalist encirclement led to a number of radical changes in the management of border controls. At the very beginning of the establishment of Soviet authority, Felix Dzerzhinsky, the chairman of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission (Cheka), proclaimed, “the border is a political divide, and it is a political body that must protect it.” Therefore, in 1920, a Special Division of the Cheka, became the responsible agency for Soviet border protection. Later, in September 1922, this institution, then renamed into the State Political Administration (GPU) and the Border Guards of the USSR (*Pogranichnye voiska SSSR*), was placed under the aegis of the NKVD (People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs).

Throughout the 1920s, the principles of Soviet borders’ protections were elaborated upon and in the course of the collaboration of various Soviet governmental and Communist party agencies (such as NKID [Commissariat of Foreign Affairs], *Pogranichnaya Okhrana* [Soviet Border Guard Department] of the OGPU, Defense Sector of GOPSLAN, the SNK [*Sovnarkom*] and Politburo). However, major role in the establishment of economic control over Soviet borders was ascribed to the Central Anti-Smuggling Commission, which was comprised of leading GTU (Main Customs Directorate) administrators and top GPU officers, with analogous commissions created in most Soviet borderlands. From the creation of this inter-agency administrative body on December 8, 1921, under the chairmanship of Vasily Ulrikh, assistant to the KRO GPU chief A. Artuzov, and up to its dismantlement<sup>3</sup>, its activities were marked by constant conflicts between the OGPU and the Customs

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<sup>3</sup> The commission along with its local branches existed until 1927, when the final power transfer to the OGPU was accomplished [1:253].

under the aegis of NKVD over the leading role in ‘combatting contraband,’ generating a cornucopia of mutual accusations [3: F. 413. Op. 14. D. 190. L. 13 -19].

At a regional level, economic control over the borders was divided between these two major agencies. Under Article 5 of the “Border Protection Regulations of the USSR” from 1923 on, border protection was assigned to the Soviet Border Guard as a structural unit of the OGPU. On the issue of “combating espionage and smuggling,” Soviet border guard units were subordinated to the Counter-Revolutionary Sections (KRO) of the local GPU branches. At the same time, “combat smuggling” was not removed from customs institutions under the aegis of the General Directorate of Customs within the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Trade (NKVT). This “dual power” regime was aggravated by contradictory legislation on duties and obligations of these agencies.

The VchKa order from February 27, 1923, signed by Assistant Head of the VchKa I. Unshlicht and the Chief of the Administrative Directorate of the VchKa H. Jagoda, prevented an increase in interference of border guard institutions into customs work, on the grounds of ‘unauthorized searches, arrests, and the paralysis of the customs work,’ stating “an immense economic significance of the customs institutions directly at the border” [3: F. 413. Op. 14. D. 190. L. 5]. However, on May 4, 1923, a meeting of the Central Commission for the Struggle with Contraband headed by Customs Administration head A. I. Potiaev<sup>4</sup>, and attended by the representatives of the NKVT, NKF, and GPU, represented by I. S. Unshlicht, Vice-Chairman of the GPU, significantly reduced the rights of customs authorities and laid the foundations for a rivalry for power and resources at Soviet borders [3: F. 413. Op. 11. D. 210]<sup>5</sup>. Although contradictions over border regime regulations and contraband bonuses between the GPU border guard and customs officials were present at all Soviet borders<sup>6</sup>, in the specific conditions of Russian Karelia and the Far East they became especially pronounced.

### **Early Soviet Border Control: Regional Variations.**

With Finland becoming independent in 1917, the 1245.6 km long border of Russian Karelia was confirmed as a boundary between two sovereign states. However, as with all other Soviet borders, the turmoil of civil war meant that the demarcation line was porous, almost unguarded and open to frequent violations. In Finnish historiography, the conflict was defined as multiple Wars for Kindred Peoples (*heimosodat*), fought between 1918 and 1922. Inspired by Finnish nationalistic ideology,

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<sup>4</sup> Potiaev A. I., GTU chief 1922-1927, arrested on July 28, 1936, sentenced by the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR on May 27, 1937, upon the accusation in participation in a counter-revolutionary terrorist organization; shot on May 28, 1937.

