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Speeches/Documents

Title: REPORT ON THE GENERAL PROGRAMME FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF REGIONAL AUTONOMY FOR NATIONALITIES

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Vice-Chairman of the Commission of Nationalities Affairs

Mr. Chairman, Vice-Chairmen and Members:

I wish to report briefly on the drafting procedure and the essential contents of the Draft General Programme for the Implementation of Regional Autonomy for Nationalities.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Central People's Government has persistently established regional autonomy for nationalities, adhering to the policy towards nationalities as laid down in the Common Programme of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference: "Regional autonomy shall be exercised in areas where national minorities are concentrated."

Statistics show that by June this year (1952) 130 national autonomous regions of differing levels, inhabited by four and a half million people of various nationalities, had been established throughout the country. National autonomous regions are also to be set up by the respective people's governments of a higher level in many other areas where national minorities are concentrated.

Entirely new conditions, never before known in Chinese history, are being created in areas inhabited by national minorities who now enjoy regional autonomy and are exercising their rights as masters of their own fate. The autonomous regions are being developed politically, economically, culturally and educationally to a remarkable degree according to the wishes of the nationalities concerned. The people's living conditions have improved and are being further improved. Political consciousness is rising; the people's love for Chairman Mao Tse-tung and their homeland is heightened by all that is happening day by day. They have great faith in their country, a big, multi-national family based on equality, solidarity and fraternal co-operation. The people of various nationalities living in areas where autonomy for nationalities is not yet established are equally full of hope and confidence as they are looking forward to this new epoch in their own history.

These circumstances show what brilliant achievements have been made since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in applying the policy towards nationalities. They demonstrate the greatness of this policy put forward by Chairman Mao Tse-tung and the Communist Party of China and laid down in the Common Programme of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. It is a policy that can correctly solve the national question within China's boundaries, consolidate the unity and co-operation among her nationalities, and ensure that they will march shoulder to shoulder towards a prosperous and happy life.

In implementing regional autonomy, we all felt that a law governing the process was needed, so that regional autonomy could gradually be established in accordance with such a law in national minority areas and the policy towards nationalities, as laid down in the Common Programme, be carried out correctly in all autonomous regions. The enactment of such a law was an epoch-making event in our country. The directives issued by Chairman Mao Tse-tung and the Central People's Government

concerning various important questions of principle in the implementation of regional autonomy for nationalities and the experiences gained in actual work provided the basis for the enactment of such a law.

The Commission of Nationalities Affairs of the Central People's Government, in accordance with the decision of the Government Administration Council, was therefore able to call, last December, an enlarged meeting of the second session of the Commission which was in the nature of a representative conference of the country's nationalities. This meeting summed up the experiences gained in the implementation of regional autonomy for nationalities in all areas and achieved unity in views on the question of regional autonomy for nationalities, with emphasis on certain important questions that require attention in its implementation. The most important fact of this meeting was that a Draft General Programme for the Implementation of Regional Autonomy for Nationalities was put forward. In order to obtain as many opinions as possible, the Government Administration Council circulated this draft among the Greater Administrative Areas and provinces concerned. On February 22 this year, the draft was discussed and adopted by the Government Administration Council at its 125th Administrative Meeting. A panel discussion on the draft was held on August 3 by the Political and Legal Affairs Section and the Nationalities Affairs Section of the First National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. Now it is before the Central People's Government Council for examination and approval.

Regarding this draft, I would like to stress following points:

(1) What Does Regional Autonomy for Nationalities Mean ?

Regional autonomy for nationalities is the fundamental policy laid down by Chairman Mao Tse-tung for the solution of China's national question through the application of Marxist-Leninist theory. It means regional autonomy practised within the boundaries of the People's Republic of China under the unified leadership of the Central People's Government. It is established in accordance with the general line of the Common Programme of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, based on areas inhabited by national minorities. Adhering to the general principle and major premise, all national minorities who live in compact communities have the right to regional autonomy, to establish autonomous regions and organs, and to manage their own internal affairs according to the wishes of the great majority of their people and of the leaders in touch with the people. Regional autonomy means the right of national minorities to be their own masters.

For lack of an over-all and correct understanding of regional autonomy for nationalities, some cadres of Han nationality in certain areas used to entertain doubts and misgivings about the implementation of regional autonomy for nationalities. Some asked for instance: Why must we establish regional autonomy while national oppression has already been eliminated, and national equality put in its place? Since we believe in progress towards universal harmony, why should we now be worrying about regional autonomy for nationalities? Will its implementation not foster narrow nationalism? Will it not hinder the political, economic, and cultural development of the autonomous regions? These cadres did not understand that, just because we wanted to wipe out completely the enmity and misunderstandings among nationalities left over from a long history of national oppression and to safeguard the right to national equality, that regional autonomy for nationalities must be put into effect. It is just because we want all nationalities to go forward together into a future where all mankind shall live in peace, because we want to eliminate narrow nationalism, and because we want to hasten and enhance the political, economic and cultural development of areas inhabited by national minorities that we must establish regional autonomy for nationalities.

On the other hand, there are also some people among the national minorities themselves who grossly misunderstand the meaning of regional autonomy for nationalities. For instance, some tend to think that regional autonomy means independence and self-government without leadership by the people's government of a higher level. Some regard regional autonomy as mere autonomy without any democracy. Others believe that, with regional autonomy, they have nothing more to do with the Han people. Still others are afraid that, when regional autonomy is established, the Han cadres who have been helping them in their work wholeheartedly might leave them.

