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### **Biographical note**

Nataliya Sureva earned her doctoral degree from Zaporizhzhia National University (Ukraine). She has authored a series of publications centered on the social dynamics of Southern Ukraine during the latter half of the 18th and 19th centuries. Nataliya has taught courses on Russian and Ukrainian history at universities in Ukraine, Russia, and Republic of Korea.



# THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NEW RUSSIA GOVERNORATE: AMBITIONS, CONFLICTS, AND COMPROMISES (1764-1765)

Nataliya Sureva

## Abstract

The establishment of the New Russia Governorate in 1764 marked a pivotal attempt by the Russian imperial government to standardize the administration of the Black Sea steppe frontier lands. This effort, from the perspective of St. Petersburg, aimed to bring order and control to the region, while for the local population, it represented their first encounter with systematic, all-encompassing state governance. The plan, crafted by Mel'gunov and sanctioned by the Russian Senate, envisioned the area as a largely uninhabited territory, save for previously established Balkan settler regiments and the Ukrainian fortified line. The goal was to populate the region with foreigners and former Russian subjects who had fled to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. However, these plans clashed with the reality of a highly unstable geopolitical situation and limited Russian resources. Local resistance emerged, particularly from Cossacks and large landowners who saw the spread of the New Russia Governorate as a threat to their traditional rights and privileges. Despite the central government's concern over public reactions and a subsequent halt to Mel'gunov's activities, the approach of integrating local privileges to attract settlers was adopted by future administrators.

**Key Words:** Russian Empire, Hetmanate Ukraine, Sloboda Ukraine, Black Sea Steppe frontier, New Russia Governorate, colonization.

## 1. Introduction

By the mid-18th century, controlling the southwestern steppe frontier presented a significant challenge for the authorities of the Russian Empire. Hetmanate Ukraine, Sloboda Ukraine, and the Zaporozhian Sich remained autonomous territories within the empire, governed by their own elites and legal systems. Their armies were recruited independently and commanded by local leaders. The Zaporozhians had only recently accepted Russian

protection (in 1734), which raised doubts about the reliability of their loyalty. The use of these armies for state-wide objectives, as envisioned from Saint Petersburg, was only possible to a limited extent within the existing arrangements.

Under these conditions, the main points of support for imperial authorities in the region became the Kyiv Governor-General, the Ukrainian Line, regular regiments of the Russian army, and a network of fortifications to the south. Military garrisons in several Ukrainian cities, and outposts along the Ukrainian Line with its system of Land Militia, were all subordinated to or supervised by the Kyiv Governor-General.

The Ukrainian line represented a series of military-defensive fortifications, similar to other Russian border lines formed as the empire expanded its borders eastward and southward in the 17th and 18th centuries<sup>1</sup>. Initially, the Russian government attempted to assign the task of constructing and maintaining such a line to the government of the Hetmanate but failed. Subsequently, the Hetmanate's Cossacks were employed as laborers for pay. The Ukrainian Line was never perceived as their own protective measure in the historiographic tradition of the Hetmanate but rather as a burden. The imperial government had to assign military service duties along the Ukrainian Line to the single-homestead class (*odnodvortsy*) from the nearby Belgorod, Kaluga, and other inner Russian provinces.

Overall, the Russian imperial military presence in the southwestern borderlands was relatively small, constrained by the limited resources of the imperial military forces and treasury. Until the mid-18th century, the Russian government favoured the strategy of advancing fortified lines, using this approach to prevent its own population from spontaneous resettlement. As Brian Boeck demonstrates in his work, the Russian government primarily focused on migration control and border patrolling between the internal regions and the privileged Ukrainian Cossack communities (2007, pp. 55-56).

## 2. Evolving Frontier Strategies

Attempting to control the frontier with minimal resources, the Russian government decided in the early 1750s to rely on military settlers from the Balkan Peninsula willing to perform border service. Balkan military settlements such as New Serbia and Slavo-Serbia were established. The

initial design of New Serbia and Slavo-Serbia, similar to the fortified Ukrainian Line, was strategically planned not only for defensive purposes but also to control population movement and to ensure the stability of the region.

New Serbia was settled on lands previously developed by the inhabitants of the southern regiments of Hetman Ukraine. The former population was to be forcibly resettled. The resettlement of the Ukrainian population from the lands allocated to New Serbia began in 1753. Out of the 3,828 households of Cossacks and commoners designated to return to their old places, only 992 families agreed to relocate within the borders of the Myrhorod and Poltava regiments of Hetmanate. To prevent the remaining families from moving to Zaporozhzhia, especially in the territory then forming under Crimean supremacy in the interfluvium between the Bug and Dniester rivers, known as "Khan's Ukraine," the Russian Senate decided on August 18, 1753, to allocate a zone to the south of New Serbia for them and to form the New Sloboda (*Novoslobids'kyi*) Cossack Regiment. The population quickly arrived from the lands of both Left-Bank and Right-Bank Ukraine. If on January 1, 1759, 14,220 men lived in its territory, by the same date in 1763, their number had increased to 19,625 (Pirko, 2004, p. 55).

In this evolving landscape, the Ukrainian Line and the Balkan regiments failed to fulfill their intended roles. The number of Balkan settlers and Russian settled military garrisons was insufficient to sustain demographic, military, and economic goals for which these settlements were created. This inadequacy was compounded by the ongoing diverse migration of people from the Hetmanate, Sloboda Ukraine, Right-Bank Ukraine, and Zaporozhzhia, which the Russian authorities were unable to control. The military settlement formations, whose task was to delineate and control the state border on the steppe frontier, instead transformed into zones of contact rather than barriers. The lands south of them were actively settled, further blurring the dividing lines they were meant to enforce. Russian military authorities were forced to act on a local level more as arbiters than principal actors. Instead of serving as strict boundaries or effective deterrents, imperial frontier structures evolved into a kind of "middle ground" where various groups fostered their own forms of interaction, exchange, and joint management<sup>2</sup>.

In the mid-1760s, the Russian imperial government demonstrated its intention to shift from a policy of population containment and border control to a policy of active settler colonization in the Black Sea steppe

frontier. By the end of 1762, the government began to depart from restricting settlers based on religious affiliation, allowing all foreigners except for Jews to settle in the Russian Empire (Polnoe sobranie, vol. 16, p. 126). Despite these measures, the expected mass relocation of foreigners to southern Ukraine did not occur. It was also impossible to expect people to move from inner Russia due to serfdom and the landowners' complete lack of interest. Foreign colonization also remained negligible. It is possible to agree with Brian Davies (2016, p. 63), the reason for such attention to the imperial Black Sea frontier lay more in geopolitics than economics. The fertile soils did not attract landowners because there was no market for their products – rivers flowed south, and the primary sea for exporting agricultural products from Russian Empire was the Baltic until the 1810s.