<sup>5</sup> An instruction was accordingly sent to the district customs administrations: [1: F. P- 275, Op. 1, D. ½. L. 48, 60].

<sup>6</sup> They were present, albeit much less pronounced in the Petrograd (from 1924 - Leningrad) guberniya at the border controls along Soviet-Finnish border [2: F. P-3944. Op. 1. D. 2. L. 18. 51; F. P-3441. Op. 7. D. 7. L. 1, 5; F. P -2205 Op. 1. D. 56].

Finnish right-wing radicals and nationalist activists wanted to unite all the Finno-Ugric peoples in Finland, Russia, and Estonia and expand the borders of Finland to the east. Thousands of Finnish volunteers took part in military expeditions into the Russian regions of Ingria, the Karelian Isthmus, East Karelia, White Sea Karelia, and Pechenga [3:290]. These cataclysmic events resulted in large-scale population displacement and transborder migrations. Part of the border population (especially in Northern Karelia), called the Karelian refugees (*karbezhtsy*), fled to Finland between 1919-1921. Some returned under the terms of a Soviet amnesty from 1923 to 1926 and extended by the Bolshevik regime as part of its general settlement of frontiers for diplomatic and security reasons. The establishment of the national Soviet republic (Karelian Labour Commune), later Karelian ASSR neighboring the “bourgeois” Finland opened a new page in the history of the embattled northern frontier.

Soviet Karelian regular border protection was created in the autumn of 1922, when a separate border corps (OPK) of the Soviet GPU troops was created, which included 7 border districts. By the end of 1924 the Karelian border with Finland, coinciding with the administrative border delineated in the nineteenth century, was partially blocked by GPU border guard detachments. In 1919, a customs chain was installed along the Karelian border, and from August 1922 onwards it was managed by the Petrozavodsk Customs district, as a branch of the Petrograd customs area<sup>7</sup>.

Similar developments occurred at the Far East. During the events of the revolution of 1917 and the Civil War, Karelia and the Far Eastern territories witnessed the collapse of imperial administrative structures, a change of power and intermittent interventions. These turbulent events resulted in the establishment of the Far Eastern Republic (FER). This was the result of the legacy of Russian expansionism and Bolshevik efforts to export the revolution to Mongolia, Korea, China, and Japan, as well as that of various local regionalists, who aimed for independence or strong regional autonomy for distinct Siberian and Far Eastern communities and whose efforts culminated in the short-lived Far Eastern Republic of 1920-1922 [18:4]. The need to keep the Russian Far East within a Russian state, Soviet or not, and to protect it from Japanese imperialism became the main slogan during the consequent the FER's absorption into the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (RSFSR) after the Japanese evacuated from the region's continental part in 1922. At the beginning of 1922, customs management was transferred to the Ministry of Finance of the FER [12: L. 14-25], while January 4, 1923, marked the birth of the DVO - *Dalnevostochnyi pogranichnyi okrug* [20: 15-18].

Several factors impacted emerging economic border controls and interagency relations at these border sectors. Understaffed border control institutions, general lack of financing, the absence of adequate mobility infrastructures for both border

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<sup>7</sup> [1: F. P-544, Op. 1. D. 1/3. L. 97]. Prior to the revolution, however, in Northern Karelia, part of Archangelskaya guberniya, a customs office and several customs outposts were operating.

guards and customs officials<sup>8</sup> impacted in combination with physical border specifications and harsh environmental and climatic conditions, resulting in heavy illegal trafficking<sup>9</sup>, informal alliances, and permanent interagency conflicts.

Lack of human resources for border protection vividly manifested itself in both regions, with long strips of these borders left completely unguarded. By March 1927, the border guards of the GPU of the KASSR numbered only 1,805 people (90% of them peasants). This was almost five times fewer than estimated as necessary for securing this particular border area several years earlier [3: F. 413. Op. 14. D. 7. L. 147, 149-150]. Accordingly, Petrozavodsk Customs included 9 customs outposts with each a staff of just two to four officials, and a customs office in Petrozavodsk [1: F. P-544. Op. 1. D. 1/3. L. 97].

