

PARTICIPATION OF EASTERN COUNTRIES IN THE SOVIET FAIR TRADE AND THE ISSUE OF ORGANIZING AN INTERNATIONAL FAIR IN CENTRAL ASIA (1920s)

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Abstract: This article examines the participation of Eastern countries in Soviet trade fairs in the 1920s, the activities of Central Asian economic agencies in this issue, namely the organization of an international trade fair in the region, and the position of central foreign trade organizations regarding it, based on historical materials of that period.

Keywords: Great Silk Road, Xi'an, trade, economy, fair, Nizhny Novgorod Fair, Baku Fair, Tashkent, Russian Eastern Chamber of Commerce, Central Asian Chamber of Commerce, Central Asian Economic Council, trading companies.

We know from the history of our economy that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a number of trade fairs of local importance operated in Central Asia - Kuyandin, Sergipol, Kuchalin, Vernen, Karkara, Karakul, Otbashi, Tokmok, Pishpak, Uilsk, Temir and Avliyoata. Turkestan is geographically located on an important route of the Great Silk Road and has long played a significant role in East-West trade. Caravans leaving the ancient city of Xi'an came to the cities of Kashgar and Urumqi in East Turkestan through Western China, and from there they headed north to Russia. In this regard, the intermediary position of Turkestan in the trade and economic relations of Russia with the countries of the East is particularly noteworthy. The active participation of Eastern countries in international fairs in Russia dates back mainly to the early 1920s. In this regard, the importance of the Nizhny Novgorod trade fair, which was reorganized in 1922, should be emphasized (the Nizhny Novgorod fair was founded between 1817 and 1822 and ceased its activities during the Civil War of 1918 - J.N.).

In the first year of the fair's reorganization (1922), 29 foreign Eastern firms participated. These were mainly Iranian trading firms. As a result of the introduction of a license-free regime for trade with Afghanistan and Iran by the People's Commissariat for Foreign Trade of the RSFSR in 1923, the participation of Eastern traders in the fair also became more active. The number of Eastern firms participating in it that year reached 76, the following year (1924) - 237, in 1925 - 259, and in 1926 - 361 [1]. Or, if the total volume of trade at the fair in 1925 amounted to 150 million soums, of which 13.2 million soums fell to the share of the East - China, Turkey, Mongolia and Iraq [2].

At the same time, a number of events were held at the Turkestan level in order to more actively attract foreign Eastern countries to the Nizhny Novgorod fair. Given that Turkestan is geographically adjacent to foreign Eastern countries, and in addition, they have transported their goods through here, the issue becomes self-evident.

Taking these into account, at the initiative of the Central Asian Representation of the USSR Council of Labor and Defense (UpolSTO), in order to ensure the consistent participation



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of Eastern countries in the 1925 Nizhny Novgorod Fair, a bureau was established under the Central Asian Department of the Russian Eastern Chamber of Commerce (RShSP) to support the fair. The bureau included the ambassadors of Iran and Afghanistan in Tashkent, who were provided with information about the fair. Also, the Central Asian Department of the RShSP published a separate supplement to its special publication, the "Trade of the Middle East" magazine, in three languages (Uzbek, Russian, Persian), entitled "Nizhny Novgorod Fair in 1925," and distributed it free of charge to Eastern countries. Later, the Tashkent Commodity Exchange established a committee to cooperate with the Nizhny Novgorod Fair. According to the Central Asian Trade Bulletin, this committee was tasked with informing Central Asian trade organizations and Eastern merchants about the conditions of the fair, concessions for goods, the volume of goods, and other issues related to trade [3].

In conclusion, Russian trade and economic organizations, acting through Central Asia, were able to ensure the active participation of foreign Eastern firms in the geographically distant Nizhny Novgorod fair. This is evidenced by the fact that 361 Eastern trading firms participated in the Nizhny Novgorod fair in 1926.

So, how did the Central Asian economic authorities react to this issue in the context of the New Economic Policy (NEP), which provided a number of freedoms in foreign economic relations? In general, what was the situation in the field of foreign trade at that time?

First of all, it should be noted with regret that the national-state delimitation carried out in the region (1924) was the beginning of the disintegration of the economic unity that had historically existed in this region for centuries. But it was impossible to be hasty. In November 1926, a body completely subordinate to the center was created - the Central Asian Economic Council. However, it is known that this Council did not last long, it was abolished in 1934 at the initiative of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b). Moreover, this Council did not have independent rights in the field of foreign trade. Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that some of our economic bodies, despite the pressure from the center, also had tendencies to strive for freedom in foreign trade relations. After all, they understood that without this it would never be possible to enter the international market.

In particular, the Central Asian branch of the RShSP received the status of an independent Chamber, which was the first achievement in this regard. This Chamber has a very important place in the history of trade and economic relations of Central Asia with neighboring Eastern countries in the 1920s, which requires a separate topic. The issue of the fair, which we are considering, is directly related to the initiative of this Chamber.

The active participation of Eastern trading companies in the international fairs of Nizhny Novgorod and Baku showed that there was a huge need for industrial goods there, and if the fair were organized in a more geographically convenient place, it would undoubtedly be successful. In this sense, the organization of a trade fair of international importance in the territory of Central Asia was put on the agenda [4].

The holding of such an economic event was also important because after the Nizhny Novgorod fair, in the second half of the year, the level of trade with Iran, Afghanistan and Western China on the border of Central Asia decreased to a certain extent. Because Eastern trading companies purchased large quantities of goods at the fair, this situation would lead to a significant decrease in the need for Central Asian export goods in the coming months. In addition, it soon became clear that there were different views on this issue. The Central Asian Department of the RShSP organized a special survey (questionnaire) to find out the opinion of



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existing trade organizations on this issue. It received information from 31 trade and economic organizations operating in Central Asia. Of these, 26 were positive, the rest were negative. Despite this, the Central Asian Department of the RShSP considered it necessary to organize an international trade fair [5].

An article titled "Central Asian Fair" published in the "Kyzyl Uzbekiston" newspaper stated the following about the existence of the necessary conditions in the country for organizing a fair: "In order to successfully organize the Central Asian Fair, it should be called before the Nizhny Novgorod Fair. The following factors will guarantee its development and success: 1) our geographical location; goods sent to and purchased from the USSR by the countries neighboring Central Asia pass through Central Asia; 2) the proximity of the Central Asian Nizhny Fair to Karaganda is very convenient for middle and small Eastern merchants; 3) the similarity of trade customs in Central Asia with those in Eastern countries. Also, Tashkent, Baku and other fairs are closely related to our Eastern trade. "it is a bond" [6].

By the way, it should be noted that the question of where to hold the fair, if it were to be organized, also caused heated debate. Some organizations, given Turkmenistan's border with Afghanistan and Iran, proposed holding the fair in Merv or Charjoi, others in Poltarasky (Ashgabat), and some, taking into account the ancient glory of Bukhara in trade with the East, recommended holding it there [7]. However, the Central Asian branch of the RShSP, based on the experience of the Nizhny Novgorod and Baku fairs, that is, noting that eastern merchants were buying industrial goods on a large scale, concluded that it was in all respects expedient to hold the fair in Tashkent, one of the largest industrial centers of Central Asia [8].

The task of decisively resolving the issue of the fair was assigned to the Central Asian Trade Congress, which was to be held in Tashkent in May 1926 on the initiative of the USSR Council of Labor and Defense [9]. The convening of this congress was necessary because at that time there was no single organization in Central Asia that would organize both foreign and domestic trade. However, domestic trade was in the hands of the People's Commissariat of Internal Trade of the republic, and foreign trade was under the jurisdiction of the Central Asian representation of the USSR People's Commissariat of Foreign Trade. In other words, there was no independent foreign trade organization in Central Asia. In addition, this congress, which was supposed to consider important issues, as well as the issue of the fair, was postponed twice on the pretext that its organizational aspects were not yet ready. During this time, changes had occurred in domestic and foreign trade, and the Central Asian Economic Council expressed the opinion that convening this congress was no longer advisable. The Economic Council of Uzbekistan, at its meeting in November 1925, also noted that the newly formed Central Asian republics were developing their own unique trade characteristics and stressed that there was no need to convene such a congress [10].

Thus, the congress was not convened. But the issue of organizing an international fair in Central Asia remained on the agenda. In fact, it is not difficult to understand that the central trade authorities, while not holding the congress, wanted to solve the issue of the fair in their own interests. After all, the organizers of the Nizhny Novgorod fair, as well as the officials of the RShSP, were worried about losing customers from the East if an international fair was held in Central Asia. But it was also impossible not to take into account the desire of the Central Asian republics to strive for freedom in trade with the East. In 1926, when the Central Asian branch of the RShSP received the status of an independent Chamber, the Central Asian representation of the Council of Labor and Defense of the USSR and the State Planning



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Committees of the Central Asian republics raised the issue of convening an international trade fair in the region that same year [11].

Unfortunately, in those years, neither the center nor some of our local trade organizations paid serious attention to putting this issue into practice. Thus, the wonderful event that should have filled the page of our economic history of the 1920s - the Central Asian International Trade Fair - was not convened. This good deed, to put it mildly, became a victim of the indifference of the central trade agencies to the foreign economic interests of remote nationalities, and the intransigence of some of our local organizations in this regard.

Almost 100 years have passed since then. Now Uzbekistan is independent and free. It has escaped the torture of the totalitarian and highly centralized bureaucratic system of the former Union and is operating freely in foreign and domestic trade relations. In a word, Uzbekistan has embarked on the path of development and progress. It has achieved equal membership in many influential international organizations in the field of economic cooperation. We now have the necessary regulatory documents related to foreign economic relations, our own ministry. The socio-political stability prevailing in the republic guarantees that many countries of the world will boldly enter into economic relations with us. These days, Uzbekistan is preparing to join the World Trade Organization

In conclusion, there are all the grounds for resolving issues related to the revival of any foreign economic relations. If the current economists of our republic, who are in their forties, seriously consider the issue of organizing a trade fair of international importance in Central Asia, raised by their colleagues in the 1920s, it would be beneficial, moreover, this event would further strengthen our increasingly growing economic relations with China, India, Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey, Indonesia, Malaysia and other Eastern countries. In this regard, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the proposal of the President of our republic Shavkat Mirziyoyev, in his speech at the SCO summit in Samarkand on September 16, 2022, to hold a large SCO trade fair every year and create a single electronic platform on its basis, was a practical step in this direction [12].

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