On June 11, 1763, Empress Catherine II issued a decree allowing the settlement of refugees from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of Ukrainian, Russian, and other origins, as well as all willing individuals, including serfs who had lived with their landlords for less than ten years, in New Serbia. This decree effectively removed all legislative restrictions on the migration of the Ukrainian population to the southern regions, including Left-Bank and Sloboda Ukraine. In reality, while the decree introduced a new law, it merely aligned formal legislation with already existing practices, acknowledging long-standing patterns of spontaneous migration. This step was justified by the Russian authorities' recognition of the insufficient number of Balkan settlers and the urgent need to populate "those steppe areas, as they are crucial due to their border proximity, as much as possible, with a real cordon" (Polnoe sobranie, vol. 16, p. 297).

Simultaneously, Catherine II's new imperial government attempted to strengthen control and Russian military presence by implementing a series of administrative reforms on the empire's peripheries, appointing governors with extensive powers. This involved a reevaluation of the governor's role, with centralized regional authority and responsibility for regional development gaining new ideological justification. In the official directive to governors dated April 21, 1764, the governor is referred to as the "master of the region," indicating a trend towards the concentration and personification of regional power. The governors' powers were extensive and undefined, determined by the central authority's assessment of the region's problems and the need for intervention (Polnoe sobranie, vol. 16, pp. 716-717).

The Russian government embarked on these transformations without a clear action plan for each province. The strategic goal was unification and



integration, understood as the comprehensive civilization of the territory in line with Enlightenment ideas. Governors were tasked with developing tactical steps and practical measures within the defined strategy. Catherine II selected proactive, pragmatic, and ambitious individuals for local leadership positions, strongly recommending reliance on consensus with local elites rather than confrontation. She and her government succeeded in forming a pool of effective, long-serving governors: Siberian Denis Chicherin, Novgorod's Iakov Sievers, and Riga's George Browne. Governors Piotr Rumiantsev and Evdokim Shcherbinin also proved capable of successfully fulfilling their duties as leaders of the newly created imperial administrative units in Ukrainian lands.

The administrative career of the first New Russia (*Novorossiya*) Governor Alexei Mel'gunov (1722-1788) also initially seemed promising. His project for creating the New Russia province on New Serbia's lands was supported with minimal changes, and within a few months, the territory along the Ukrainian Line and the disbanded Slavo-Serbia was placed under his administration on the same basis. A decade later, the settlement project he authored - the Plan for the Settlement of New Russia Province - became the legal foundation for settlement policy and land use organization over vast territories acquired by the Russian Empire following the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardzha in 1774 and the abolition of the Zaporozhian Sich in 1775.

However, despite designing the legal framework and planning the province, the first New Russia governor did not join the ranks of long-term, successful, and effective rulers from the center's perspective. Merely two years after his appointment, he was hastily removed from office and transferred to another position. The New Russia province then reverted to the *de facto* administration of the Kyiv governor for about a decade. Moreover, in the late 1760s, Russian officials seriously considered a project to eliminate the right-bank half of the New Russia province by completely relocating its Elisavetgrad province from the right to the left bank of the Dnipro River (Pyvovar, 2021, pp. 22-28).

Mel'gunov's administrative fate as the New Russia governor and his colonization project vividly illustrate the challenges, dilemmas, and uncertainties of Russian inner policy in the Black Sea Steppe.

### 3. General-Lieutenant Alexei Mel'gunov

By the same decree that lifted restrictions on the movement of the Ukrainian population, all Russian military-administrative units in the region – the New Serbia Corps, the New Sloboda Cossack Corps, and the Fortress of St. Elizabeth – were unified under the command of General-Lieutenant Alexei Mel'gunov, under the supervision of Kiev Governor General Ivan Glebov. Mel'gunov was also appointed head of the commission investigating the abuses of General Horvat, his predecessor as commander of the New Serbia Corps. In the preamble of the decree, Mel'gunov was tasked with consulting with the Kiev Governor General and local senior officers to develop a plan for reforms in the region. The main goal of these proposed reforms was declared to be “the increase of settlements, as the primary objective of all this.” (Polnoe sobranie, vol. 16, p 297).

General-Lieutenant Alexei Mel'gunov was one of the most influential figures in the Russian Empire during the reigns of Peter III and Catherine II. Prior to his appointment in the region, he led the Landed Gentry Corps (*Sukhoputnyi Shliakhetskyi korpus*), the premier military educational institution of the Russian Empire. Mel'gunov gained a reputation as a highly educated and enlightened nobleman with liberal views. He founded a theater and a printing house within the Corps, where he published his own weekly magazine and translated works from German and French authors. He consistently advocated for transitioning the Corps' instruction into the Russian language, and to this end, he established the printing house, which was intended to publish textbooks among other materials. In the conflict between Gerhard Friedrich Miller and the Russian Academy of Sciences, he supported Miller and, in 1760, initiated the printing and distribution of a questionnaire composed by Miller to be sent to the provinces with the aim of preparing a comprehensive geographical description of the Russian Empire. Mel'gunov participated in the development of key legislative acts under Peter III, such as the Manifesto on the Abolition of the Secret Chancellery and the Decree on the Liberties of the Nobility. Similar to Piotr Rumyantsev, the future governor of Little Russia, he distanced himself from affairs after the palace coup in St. Petersburg in the summer of 1762. However, a year later, he energetically responded to Catherine II's offer to reorganize the Russian military-administrative structures in the southwestern borderlands.

Thus, the selection of Mel'gunov for the post was not accidental. Catherine II saw him as a statesman with progressive views, sharing the

Enlightenment ideas and principles of state administration as understood by the Russian elite at the time. Mel'gunov endeavored to meet the expectations of the Empress. He did not treat his role as a formality, as evidenced by his original reform projects and his regular, extensive reports to Catherine II, preserved in the archives of the Russian Senate.