Similarly, in 1922, the Soviet Far East total land border was 7000 km in length, which was more than five times longer than the Soviet Karelian one, and on more than 15000 km of the marine border there were just 9 border guard detachments (*pogranotryady*) and 2 separate border commandants' offices (*komendatury*) with a staff of 2259 - just slightly exceeding the number that staffed Karelian border [6: 115]. The slightly reformed customs infrastructure was largely based on previous imperial arrangements and consisted of just 10 customs outposts (compared to the 9 Karelian ones), 26 customs *zastav* and 63 *tamposta* - all belonging to four customs inspectorate districts: *Chitinsky*, *Blagoveschensky*, *Khabarovskii*, and *Vladivostokskii* [3: F. 372. Op.11. D. 98. L. 14-15]. Such a dramatic lack of border control infrastructures was partly caused by general Soviet strategic-military planning, based on the perception of both the Karelian and Far-Eastern frontiers being relatively stable, and not posing imminent threats and military dangers until the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s [11].

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<sup>8</sup> Even in 1927, 520 horses were the only means of transportation for the Karelian border guards [1: F. P-690. Op. 1. D. 27. L. 78]. At the Far East the situation was even worse. At the Sino-Soviet border in mid-1920s, poorly staffed and armed officers of *Blagoveschensk* and *Vladivostok* districts were helpless against paramilitary bands, accomplishing contraband transfers reaching 30 to 40 *podvody*, accompanied by convoys and armed with machine guns.

<sup>9</sup> Total value of the contraband smuggled through Karelian sector of the Soviet-Finnish border was small (primarily due to the fact it almost exclusively consisted of provisions, textiles, and agricultural instruments. [1: F. P-690. Op. 1. D. 27. L. 79]. Still, the traffic itself was dense and well-organized smuggling networks covering several villages were exploited by Soviet Counterintelligence that introduced new features into the complex world of illegal transborder encounters, common for all Soviet Western borderlands during the decade after the revolution [10; 19]. At the Far East, the report of the Dal'revkom, the Far Eastern Revolutionary Committee, estimated the value of contraband assets in 1924 at the borders of the Soviet Union's Far East at about one-third those of its European borders. The population in the European territories, however, was ninety times the population of the Soviet Far East [23: 129]. The imports consisted of alcohol and consumer goods, and exports of gold, opium, fur, and bioresources. Apart from large scale gold and furs trafficking - the Far Eastern countryside, as did the Karelian, was actively consuming contraband manufactured goods and foodstuffs, with primary reasons being "a far route to the legal trade," and gaps between prices for contraband and legal goods. In 1925, price discrepancies sometimes extended 500%, far exceeding the Karelian average of 70% [1: F. P -544. Op. 2. D. 3/58. L. 44].

Physical border specifications, problematic terrains and insularity of border zone topographies remained major “persistent” problems for border control mechanisms inherited from the Russian Empire. In Karelia, the remoteness of most parts of the border, harsh conditions, and rugged terrain combining water obstacles, marshes, and boreal forests became key factors that made actual effective border control impossible [1: F. P-690. Op. 1. D. 27. L. 78]. Water routes, freezing in winter and the nature of the terrain frequently made roads impassable, contributing to failed border controls and sometimes resulted in total border control paralysis in some sectors of the Karelian borderland [1: F. P - 689. Op. 1. D. 8/81. L. 123]. Customs outposts, inspected every several years, operated in almost complete isolation, and correspondence usually arrived once a month.

The factors of remoteness and physical specifications of the state border that resulted in troubled connections between the Petrozavodsk Customs Inspectorate and Karelian customs outposts were even more pronounced at the Far Eastern sector of Sino-Soviet frontier. In analogous conditions of isolation of customs and border guard outposts, absence of phone and telegraph connections with most parts of the border regions, and lack of mobility infrastructures, throughout the 1920s Moscow repeatedly complained about extremely poor 'live connection' with the DVO and increasingly ‘centrifugal forces’ in border management. An ‘irresistible force’ of ‘immense spaces’ aggravated growing ‘apathy’ of the DVO Customs sections [1: F. P-378, Op. 4, D. 6].

