

*Cahiers du*  
MONDE RUSSE

## **Cahiers du monde russe**

Russie - Empire russe - Union soviétique et États  
indépendants

**52/4 | 2011**  
**Varia**

---

# Andrej Minakov, Gubernatorskij korpus i central 'naja vlast'

John P. LeDonne

---



### **Electronic version**

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/monderusse/7593>

ISSN: 1777-5388

### **Publisher**

Éditions de l'EHESS

### **Printed version**

Date of publication: 20 December 2011

Number of pages: 702-704

ISBN: 978-2-7132-2353-2

ISSN: 1252-6576

### **Electronic reference**

John P. LeDonne, « Andrej Minakov, Gubernatorskij korpus i central'naja vlast' », *Cahiers du monde russe* [Online], 52/4 | 2011, Online since 03 December 2012, Connection on 01 May 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/monderusse/7593>

---

This text was automatically generated on 1 May 2019.

© École des hautes études en sciences sociales

---

# Andrej Minakov, Gubernatorskij korpus i central'naja vlast'

John P. LeDonne

---

## REFERENCES

Andrej MINAKOV, **Gubernatorskij korpus i central'naja vlast' . Problema vzaimootnoshenij** [Provincial governors and the central government: the problem of mutual relationships]. Orel : Orlyk, 2011, 487 p.

- 1 There are at least two ways of writing a book on Russian administration: a descriptive narrative or a conceptual analysis. Minakov has chosen to write a description of the provincial governors' careers and of their reports to the emperor. The book has all the hallmarks of a doctoral dissertation with a wealth of details based on archival research, and the references will be of great interest to other scholars wishing to conceptualize the office of governor. It will be read with profit together with Alsu Biktasheva's *Kazanskie gubernatory* (2008), Richard Robbins's *The Tsar's Viceroys* (1987), and the memoirs of Prince Sergej Urusov, the governor of Bessarabia in 1903-1904 (1908).
- 2 The book is divided into two parts. The first traces the formation of the "gubernatorial corps," the origin of the governors, their status in the hierarchy, their transfers from one province to another, their dismissals. This last section is the most interesting because it gives the reader a hint of the bureaucratic politics in which the governors were inevitably caught. There will be much to be done by mining the sources given by the author to recreate the political context in which the Russian administration operated at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. The second, of about the same length, examines the reports (*otchet*) submitted regularly beginning in 1838 by each governor to the emperor, and a few annexes show the table of contents of those reports.
- 3 The reader seeking no more than a descriptive narrative will find in Minakov's book an excellent introduction to the position and activities of a Russian governor, but even he will fret at the author's refusal (or inability?) to raise some interesting questions. Half of

the second part is devoted to relationships between the governor, the vice-governor, the zemstvo, and to the so-called “mandatory ordinances,” which the governor was allowed to promulgate from the 1880s on. One wonders why he did not include a section on the relationship between a governor and a governor general. This was an important topic, because it had an important bearing on the concept and practice of regionalism in Russian history, even though governors general no longer existed in Russia proper by the end of the nineteenth century. But the issue was still very much alive in the borderlands.

- 4 What purpose did these reports serve? They informed the emperor about the political and economic conditions in the provinces, but what else? Judging from his comments, penned in the margins, he expressed his satisfaction about a statement made by the governor or expressed an opinion that such and such matter should be discussed by his ministers? Did this have any results? In these comments the emperor appears more as the inspector general of the imperial government than as its administrator-in-chief. This issue—that ministers governed the empire and the emperor exercised only a supervisory function—first came into being during the reign of Alexander I, then developed into one of the most important issues of Russian government during the imperial period.
- 5 Another important issue, of which Minakov faintly seems to be aware, was the “problem of mutual relationships” which he inserted into his title, revolved around the absence of a structural similarity between the central and the provincial government. For the governor to be a truly territorial agent, with a jurisdiction encompassing all sectors of administration, he had to be the territorial agent of a truly unified government. In its absence, he would become the provincial agent of a single ministry (MVD), while other ministries kept direct links with their provincial agencies. If one wanted a strong governor, there had to be a central government unified under a strong prime minister capable of integrating the fractious ambitions of several individual ministries. A truly territorial government existed only during the reign of Catherine II, after the closing of the colleges and the emergence of the procurator general as a true prime minister, as well as later, in Poland and the Caucasus, with the appointment of the viceroys (*namestniki*). This also tells us something about the inability of the emperor to create such a government, to become the administrator-in-chief of his empire. Some high officials were aware of this necessary concordance between the central and provincial government—only to oppose it. Minakov cites the minister of state domains, Aleksandr Zelenoi, as saying that to give the governor the authority to issue mandatory ordinances would indeed unify the provincial administration but would destroy that of the empire (which was a fiction). In the end, governors were empowered to issue such ordinances, but mainly in the field of public security, the domain of their institutional superior, the interior ministry.
- 6 Perhaps one should not fault Minakov for not raising these questions since his purpose was to give the reader a descriptive narrative, and this he did very well. His book will serve as a handy reference work for those interested in the gubernatorial institution toward the end of the imperial regime. Nevertheless, one must bemoan the fact that he chose not to delve deeper into the contradictions which sapped the strength of Russia's government.