Mel'gunov, like other Russian governors in the empire's peripheries at the time, was granted extensive executive powers and the right to initiate legislation. His task was formulated as follows:

to devise a plan [...] on how to reform the New Serbia Corps and bring it to a better state, to increase and maintain proper living conditions, with the advantage of increasing settlements as the main objective, as well as increasing Sloboda settlements and Old Believer communities, and taking measures to attract runaways from Poland, including Little Russians, Old Believers, and other subjects of Your Imperial Majesty. (Polnoe sobranie, vol.16, p. 297)

Mel'gunov first arrived in the region in the summer of 1763 and, as the sources indicate, launched a flurry of activities. He initiated the excavation of a Scythian burial mound near the Fortress of St. Elizabeth. He established a printing house in the fortress, with its first publication being the "Russian Alphabet Book" (*Rossiiskaia azbuka*). He also accelerated the construction of a church within the fortress. Moreover, he initiated the demarcation of lands with the Zaporozhian Cossacks along a new boundary, leading to active correspondence with the Sich and facing resistance from some Zaporozhian commanders (Syniak, 2010, pp.13-14).

#### **4. "Plan for the New Russia Governorate"**

By the end of 1763, Mel'gunov had transformed his accumulated experience in the region into a substantial legislative project, as he had been tasked to do. This project became known as the "Plan for the New Russia Governorate." This document, along with the staffing schedule of the newly formed regiments and maps, formed the basis for the Panin brothers' report on the creation of the New Russia Governorate, which was approved on March 22, 1764 (Polnoe sobranie, vol. 16, pp. 657-667). Mel'gunov's "Plan," with minor adjustments, would serve as the primary legal framework in the region for decades. Later, in the second half of

the 1770s, the incorporation of the population of the former Zaporozhian Lands into the social and administrative structures of the empire would occur in the manner proposed by Mel'gunov<sup>3</sup>.

During the review of New Serbia's organisation, it was found that it had cost too much (700,000 rubles), and the funds spent on it did not correspond to the benefits it provided to the state. There was no reason to expect that the situation would improve in the future. Therefore, it was proposed to create a governorate, to expand its territory by including the triangle of land between the Inhul and Oril rivers, which belonged to the Zaporozhian Cossacks, and to add the New Sloboda Regiment and Slavo-Serbia. The territory of the New Russia Governorate was not limited to these areas, which were dispersed significantly.

Naturally, the question of their unification arose. The Ukrainian line was already becoming redundant, as settlements had moved far beyond it, and it had ceased to serve as protection from the steppe. Moreover, it was built in an area lacking water and forests, making it less suitable for border defense. Therefore, the Russian Senate concluded that the Ukrainian line needed to be transferred to the jurisdiction of the New Russia Governorate. Along with it, the places located "behind the Ukrainian line" would also be transferred to the New Russia Governorate. All these lands had been spontaneously colonized by residents of the southern regiments of the Hetmanate and included about 40,000 people (Miller, 1889, p. 302).

The New Russia Governorate had a semi-military character. The entire territory of the governorate was divided among regiments, both hussar and pikemen. The regiments were settled, meaning they combined military service with farming; each hussar or pikeman was allocated a plot of land. The territory where the settled regiments were located was under the authority of the regiment commander, and this authority extended to both military and non-military populations.

In his "Plan," Mel'gunov attempts to encompass all aspects of the region's life and subject them to the demands of colonization, starting from the allocation of land and ending with issues of upbringing and education. It is noteworthy that the "Plan" envisioned the region as a desert, devoid of people, customs, or laws, where everything needed to be created anew.

The "Plan" stipulated that foreigners of any nationality could join settled regiments without restrictions, receiving 30 rubles "without return." All Russian subjects living abroad, as well as Zaporozhians who enlisted in the hussar and pikemen regiments, would receive 12 rubles. The same amount was given to all settlers, both foreigners and Russian subjects, who

did not enter military service. The territory of the new governorate was divided into separate districts for military personnel and other population groups. The former New Serbia was divided into 70 districts, of which 62 were allocated for military personnel, 2 for townspeople, and 16 for state peasants, Old Believers, and foreigners. If the allocated land was settled according to the established quota, the land was granted in full ownership. There were no class restrictions for acquiring land; anyone could receive land as long as they had the means for settlement.

The Mel'gunov's Plan introduced norms that significantly differed from those existing in other parts of the Russian Empire<sup>4</sup>. The "Plan" provided everyone with the opportunity to acquire large landholdings and populate them with peasants. For anyone who brought a certain number of settlers, there was a path to nobility and promotion to officer ranks. Residents of the New Russia Governorate enjoyed even more rights than "longtime Russian subjects": they could not be forcibly conscripted into military service, anyone was allowed to trade in salt and vodka, and they could export and import agricultural products and various goods from abroad without paying duties. Norms of the "Plan" were closer to the principles and norms familiar to settlers from the nearby Ukrainian lands. Among the most important were personal freedom for peasants, household taxation<sup>5</sup>, and the freedom to distill and sell wine. It is therefore crucial for us to reconstruct the logic and foundational premises of the author of the plan, as well as the circumstances that shaped this logic. What led this imperial dignitary to significantly deviate from the general legislative norms and propose a fundamentally new and unprecedented legal framework within the Russian Empire?

For our analysis, we will draw upon a range of reports and notes submitted by Mel'gunov to Empress Catherine II in 1764-1765, as well as petitions and appeals to various authorities by local groups affected by Mel'gunov's reforms.

Interestingly, in his communications, Mel'gunov writes extensively about the desirability of legislative, administrative, and cultural unification. In the opening lines of his notes, dated January 27, 1764, which accompany and comment on the provisions of the "Plan for the New Russia Governorate" submitted for Senate approval, Alexei Mel'gunov proposes appointing the chief commander, or governor, "for no less than three years and from among the Russians, as the common people, being of the same faith, place greater trust in such a person" (Sledsvennoe delo, sheet 118).

Mel'gunov further proposes renaming New Serbia and the New Sloboda Cossack Regiment as a governorate and giving the companies of the newly settled regiments within that governorate "Russian names." He strongly recommends that at least one-third of the officer corps of the newly created settled regiments be drawn from the Russian army regiments. Otherwise, he fears:

[...] these regiments will never improve, and the rank-and-file soldiers will not quickly become accustomed to proper service and will not become diligent in it. They will always consider themselves a separate nation. Current officers not only fail to eradicate this notion but, on the contrary, some out of foolishness and others out of malice instill and affirm among the common people that they are Serbs destined to form a distinct nation forever. For the rank-and-file hussars, who consist of different nationalities, it does not matter what nationality the officers are, as long as they are orderly and just. They will even prefer Russian officers over the current ones. If we were to appoint officers who understand their language, every hussar officer would need to know more than ten different languages, which is impossible. Therefore, it is more practical to appoint Russians or those who know the Russian language and require that the rank-and-file learn Russian, which can be achieved without difficulty. It is even desirable that they forget their previous language and customs altogether, as this will more reliably integrate them into the settlement and unify them into the Russian nation (Sledsvennoe delo, sheet 119).