In comparison with Russian Karelia, one of peculiarities of the Soviet control over this border strip was *interchangeability* of border guard and customs functions, with the term ‘armed customs’ (*boevye tamozhni*) actively used in correspondence of the Far Eastern Customs Directorate. While in some areas customs officials had to protect the border from armed bands and frequently fell prey to them, local border guards were usually entrusted with customs control functions in the “areas where there was no possibility of installing customs stations [1: F. P-378. Op 4. D. 6. L. 20]. Additionally, contrary to Russian Karelia, where state border protection remained a prerogative of Soviet controlling agencies, the Far Eastern sector of the Sino-Soviet border up to the end of the 1920s witnessed the active involvement of local communities in exercising economic border regime. Far Eastern fishing supervision and village councils remained actively involved in performing customs functions [1: F. P-378, Op. 4, D. 6. L. 16].

The emerging need for regular on-site inspections of both border sectors became a challenge for Soviet officials who had to innovate. In Karelia, for example, winter inspections could only occur by horseback on frozen rivers and lakes through a complex system of tract-country and water communication, and even then, they failed to inspect all the institutions [1: F. P-544. Op. 2. D. 4/68. L. 83]. During Moscow Chief Customs Directorate inspections of the Sino-Soviet border, even ‘the smartest inspectors’ could visit only ‘armed customs’ (*boevye tamozhni*), with a large number of border control institutions remaining unsupervised [1: F. P-378. Op 4. D. 6. L. 20].



At both borders multiple cases were registered of border guards and customs officials involved into informal smuggling networks with the locals, taking bribes for contraband transfers. With delays in regular food and commodities deliveries, persistent housing shortages, as well as unsuitable living and working conditions, involvement in smuggling became an important source for the survival of border controllers [1: F. P-690. Op. 1. D. 27. L. 55; 14]. Border guards and customs officials who were settled (and actually working) in crowded peasant (and sometimes smugglers') houses frequently assisted in or disregarded contraband operations, and even enrolled as seasonal workers on peasant lands. Throughout the 1920s, while the tone of the central appeals for "combating contraband" became more alarmed, customs officials in localities became increasingly unwilling to treat the problem seriously; they preferred to send faked or blank reports that denied the existence of the contraband traffic at their locations [1: F. P-544. Op. 3. D. 1/6. L. 12].

Moreover, while local communities went on with using the border for their needs at both border sectors, border controllers engaged in interagency rivalry over contraband incomes, border regulations, and informants' networks [6: 38; 15: 323; 1: F. P-378. Op. 4. D. 3; F. P-690. Op. 1. D. 27]. The report on border security of a famous Soviet Bolshevik leader, Ieronim Uborevich, at the *Dalrevkom* meeting from February 10, 1923, commented on the 'dual power regime' at the Sino-Soviet border and noted that the Main Political Directorate had 'failed to remove the border control from the customs.' He states that "...I have no idea how to discipline them, to record them, cleanse them, and how finally to reduce their numbers...they have an advantage over us, for the material condition of our troops is truly sorrowful..." [9:127]. In Karelia, Sylvestr Demenchuk, Head of Petrozavodsk Customs Inspectorate (1922-1924), also repetitively complained of the customs outpost officials refusing to cooperate en masse with local GPU border guards, which in some areas resulted in the almost total 'collapse' of the 'combat against the contraband' [1: F. P-544. Op. 3. D. 1/6. L. 12]. Interagency conflicts, erupting during the legal cross border trade operations at both border sectors involved foreign trade missions as well as local SNK [1: F. P-544, Op. 2, D. 4/68. L. 96; 6: 39].

Control over informants' networks remained a hot button issue until 1927 [1: F. P-544. Op. 1. D. 2/1. L. 175; F. P-544, Op. 2. D. 4/68. L. 96]. The Customs Directorate of People's Commissariat of Trade possessed a staff of authorized agents actively used by the local branches, while GPU officers actively objected to customs agencies' intelligence functions. Despite reprimands and sanctions, customs officials at both border sectors actively managed their own informants' networks up to the year 1927 and perhaps even later [1: F. P-378. Op. 4. D. 3. L. 20; 14: 114-116].