We have given explanations and carried out an educational campaign to dispel such doubts, misgivings and misunderstandings. This explanatory work should be continued in future.

(2) The Question of National Composition in Autonomous Regions.

Where should regional autonomy for nationalities? be practised? As stipulated in the Common Programme, it should be practised in all areas where national minorities are concentrated. However, since the areas in China where national minorities are concentrated are not very clearly demarcated, national composition in autonomous regions raises a complex and serious question. Its proper solution will facilitated the solution of the question of demarcation of autonomous regions and of the question regarding the regions' administrative status.

What principle should guide us in the question of national composition in autonomous regions? The Draft General Programme provides that this question be dealt with in accordance with existing relations among the various nationalities, with economic conditions and historical relations in areas where different nationalities are concentrated, and on the basis of national equality and the free will of the nationalities concerned. In the past, some areas emphasized national relations and neglected their economic conditions and historical relations; others emphasized historical relations and neglected relations among the nationalities and economic conditions; while economic conditions were generally neglected in all areas. This attitude is utterly incorrect.

If we consider national composition in accordance with the principles set out above, we shall have—and in fact we already have—three kinds of autonomous regions, namely: (1) autonomous regions established on -the basis of an area inhabited by one national minority; (2) autonomous regions established on the basis of an area inhabited by one large national minority, and including certain areas inhabited by other national minorities with respectively very small populations; (3) autonomous regions jointly established on the basis of two or more areas, each inhabited by a different national minority. This third type of autonomous government may be set up in areas where different nationalities live side by side. This is beneficial to mutual co-operation among them and, in the end, beneficial to the development of all the nationalities.

There is another important aspect to the question of national composition in autonomous regions, that is, the question of the Han inhabitants. According to our experiences in various areas, the Draft General Programme provides that those autonomous regions which adjoin areas inhabited by the Han people may, on the basis of economic and political requirements, include part of the Han areas, cities and towns. Under special conditions, such areas may include a considerable number of Han people. This practice is beneficial both to national solidarity and to the general development of the autonomous regions.

However, it must be brought about with the approval of the nationalities concerned through joint discussion. Much of this work needs great patience and should not be done in a summary fashion or through coercion.

(3) Autonomous Organs and Autonomous Rights in Autonomous Regions.

The autonomous organ in a national autonomous region is a local government, the administrative status of which corresponds to the level of the autonomous region. It should be established and organized according to the basic principles of democratic centralism and the system of people's congresses. As to the concrete form which the autonomous organ shall take, the wishes of the great majority of people in the autonomous region and of leading personalities touch with the people must be respected, so that will conform to the present stage of development of these national minorities and be easily understood and willingly accepted by them. The autonomous organ shall be mainly composed of people of the nationality exercising the right to regional autonomy but an appropriate number of persons of nationalities in the autonomous region must also be included.

The ten articles of the Draft General Programme concerning autonomous rights in a given autonomous region deal with the different aspects of its political, economic and cultural life. Those are the which an autonomous region should enjoy and the state should grant. They are in complete conformity with the aspirations of the people of the national autonomous regions and the interests common to our people throughout the country, these rights are correctly and fully exercised, the enthusiasm and initiative of the people in the autonomous regions will be fully developed, national solidarity will be strengthened and, consequently, the nationalities in such areas will have a wide scope for development. The people's governments of a higher level should, therefore, safeguard these autonomous rights and help realize them. In accordance with the principle of national equality, these autonomous rights should be equally enjoyed by all national autonomous regions, irrespective of size or administrative status. However, the scope for the exercise of autonomous rights in a given autonomous region should be commensurate with its administrative status.

(4) Relations Among Nationalities in the Autonomous Regions, and the Principle of Leadership of the People's Governments at Higher Levels.

National equality characterizes the one basic principle governing the articles of the Draft General Programme concerning relations among nationalities in autonomous regions. The exercise of autonomous rights in all national autonomous regions, the consolidation of autonomous organs, and the development of the autonomous regions are all dependent on friendly co-operation among the various nationalities, their continually rising political consciousness and organizational readiness. Consequently, these factors are also dependent on whether the autonomous organs of national autonomous regions can ensure the right to national equality for all, and whether they can inculcate in the people a sense of patriotism and internationalism.

The people's governments at higher levels should attach importance to their leadership over national autonomous regions, as it plays a decisive role in establishing and developing these regions. So far as the method of leadership is concerned, the people's governments at higher levels should properly gauge the characteristics and concrete conditions of the national minorities at the present stage of development, so that their directives and orders may conform to these and to the basic spirit of the Common Programme. The practice of applying summarily to one region the experiences and measures of others should be avoided and, where necessary, corrected.

These are in simple terms the important questions involved in the General Programme for the Implementation of Regional Autonomy for Nationalities.

In the past, China's national minorities were subjected to brutal discrimination. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, they, too, have stood up, emancipated. It is my belief that the adoption and promulgation of a document of such great historic significance as the General Programme for the Implementation of Regional Autonomy for Nationalities will herald an unlimited future, bright with the happiness for the people of the various nationalities. All national minorities throughout the country will rejoice over this event and express their ever-increasing gratitude to the Central People's Government and to Chairman Mao Tse-tung.

I await your instructions after you have examined and discussed my report.