This excerpt clearly shows that Mel'gunov considers administrative russification his direct task and welcomes the potential assimilation of local Balkan settlers. Concluding his notes in January 1764, Mel'gunov revisits the theme of Russification ("obrusenie"), proposing to station the Carabinier Perm Regiment and two Land Militia Infantry Regiments in permanent quarters at the Fortress of St. Elizabeth, the administrative center of the planned governorate. He believed that this measure would both strengthen border defense and create conditions for "the diverse peoples coming to New Serbia to Russify [*obruset'*] more quickly" (Sledsvennoe delo, sheet 119 verso).

In the first point of the first chapter of the Plan, the author included a declaration about the fundamental uniformity of the legal status for all who find themselves in the newly created governorate: "In all settlements, people of all ranks from all places who have come or will come for service, settlement, or other purposes, as soon as they register where they desire,

shall from that moment enjoy the privilege of being considered and treated equally with all long-standing subjects, and obey the State laws just like everyone else" (Polnoe sobranie, vol. 16, p. 663). In his report to Catherine II dated August 21, 1764, he writes about his expectations: "Little Russia, seeing this example, will ask, sotnia<sup>6</sup> by sotnia and town by town, to be united under a single law. Then it will naturally follow that the entire land can be divided into provinces and governorates as needed, and the Brandenburg and Saxon rights currently existing there will disappear on their own. Thus, there will be one flock and one shepherd" (Doneseniya Aleksey a Melgunova, sheet 13 verso).

In Mel'gunov's accounts from late 1764 to early 1765, faced with opposition and complaints from major landowners in Left-Bank and Sloboda Ukraine about their peasants moving to the New Russia Governorate, Mel'gunov, seeking to justify his actions to Catherine II and senior officials, presents additional arguments. He draws on historical information and demonstrates his reasoning based on a critical reflection of the Russian Empire's experience in Ukrainian lands. The governor refers to the history of the Sloboda regiments and discusses the mistakes of previous leadership in matters of cultural assimilation:

Although the residents of the Sloboda regiments have long been equated with other Russian people by courts and administration in the Belgorod and Voronezh governorates, there was no need to make any distinction in their designation or use... If every resident were called by the name of the governorate where they live, their previous designation would naturally disappear, and they could no longer be considered free Little Russians, and therefore would not have the right to free movement. Throughout the world, a group of newcomers does not bring rights to the whole; whoever arrives somewhere is subject to the laws of that land (Doneseniya Aleksey a Melgunova, sheet 13 verso).

In doing so, Mel'gunov formulates an entirely new objective for Russian administration in the entire southwestern borderlands of the empire, including the Hetmanate and Sloboda Ukraine. All inhabitants, regardless of their origin and previous status, should ultimately be declared equal to "long-standing" Russian subjects. This means they would unconditionally belong to the empire, rather than to Ukrainian Cossack corporations, which were part of the empire based on contractual principles and had a special, privileged legal status. In Mel'gunov's view, which, unlike

that of his predecessors, is based on the principles of cameralism and rational administration, the main goal can only be achieved by extending a unified legal system: “the extensive border will be protected by military personnel, all sustained by their own revenues.” In other words, only then will the local Russian administration be able to guarantee effective border protection based on taxes collected locally.

## 5. Practical Strategies vs. Initial Intentions

Upon arriving in the south and closely acquainting himself with the situation in the summer of 1763, Mel’gunov realized that the primary population of the lands entrusted to him, as well as potential settlers “from Poland” and other places capable of military service, were mostly descendants of privileged Ukrainian Cossack corporations with strong and stable notions of their origins and rights. There were no other social groups that the Russian government could rely on as settlers in the region, and Mel’gunov was well aware of this. It is no coincidence that in his reflections, he recalls the unsuccessful experience of resettling single-homestead peasants to the Ukrainian Line:

More than thirty years ago, the previous government, for this necessary purpose, did not take people from Little Russia to cover it but instead populated it with single-homestead peasants from the interior of the state. As a result, over one hundred thousand souls, forcibly relocated to those places, died prematurely. This border, in comparison to others, is incomparably more dangerous. All others lose only during wartime, but here, in addition to the proximity to Crimea, there is the constant, inevitable danger of the plague. Therefore, is it not better to settle such a region with volunteers rather than with forced labor (Reskript, sheet 5).

Mel’gunov faced the task not of populating the empty lands of the territory entrusted to him with “foreigners from Poland,” as initially envisioned from St. Petersburg, but rather of attracting the Ukrainian population that had already settled or had economic interests in the territory of the newly created New Russia Governorate, as well as potential settlers dissatisfied with their current situation.

At the same time, unifying legal status – thus, equalizing the rights of the Ukrainian population with those of “native Russian subjects” –



entailed a significant reduction of the existing privileges of the Ukrainian population, which was unlikely to attract many volunteers. Mel'gunov understood that his project for the new governorate needed to appear attractive to the "Little Russians," as he generally referred to the people from Left-Bank and Sloboda Ukraine. He argues:

Throughout the state, a law has been established and affirmed by custom over many years, according to which peasants are deprived of the freedom to move from one owner to another and are thus bound to their owners. In return, the owners are obliged to pay all state taxes for their people according to the census, supply the army and navy with recruits, and purchase wine and salt from the treasury rather than selling their own for profit. Consequently, landowners strive to encourage their people to engage in agriculture, thereby ensuring proper tax payments. Failure to comply with this law results in landowners losing their rights to serf ownership and being deprived of their lands.

In this part of the state<sup>7</sup>, which contains at least around a million souls, none of these conditions exist to this day. It is highly desirable for the increase of state power and revenues to bring this region under the same law as the rest of the state. It might seem that a decree would be the shortest way to achieve this, but it is necessary first to consider the nature of the people, the condition of the land, and the neighboring regions, and then determine whether the law can be enforced.