This situation was aggravated by the fact that up to the end of the 1920s at both border strips the GPU repeatedly failed to create their own working efficient informers' networks. At the Russian Far East, the GPU resorted to posting ads in the local newspapers to attract the informants. In Karelia, stubborn resistance of the



local peasantry to report on their neighbors engaged in illegal border crossings and smuggling and enroll as informers was repetitively noted in the GPU KASSR reports. The same reluctance is reflected in the contents of the contraband cases throughout 1920s. Only a decade later, when the concept of the ‘endangered border’ and Soviet ‘spy mania’ was finally instilled into the mass consciousness of the 1930s, Soviet denunciation practices became a distinguishing feature of the Stalinist political modernity in the already ‘cleansed’ borderland regions.

### **The End of “Dual Power Economic Border Control”**

The end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s marked a transition from New Economic Policy to Stalinist Command Economy. They also opened the door for Joseph Stalin’s border securitization. The demolition of the Soviet customs apparatus in 1930 [1: F. P-378. Op 4. D. 6. L. 1] was followed by a sharp increase in OGPU border guard numbers and the introduction of strict security measures in border zones [1: F. P-378. Op 4. D. 6. L. 1].

In November 1929, a joint Moscow session of the Soviet OGPU and the Customs Directorate of NKVT, headed by the Deputy Chief of the *Narkomtorg* Lev Khinchuk and the GTU chief A. Vinokur, attended by the chiefs of all major Soviet customs inspectorates, marked the end of the ‘NEP’ border regime. At the beginning of this meeting, complaints on increasing “GPU pressures,” expressed by the DVO Customs chief Kuzovlev, received active support from several leading provincial GTU officials. However, in the response of GPU officers, these complaints were qualified as empty ‘yamming’ (*slovobludie*) [1: F. P-378. Op 4. D. 6. L. 20]. Concluding the meeting with a response to multiple complaints of other Soviet Customs chiefs on grave problems in interagency cooperation and failing customs managers’ relations with local GPU bosses, Lazar Kogan, an Assistant Chief of the Main Directorate of the Border Guard and the Troops of the OGPU, stated: “We should close this question once and for all; all false complaints on part of the GTU staff about ostensible GPU pressures are attempts at sabotage, so from now on they should be firmly rebutted and investigated” [1: F. P-378. Op 4. D. 6. L. 4].

In Soviet Karelia, after a radical cut in customs personnel numbers and removal of most of their functions in favor of the GPU, (including determining dislocations of export centres and control over transborder transfers of commodities,) a manager of the *Kem* Customs, Pyotr Piho, filed a petition to the GPU of the Karelian ASSR. On the grounds that remaining administrators at the customs posts along the Finnish border now had ‘plenty of spare time,’ he proposed their transfer under the jurisdiction of the chiefs of the nearest GPU border guard outposts [1: F. P-378. Op 4. D. 6. L. 10]. Karelian GPU rejected the proposal, finding the offer “highly impractical”, and suggestions on the involvement of the heads of the customs outposts in the GPU activities ‘totally unacceptable,’ [1: F. P-378. Op 4. D. 1/8. L. 7-10] resulting in the final decay of local customs.

During Soviet border securitization that started in the late 1920s and continued throughout the 1930s, in dramatically transforming geopolitical contexts, and in-

creasing Soviet “war scares,” the Western as well as Eastern Soviet borderlands became sites of “cleansing operations,” and later, in the 1930s, of dramatic displacements of populations. Both borders were finally “sealed” with the destruction of their borderland societies that resulted from Stalinist anti-espionage operations and deportations at the end of the 1930s [21]. What is less known, in 1937-1938, a large share of the high and mid-rank ex-customs staff were repressed with the standard charges of “counter-revolutionary agitation,” “espionage” and “sabotage” [20].