To support his point, Mel'gunov cites the unsuccessful experience of the Smolensk Governorate, from which people are fleeing *en masse* from serfdom to the neighboring Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The New Russia governor further questions why people actively migrate from the Hetmanate and Sloboda Ukraine to the south:

In this region, where none of those measures [referring to the binding of peasants to landowners] have been implemented, a great many people move to Poland, the Tatar lands, and the Sich with their wives and children. In the first two places, it is a total loss for the state, and in the third place, it is equally disastrous and additionally harmful. The more populous the Sich, the more dangerous and audacious it becomes (Reskript, sheet 6).

Finding an answer to this question is key for him. At that time, the local Russian administration lacked the means to stop or effectively control these migrants. However, understanding the motives behind this migration could

enable the Russian administration to offer an attractive alternative to the settlers. According to Mel'gunov, people from Little Russia and the Sloboda regiments flee due to excessive exactions by the senior landowners, the disenfranchisement of the Cossacks, exploitation by the ever-growing sotnia and regimental administration, and the upbringing in the customs of "illusory freedom." (Reskript, sheet 6).

Since prohibiting free movement would only increase emigration and relocation to the Zaporozhian Sich, "which no barriers can prevent," Mel'gunov proposes:

[...] allowing anyone from Little Russia and the Sloboda regiments who wishes to move to the New Russia Governorate for service and settlement, provided they continue to pay the same taxes there as they did in their previous locations, and likewise allow people to move from the governorate to the mentioned areas.

In the author's opinion, this is the only way to retain people within the state, populate the New Russia Governorate, and strengthen the borders: "If not by this method, then no other can be found to cover such a vast and empty border without burdening the entire state" (Reskript, sheet 8 verso).

In addition to the rights of free movement and choice of residence, the "Plan for the New Russia Governorate" proposed a regimental structure (settled Pikemen Regiments), land-based rather than poll taxation, the right to freely sell wine, and several other provisions that closely resembled what was known in the Russian Empire as "Little Russian law." For Mel'gunov, including these norms was a necessary compromise between the ideal and the reality. The local administration could not rely solely on coercion. The borders were easily penetrable, and dissatisfied individuals could easily move to Zaporozhian lands, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, or territories controlled by the Crimean Khan. Mel'gunov decided to create an attractive alternative for discontented peasants and Cossacks, as well as for lower-ranking sotnia officers, capable of competing with options like moving to the Zaporozhian Lands or the Khan's Ukraine.

Notably, Mel'gunov's project for the New Russia Governorate was, in practice, an open spatial concept: according to the Russian Senate reports approved on March 22 and June 11, 1764, the governorate included the territories of the former New Serbia and Slavo-Serbia, the former New Sloboda Cossack settlement, the area between the Inhul and Oril rivers belonging to the Zaporozhian Lands, and lands along and inward from

the Ukrainian Line extending over 40 kilometers, including the southern sotnias (administrative units) of the Poltava and Myrhorod regiments of Hetmanate Ukraine. These were the legislatively fixed geographic boundaries in 1764 (*Polnoe sobranie*, vol. 16, pp. 297, 663)

However, the administrators of the New Russia Governorate began incorporating residents of the Hetmanate and Sloboda Ukraine along with their lands, regardless of their location. The local administrations were not informed about the transfer of lands from their control to the jurisdiction of the New Russia Governorate. Mel'gunov addressed the local offices directly, instructing them to offer all Cossacks the option to enroll in the New Russia Regiments under the threat of land confiscation. In this manner, he seized about 30 sotnias from the Poltava, Myrhorod, Lubny, and Pereyaslav regiments. In the summer and autumn of 1764, the events also covered the Kharkiv and Izyum regiments of Sloboda Ukraine.

The incorporation into the New Russia Governorate appeared voluntary: Mel'gunov and his close associates collected signatures from the population expressing their desire to come under the jurisdiction of the New Russia Governorate and to enroll in the Pikeman Regiments. At the same time, the senior officers were immediately promised officer ranks, granting them the right to Russian nobility; the lower ranks and commoners who enrolled as pikemen received land plots.

Mel'gunov actively worked on integrating new settlements into his governorate and filling the newly established Elisavetgrad, Dnipro, and Luhansk Settled Regiments with people<sup>8</sup>. The promised living conditions in the new governorate were highly enticing. The main conditions included: granting land ownership to each individual, the free sale of wine and salt, the freedom to enlist in or leave military service, no payments to the treasury except an annual land tax, and the status of state peasants for those not wishing to serve in the military, ensuring they would never be bound to landowners.

New Russia governor identified the sotnia-level officers as his main potential supporters and allies, directing all his persuasive efforts towards them. While composing his "Plan," he requested the authority to recommend these officers for military ranks in recognition of their contributions to settlement efforts (*Sledstvennoe delo*, sheet 117 verso). Obtaining Russian officer ranks provided the Ukrainian officers with a path to the desired Russian nobility status, including the right of hereditary ownership over peasants. In his report to Catherine II dated November 17, 1764 (*Doneseniya Aleksey Melgunova*, sheets 3-8) Mel'gunov,

requesting the swift promotion of Kremenchuk sotnyk Gavrillov, Belytsky sotnyk Troinitsky, and Keleberda sotnyk<sup>9</sup> Florinsky to the rank of captain in the active Russian army, writes:

By this means [i.e., through the granting of ranks], through a few sotniks and other minor individuals, Little Russia can soon be brought to any desired state. The local officials are very eager for these genuine ranks, and without such rewards, I do not expect others to follow. Moreover, these pioneers would be held in extreme contempt by all their former compatriots.

The sotnia-level officers who decided to join Mel'gunov's newly created settled regiments became the main organizational driving force, using persuasion, intimidation, and coercion on the local population, both Cossacks and peasants, in the drafting of supposedly voluntary collective petitions. However, the Cossacks who had their own lands viewed this reform very negatively, and only the threat of losing lands forced them to enlist as pikemen. The higher-ranking officers also reacted negatively, as they had large estates and risked losing their peasants<sup>10</sup>.

## **6. Mel'gunov's Attack on the Hetmanate and the Brewing Conflict**

As we have seen above, Mel'gunov's reform proposals and considerations encompassed all Ukrainian lands within the Russian Empire, not just the territory directly under his control. This was because the rapid success in managing the entrusted New Russia Governorate and establishing settled regiments there directly depended on the cooperation and involvement of the Ukrainian population. Mel'gunov was undoubtedly aware that throughout 1764, the higher echelons of the Russian government were preparing to reform the administration in the Hetmanate and Sloboda regiments. The decision to dismiss Hetman Kyrylo Razumovs'ky and abolish the hetman's office was made in February 1764, initiating the process of drafting provisions for the new Little Russian Collegium and selecting candidates for the position of the Little Russian governor (Hal', 2008; Kruglova, 2010). At the same time, in Sloboda Ukraine, a commission led by the future governor Shcherbinin was investigating the activities of the local military command and officers. This commission was laying the groundwork for the abolition of the Cossack military-administrative system

and the establishment of the Sloboda Ukrainian Governorate (Masliichuk, 2007; Sklokin, 2019).

Taking control sotnia by sotnia, village by village, Mel'gunov interacted exclusively with the sotnia-level officers, and it seems he did not fear conflict with the Cossack regimental administrations or their direct superiors. The General Military Chancellery in Hlukhiv was inundated with inquiries from the regimental leadership in Poltava and Myrhorod, and petitions from dissatisfied sotnias. However, it did not know how to respond and limited itself to sending reports to Hetman Razumov's'ky, who spent all of 1764 in St. Petersburg.

However, by the autumn of 1764, the wave of discontent stirred by the actions of the New Russia governor reached the Russian capital. This wave had two main causes: first, the dissatisfaction of some sotnia-level officers and Cossacks who found themselves incorporated in the New Russia Governorate against their will, and second, the negative reaction of large landowners in southern Hetmanate and Sloboda Ukraine to the loss of their dependent peasants who chose to register in the New Russia Governorate.

In October 1764, the ataman of the Orlyans'ka sotnia, Fedir Bairak, arrived in St. Petersburg, bringing with him several dozen petitions and collective grievances addressed to Hetman Razumov's'ky and Catherine II, from the sotnias of the Hetmanate affected by Mel'gunov's recruitment activities (Reshennye, sheets 22-43 verso). Fedir Bayrak specifically protested against the actions of the sotnyk Ivan Osovet's'ky. In addition to the petitions brought to the imperial capital, he submitted a personal petition to Empress Catherine II, detailing the violent actions and robberies carried out by Osovet's'ky, who had been appointed by Mel'gunov as the *rotmistr* of the Dnipro Regiment, forcing the Cossacks to register in the New Russia Governorate. It is worth noting that historical sources record these two individuals in other conflict situations several years before this incident. Fedir Bayrak served as the ataman of the Starosamars'ka Sotnia of the Poltava Regiment, located beyond the Ukrainian Line, until 1762. After a conflict with the Zaporozhians led to the disbandment of this sotnia, he became the ataman of the Orlyans'ka Sotnia (Repan, 2017, p. 53). Meanwhile, Orlyans'ka sotnyk Ivan Osovet's'ky was arrested in 1759 by the commandant of Fort St. Elizabeth, Muravyov, due to a dispute over the lands of the Orlyans'ka Sotnia, which had been allocated for New Serbia (Delo ob areste, sheets 1-22). This previous experience evidently convinced these men to choose different strategies. Bayrak, seeing the

inability of local Russian authorities to resolve disputes between the Hetmanate and the Zaporozhians on lands beyond the Ukrainian Line, preferred to choose the jurisdiction of the Hetmanate. In contrast, the loss of the lands beyond the Dnipro due to their inclusion in the newly organized New Serbia by the Russian government seemingly convinced Osovs'ky of the inevitability of expanding Russian control over the region and the corresponding changes. This likely led him to choose the New Russia Governorate.

On November 4, 1764, Hetman Razumov's'ky submitted a letter (*gramota*) to Catherine II, attaching all these petitions and outlining the complaints from the Poltava and Myrhorod regiments about their unwillingness to be part of the New Russia Governorate and the violent actions of Mel'gunov's appointed officers, including beatings and robberies (Reshennyie, sheet 21). Among the various collective petitions were those submitted by the officers, as well as by two separate groups of 47 and 60 Cossacks from the Kremenchuk's'ka sotnia, complaining about the violent actions of Kremenchuk's'ka sotnyk Iakiv Gavryliv and expressing their unwillingness to be in the pikemen regiment of the New Russia Governorate. This Kremenchuk sotnia, along with the neighboring Vlasiv's'ka sotnia, had already been officially included in the New Russia Governorate by a decree of Catherine II on September 6, 1764, based on collective petitions, orchestrated by Gavryliv (Polnoe sobranie, vol. 16, p. 894).

In Razumovsky's letter, he also mentioned a complaint from the estate manager of the General Military Treasurer Semen Kochubey regarding the migration of more than 200 peasant households from his villages in the Poltava Regiment to the New Russia Governorate. Other documents reveal that similar actions were taken by the subjects on the lands of Roman Vorontsov, also in the Poltava Regiment, and the subjects of Ivan Gendrikov in the Kharkiv Regiment – all influential Russian officials who had acquired extensive holdings through their friendship with Hetman Razumov's'ky. Mel'gunov, who had learned about the discontent of the large landowners, concluded his report to the Empress on October 27, 1764, with the following:

I expect that the Little Russian landowners and those who need them will not refrain from lodging complaints against me under various pretexts. However, my hope is encouraged by the wise discernment of Your Imperial Majesty in human affairs. I strive solely to increase the people

and the land under Your Majesty's unified rule by all appropriate means (Doneseniya, sheet 15).

In his final report from the region on November 17, 1764, before his return to St. Petersburg, Mel'gunov was particularly verbose, engaging in polemics with imagined critics. He mocks the local landowners worried about losing their peasants, pointing out that the Little Russian privilege of free movement has turned against them:

It is somewhat unpleasant for the Little Russian landowners that, through the current establishment in the Catherine's province, their Little Russian liberty is observed by allowing anyone to move there for settlement and to return if they do not wish to stay. This privilege is burdensome for them because, even though this permission was published only a month ago in the Poltava regiment, it has not yet been announced in other regiments. This was done intentionally to let the opportune time for transition pass (Doneseniya, sheets 4 verso - 5).

Mel'gunov goes on to describe how the landowners spread false rumors about upcoming conscriptions in the New Russia Governorate, provoking fears and concerns among the people. Despite this, Mel'gunov boasts that in October 1764, he managed to enlist 200 men into the pikemen regiments and three thousand people as settlers (Doneseniya, sheet 5). Defending his approach regarding the Little Russian landowners, the New Russia governor appeals to the legal foundations of the Ukrainian Line, according to which private landowners have no rights to own land there. He also reproaches the major Little Russian landowners for the excessive exploitation of their dependent peasants:

Many compelling reasons force simple peasants to leave their old homes, buildings, plowed fields, lush meadows, sometimes livestock, grain, and belongings, and flee to those empty lands. What is most regrettable is that, as we hear, they irrevocably move to the Khanate's territory beyond the Perekop in Crimea, settling there and paying the Khan about two kopecks per plot. What causes this? Certainly, it is because, first, no peasant has his own clearly defined land; second, the sotnia-level officers are oppressed by the regimental officers, the regimental officers by the general officers, and in general, all by the prominent landowners. Therefore, every peasant, being restricted and oppressed in lands and resources, is forced to seek better opportunities due to the freedom of movement.

Concluding his report, Mel'gunov insists on his urgent return to St. Petersburg, emphasizing the impossibility of fully conveying all the circumstances he has uncovered about Little Russia in writing (Doneseniya, sheets 11-12).

It seems that the situation and sentiments in the higher circles of the Russian government regarding Mel'gunov's creeping transformation of the Hetmanate and Sloboda regiments into the New Russia Governorate were becoming increasingly tense. As long as the New Russia governor managed to create the impression of social consensus and the voluntary transition of people under his jurisdiction in his personal reports, Catherine II remained patient. However, the substantial volume of petitions and requests that reached the capital, transmitted by Hetman Razumovs'ky along with his letter, as well as personal appeals made directly to the monarch, indicated a growing social tension in the region and demanded a response. The irritation of influential high-ranking officials of the empire, such as Senator Vorontsov and the head of the Chevalier Guard Corps, Gendrikov, who were close to the disgraced Hetman Razumovs'ky, was a cause for concern. It is well known that just over two years earlier, Catherine II came to power as a result of a noble conspiracy; she understood her risks well and could not allow any grounds for the resurgence of opposition sentiments.

## **7. Compromise and Control: The Downfall of Mel'gunov**

It was necessary to rapidly strengthen imperial administrative control over the Ukrainian lands. In the realities of that time, this meant introducing direct gubernatorial rule. As mentioned earlier, within the Russian high bureaucracy, there was an ongoing search for an optimal new arrangement for the Hetmanate and Sloboda Ukraine. The conflict surrounding the actions of the New Russia governor appears to have acted as a catalyst for final decisions to be made.

On October 30, 1764, Catherine ordered her secretary to urgently draft instructions for the Little Russian General Governor, without mentioning him by name (Pis'ma, 1863, p.190). The letter addressed to Catherine II from November 4, 1764, outlining complaints against Mel'gunov, was apparently the last one signed by Razumovs'ky in his capacity as Hetman. On November 10, 1764, a whole set of documents was dated, regulating the dismissal of the Hetman, the powers of the Little Russian



Collegium, and the appointment of the new Little Russian Governor, P. Rumyantsev. The next day, November 11, the Senate considered the collective complaints forwarded by the Hetman and decided to investigate the actions of Kremenchuk sotnyk Gavriliv and Orlyans'ky sotnyk Osovets'ky. All complaints against Mel'gunov and petitions were sent to Piotr Rumyantsev, the new Little Russian Governor, with orders to investigate immediately in coordination with Mel'gunov. For any matters that could not be resolved, he was instructed to report to the Senate with his opinion (*Reshennyie*, sheet 44).

The reforms also affected the Sloboda regiments. On December 16, 1764, a special Senate commission reviewed Shcherbinin's report on the inefficiency of the Sloboda military-administrative system and decided to abolish the Sloboda Cossack regiments. In their place, they established the Sloboda Ukrainian Governorate, appointing Shcherbinin as the governor (*Polnoe sobranie*, vol. 16, pp. 1003-1007).

On January 21, 1765, the Little Russian and New Russia governors met in Moscow to resolve the contentious situation. In his report to the Senate dated January 31, Rumyantsev stated that he informed Mel'gunov of all the complaints and discontent regarding the incorporation into the New Russia Governorate. However, Mel'gunov responded that he could not reverse what had already been initiated without higher authority's sanction, as he was acting according to the monarch's decrees. Meanwhile, Rumyantsev stated that he continued to receive numerous appeals from many Little Russian officers. He expressed concern that the loss of human resources could impact tax collection and proper military service. Therefore, he intended to thoroughly investigate the matter (*Reshennyie*, sheet 68).

On February 2, 1765, Catherine II forwarded to the Senate a detailed report from Mel'gunov, which included an extensive preamble where Mel'gunov attempted to justify his actions with historical references and a critical overview of the current state of the Hetmanate and Sloboda Ukraine (it was previously mentioned here). In the final sections, he proposed practical steps to resolve the tension he had caused. Along with Mel'gunov's text, Catherine II also sent Rumyantsev's report, which contained his responses to each of Mel'gunov's proposed points (*Rescript*, sheet 2).

The Senate commission, consisting of Ia. Shakhovsky, P. Panin, and A. Olsufiev, was tasked with quickly reviewing the issue in a confidential manner. The commission prepared its conclusion by February 10, and their report was approved on February 21. It was decided to allow only

those settlers who had lived under their landowners for less than 10 years to remain in the New Russia Governorate. However, it was ordered that “no further settlements should be accepted, and the migration of all these people should be halted until further notice.” Furthermore, it was mandated that the New Russia Governorate should not expand further into the Little Russian Governorate. A separate point specified that, apart from the Catherine Province, the New Russia Governorate should only accept “foreigners of all ranks and nations from all free places for settlement, but not accept Cherkasy, Little Russians, and Russians from any other places except those coming from lands not belonging to the scepter of Her Imperial Majesty” (Rescript, sheet 12).

In response to Rumyantsev’s query about whether the Little Russian and Sloboda Governorates should remain intact or be divided to form the New Russia Governorate, the senators decided to exclude only the village of Vodolaga and the landowners’ peasants, who had already been removed from the tax register, from the jurisdiction of the Sloboda Governorate. No significant changes were to be made otherwise. The villages of the Hetmanate already brought under Mel’gunov’s authority were to remain in the New Russia Governorate, as reversing this would undermine imperial dignity, which was deemed unacceptable. However, Mel’gunov was ordered not to expand beyond this boundary. The three governors – of New Russia, Little Russia, and Sloboda Ukraine – were instructed to meet and discuss how to regulate the free movement of residents while considering the interests of each governorate. It was also ordered that the borders between the New Russia, Sloboda Ukraine, Little Russia, and Voronezh Governorates be marked without delay (Rescript, sheets 13-18 verso; Senatskii arkhiv, p. 50).

Thus, according to this decision, the activities of New Russia Governor Mel’gunov were abruptly halted, and the results of his actions were not reversed, as the senators explained, solely “to preserve imperial dignity.” On February 20, 1765, a Senate decree reassigned Mel’gunov to the Land Survey Commission, a demonstrative demotion in status. Although he was later reinstated, eventually heading the Kamer-Collegium and serving for a long time as the governor of Yaroslavl, Mel’gunov suffered a clear and public defeat as the governor of New Russia<sup>11</sup>. The governorship of Alexei Mel’gunov vividly highlights the limited circumstances and complex compromise-driven logic of the Russian government’s administrative decisions.

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From the vantage point of St. Petersburg, the establishment of the New Russia Governorate in 1764 marked the Russian imperial government's initial endeavor to standardize the administration of the Black Sea steppe frontier lands. For the local population, it was their first encounter with systematic, all-encompassing state control. To accurately reconstruct the development of events, it is essential to adopt this dual perspective.

Designed by Mel'gunov and sanctioned by the Russian Senate, the "Plan for the Settlement of the New Russia Governorate" treated the region as uninhabited, acknowledging no population except for the Balkan settler regiments and the Ukrainian fortified line previously initiated by the Russian authority. According to the plan, the region was to be populated by foreigners and former Russian subjects who had previously fled to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In the logic of the Russian lawmakers, no other population or legal system was recognized in this territory.

These deliberations clashed with the local reality. At that time, the geopolitical situation on the Black Sea steppe frontier was highly unstable, and the financial and logistical capacities of the Russian Empire to expand its military presence were quite limited. In the views of the Russian administrative elites, a crucial condition for the success of the Russian state in this territory was the settlement of a sedentary agricultural population capable of performing military service while sustaining themselves from the land rather than relying on the state treasury. Such a population, consisting of migrants from Sloboda and Left-Bank Ukraine and Zaporozhzhia, was already partially present in the New Russia Governorate and could be readily attracted. There were no other practical sources for organizing settler colonization available to the Russian authorities at this time.

Becoming acquainted with local migration flows, as well as the reactions and expectations of the local population, the first governor of New Russia was compelled to adapt. Despite the declared principles of equalizing the legal status of the New Russia Governorate with the general Russian norms, in practice, Mel'gunov was forced to make significant concessions and essentially reproduce the main "Little Russian privileges" within the governorate under his command. This was necessary to create attractive conditions for the existing local population and potential settlers. This approach would be adopted by subsequent administrators of Southern Ukraine.

The mid-level administrators of the southern sotnias of the Hetmanate largely chose to follow Mel'gunov. Groups of peasants from the Hetmanate

and Sloboda Ukraine, faced with the threat of losing personal freedom under increasing economic pressure from major landowners, also preferred the status of state settlers in the New Russia Governorate over that of private serfs. However, the governor's efforts to transfer more people and territories from the Hetmanate and Sloboda Ukraine to the New Russia Governorate sparked significant opposition from the Cossacks and major landowners. The latter were losing their workforce, while the former perceived the expansion of the New Russia Governorate as an assault on their traditional Cossack rights and privileges. They feared being subjected to the poll tax or conscription into the regular Russian army, despite all declarations and assurances from Mel'gunov and his associates about preserving their previous status, personal freedom, freedom of movement, and the freedom to choose whether or not to serve.

The central Russian government was deeply concerned about the public reactions to Mel'gunov's actions in creating the New Russia Governorate. Fearing a loss of control over the frontier, at the turn of 1764-1765, St. Petersburg abruptly halted the activities of the New Russia Governor and prohibited further expansion of the New Russia Governorate. Simultaneously, in the adjacent Ukrainian territories that previously held the status of privileged Cossack corporations, direct gubernatorial rule was hastily introduced – leading to the establishment of the Little Russia and Sloboda Ukraine Governorates. Ultimately, addressing the organization of governance in the Black Sea steppe frontier proved impossible without simultaneously resolving the status and administration of the Cossack Hetmanate and Sloboda regiments – contrary to the initial expectations of imperial officials.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The Ukrainian line stretched along the territory of the Poltava and Kharkiv regiments on the border with Zaporozhzhia for a distance of about 300 km. Starting from the bank of the Dnipro (at the confluence of the Oril' River), it extended along the Oril', its tributary Berestova, and the Bereka, a tributary of the Sivers'kyi Donets'.
- <sup>2</sup> Regarding fortified lines as a kind of middle ground see Ricarda Vulpius (2020). Original concept comes from Richard White (1991).
- <sup>3</sup> The regulations of the Plan extended beyond the newly established New Russia Governorate. For example, in the instructions to the governor of the Sloboda Ukraine dated July 6, 1765 it was prescribed to follow the standards adopted in the neighboring province when distributing vacant lands (Polnoe sobranie, t. 17, p. 185).
- <sup>4</sup> On the forced compromises the Russian government made in extending "Little Russian" law to the territories of southern Ukraine, see also Boyko (2021) and Le Donne (2014).
- <sup>5</sup> Unlike the poll tax in the inner Russian governorates
- <sup>6</sup> A *sotnia* was both a military unit (company) and a territorial division within the regiment system of the Cossack Hetmanate in 17th-18th century Ukraine.
- <sup>7</sup> Here and henceforth, Mel'gunov refers to the Hetmanate and Sloboda Ukraine, as well as the lands designated for the Novorossiysk Governorate all together.
- <sup>8</sup> Sometimes this looked like the resettlement of people to a new place, sometimes it simply meant a declaration of the new legal belonging of people to the New Russia province. Those who decided to join New Russia governorate received "tickets" (*bilety*) - special documents from Mel'gunov or the commanders of the settled regiments about their new status.
- <sup>9</sup> A *sotnyk* was the commander of a sotnia, responsible for military leadership and administrative duties within the sotnia's territory.
- <sup>10</sup> Regarding the circumstances of the Pikiners' recruitment, see Miller (1889), Vyrs'kyi (2019).
- <sup>11</sup> Mel'gunov formally performed the duties of the Governor of New Russia until September 1765. In reality, since the winter of 1764-1765, and officially from September 12, 1765, these duties were actually carried out by Yakov von Brandt, who was a member of the Little Russian Collegium at that time.

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