## Conclusion

Throughout the 1920s, reflecting Moscow’s ambiguous policies on the borders’ protection at the Sino-Soviet as well as Soviet-Finnish border sectors, multiple interagency conflicts occurred among various border controlling agents of the same - Soviet - state. In both cases, they were aggravated by the lack of precise directives as to the new Soviet borders’ purpose, conflicting aspirations and countervailing tensions of ideology and expediency inherent in Soviet policy-making of the early 1920’s, confusion and troubled connections between central (Moscow), provincial inspectorates, and border guard and customs outposts directly at the borders. While customs institutions were subordinated to the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Trade (NKVT) and operated to keep the border open and *functioning*, Soviet GPU leading officials, who, focused on *sealing* the border starting in the late 1920s, fought with them for control over ‘porous’ borders. Moreover, contradictions in economic border controls were fueled by local actors, border guards and customs officials directly at the borders, for most of whom the borders became not objects of the state control, but resources for survival in conditions of underfinancing, isolation in harsh conditions, and impossibility of controlling illegal transborder encounters of local communities. Confusion in border controls and local ‘power struggles’ were ended by increasingly assertive OGPU policy by the end of the 1920s.

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### Abbreviations:

Karelian ASSR - Karelian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (1923-1940).

FER - Far Eastern Republic (1920 - 1922).

Dalrevkom - the Far Eastern Revolutionary Committee (1922 - 1926).

GPU - State Political Directorate, (1922-1923); from 1923 to 1934 -OGPU (Joint Joint State Political Directorate under the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR).

NKVD - People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (1917 - 1930; 1934 - 1946).

NKID - People's Commissariat Foreign Affairs (1917 - 1923).

GOSPLAN - The State Planning Committee (1921 - 1991).

SNK - Council of People's Commissars (1923-1946).

KRO GPU - Counter-Revolutionary Section of the GPU.

NKVT - People's Commissariat for Foreign Trade of the USSR.

NKF - the People's Commissariat for Finance (1918-1991).

DVO - Far Eastern area.

GTU - Main Customs Department, established in December 1921 and responsible for state control over the customs stations; a part of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade.

The Karelian ASSR - The Karelian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (1923-1940).

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**ՎԱՂ ԽՈՐՀՐԴԱՅԻՆ ՏՆՏԵՍԱԿԱՆ ՍԱՀՄԱՆԻ  
ՎԵՐԱՀՍԿՈՂՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ. ԱՐԵՎԵԼՔ-ԱՐԵՎՄՈՒՏՔ  
ԶԳՎԱԾՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ**

*Օկսանա Երմոլաևա*

**Բանալի բառեր՝** խորհրդային սահմանային վերահսկողություն, «երկրորդական անհանգստության» սահմաններ, միջգերատեսչական մրցակցություն, ոչ պաշտոնական դաշինքներ, կենտրոն-ծայրամաս խնդիրներ:

Ուսումնասիրությունների մեծ մասում վաղ խորհրդային սահմանները դիտարկվում են որպես նորաստեղծ կոմունիստական պետության և տեղական համայնքների միջև առճակատման վայրեր: Գիտական հետազոտություններում այդ տարածքները ներկայացվում են նաև որպես անօրինական անդրսահմանային փոխանակումների և ապրանքների փոխանցման տարածքներ, որոնք հանգեցնում էին պետական եկամուտների նվազման և անօրինական տնտեսությունների հարստացմանը: Հետագայում, ավելի ու ավելի քաղաքականացված համատեքստում, այս փոխազդեցությունները հանգեցրին սահմանների աստիճանական «մաքման» և «կնքման»:

Սույն հոդվածում ուսումնասիրության առարկա է դարձել նաև այն, որ Խորհրդային պետությունը 1920-ական թթ. պայքար էր մղում կարգ ու կանոն հաստատելու սահմանային գոտիներում, փորձում կարգի հրավիրելու ոչ միայն տեղական համայնքների ներկայացուցիչներին, որոնք օգտագործում էին նորաստեղծ սահմանները իրենց նպատակների համար, այլև սահմանապահ և մաքսային ծառայությունների աշխատակիցներին: Այդ խնդիրները հատկապես ակնառու էին խորհրդա-չինական և խորհրդա-ֆիննական սահամանային գոտիներում: Այստեղ խնդիրներ կային նաև տարբեր խորհրդային վերահսկող պետական կառույցների միջև համագործակցության, կադրային քաղաքականության, փաստաթղթավորման հարցերում: