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**Recruitment in Provincial Towns.
Social Relations and the Evolution of Political
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Recruitment in Provincial Towns. Social Relations and the Evolution of Political Culture during the Napoleonic Wars

By the 1800s, social relationships and political culture in provincial Russian towns were close to those of the peasantry. The meshchane – the commune of lower- and middle-income families – nominated recruits to the military, a practice inherited from the rural commune. The nomination, dominated by commune leaders and rich families, helped to maintain traditional social and political order. This is a study of three towns in the province of St. Petersburg during the regular military levies of the 1790s–1810s, but especially during the first nationwide mobilizations in Russia – the militia levies of 1806–7 and 1812. During the first militia levy, traditional nomination proved insufficient for the purposes of mass war. Far more recruits were required: bias, conflict, and violence increased. Commune elders used nominations to cleanse the town of undesirables. In response, new legislation in 1808–10 improved the position of single men, the poor, small families, and newcomers. This reduced conflict and delay during the recruit levies. The positive changes were especially visible during the 1812 militia levy. In the longer term, the revision of nomination had an important regulatory and modernizing effect.

1. Introduction

The period from the end of the eighteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century was an important period of transition from the early modern era to the modern age. Reinhart Koselleck has called it *Sattelzeit*.¹ These decades are known for rapid economic changes as well as radical social, political, and institutional transformations.² It was also the first period of mass wars, marked by militarization, mobilization, and growing permeation of the state into the economic, social, political, and cultural life of the society – the expansion of the

¹ Elisabeth Décultot/Daniel Fulda (eds.), *Sattelzeit. Historiographiegeschichtliche Revisionen*, Berlin 2016, p. 2–3.

² Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution. Europe, 1789–1848*, London 1962; Charles Tilly, *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, Princeton 1975; Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States AD 990–1990*, Oxford 1990; Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power. Vol. 2: The Rise of Classes and Nation-States, 1760–1914*, Cambridge 1993.

fiscal-military and police state.³ This contribution opens up new avenues for research on the effect of the Napoleonic Wars on European towns and its people. The requests by the state for recruits increased exponentially: The impact of these growing demands on the evolution of social and political life in provincial towns is an important topic of research.

This article examines the case of provincial towns in the Russian northwest. I analyse and compare how recruits were nominated by communes in three district capitals of St. Petersburg province during regular military levies, which took place every autumn, and militia levies – two special mobilization levies in 1806-7 and 1812. The study is based on local sources derived from the archives of provincial town councils.⁴ It examines the everyday life of communes and families and shows how during the Napoleonic Wars the process of nomination, and the actions and concerns behind it changed. The article argues that increased requests for recruits – especially during the first militia levy – led to a crisis of traditional communal nomination, inherited from rural political culture. This forced the government to revise the system of nomination between 1807 and 1812. The new system not only helped to improve the supply of manpower. It contributed to the replacement of traditional practices and political culture with new norms and regulations, which had a profound effect on social relationships and political life in urban communes. The case of Russia shows how the increased requirements of the Napoleonic Wars could have a modernizing and regulatory effect on provincial towns.

2. Provincial urban communes. The three towns of the northwest and the military levies in the 1800s-1810s

Russian towns and their residents have always been seen as different from their counterparts in Western or Central Europe. Most of them were small and remained underdeveloped in economic terms. Many district capitals performed administrative functions, with most residents – the common people – employed in agriculture, small trade, and crafts. Politically, towns depended on provincial authorities. In 1785, urban reform reshaped the social and political organisation of Russian towns, awarding them limited self-government: The families who qualified elected the town council, presided over by the town head. The council received the Emperor's manifestos, provincial governors' or-

³ John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power. War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783*, London 1989; Mark Raeff, *The Well-Ordered Police State. Social and Institutional Change through Law in the Germanies and Russia, 1600-1800*, New Haven 1983.

⁴ Most sources are from TSGIA SPb (Central State Historical Archive of St. Petersburg) and RGIA (Russian State Historical Archive, St. Petersburg).

ders, called commune meetings, and sent reports. Six legal categories, or estates, of town residents were constituted, each with its own commune. But in most provincial towns, common people belonged only to two estates: either to the merchants, the upper class, or to the *meshchane*, which included families of lower and middle income, who did not declare the minimum capital required for registration as merchants. Both estates had their communes, selected elders, and collectors of taxes. Most families belonged to the *meshchane* commune, they were employed in small trades, crafts, and in the tertiary sector, where they worked as clerks, coachmen, builders, and day labourers. Boris Mironov argues that the political culture of the *meshchane* in the 1800s was still close to that of the peasant commune.⁵ The *meshchane*, as well as the peasant communes, collected a poll tax from the male members of each household – for which the entire commune was responsible. During regular recruit levies, announced almost every autumn, the commune was responsible for the nomination of men, who were required to serve for a term of 25 years.

St. Petersburg province belonged to the Russian northwest: Towns here have been at the forefront of urban development⁶, but have been less extensively studied than towns around Moscow or along the Volga.⁷ At the centre of this study are three district capitals of differing size and economic background. Novaia Ladoga was located on the Ladoga canal, an important link connecting the Volga to the Neva, St. Petersburg, and the Baltic Sea. About 900 *meshchane* men, and a smaller commune of merchants, were registered here in 1806-12.⁸ They were buying and selling timber, Russian and German textiles, oats, leather, hemp, candles, and provisions. Some owned small vessels and transported goods and passengers along the canal.⁹ Gdov was a smaller centre on the way from Pskov to Narva, dealing mostly in the sale of provisions from the district. In 1806 there were 139 *meshchane*¹⁰, and about 200 in 1812.¹¹ Sofia, from 1808 on known as Tsarskoe Selo, was a commune of craftsmen, largely serving the Tsars' residence. There were 768 *meshchane* here in 1806; in 1812 only

⁵ Boris Mironov, *Sotsial'naia istoriia Rossii perioda imperii (XVIII — nachalo XX v.)*, Vol. 1, St. Petersburg 2003, p. 496-499.

⁶ J. Michael Hittle, *The Service City. State and Townsmen in Russia, 1600-1800*, Cambridge, MA 1979, p. 26.

⁷ Catherine Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province. Economy, Society, and Civilization in Nineteenth-Century Nizhnii Novgorod*, Pittsburgh 2011.

⁸ On the Novaia Ladoga militia, 1812, in: TSGIA SPb, f. 685, op. 1, d. 500, ll. 108-132.

⁹ Topographical description of St. Petersburg province, ca. 1782, in: RGVA (Russian State Military-Historical Archive, Moscow), f. 846, op. 16, d. 18999, l. 98v.

¹⁰ On the Gdov militia, 1806-7, in: TSGIA SPb, f. 885, op. 1, d. 215, ll. 2, 24.

¹¹ On the Gdov militia, 1812, in: TSGIA SPb, f. 885, op. 1, d. 345, l. 16.

550 – or 883 with Gatchina and Pavlovsk, whose communities were annexed to Tsarskoe Selo in 1811.¹²

Russia's military engagements intensified dramatically from 1805 onwards when a decade-long period of hostilities with Napoleonic France, the Ottoman Empire, Sweden, and Persia began. Besides increased regular levies, requesting more men from the communes, special militias were mobilised in 1806-7 and 1812.¹³ Previous studies¹⁴ have largely been devoted to the contributions of nobles, clergy, and merchants from towns. Most prominently, Janet Hartley has focused on supplies of men and money from towns for the 1812 militia¹⁵, in order to explore to what extent militia service and donations were genuinely voluntary, correcting the opinion of Vasilii Babkin, who had emphasised the massive voluntary involvement of all classes in the war of 1812.¹⁶ The ways in which the communes nominated recruits during regular and militia levies are analysed in detail in the following sections. This will allow us to see how increased requests for recruits led to a crisis of traditional communal nomination, how the problems were solved by the government, and what effect it had on social and political life in *meshchane* communes.

3. The traditional system of nomination by commune

According to the established system, the town council, upon receiving a manifesto for a new levy in the autumn, scheduled a meeting of the *meshchane* commune. The commune would be swift to nominate men, but the problem proved to be getting hold of them and preventing them from fleeing. The three councils recorded a massive evasion during levies. Men could be appointed as recruits in various years, but never actually sent. Many under the age of 35 would go into hiding – the conscription usually being confined to men aged 17-35. The councils' files show that delays, conflicts, and evasion were caused by two problems: First by accusations of dissolute behaviour, and second by

¹² On the Sofia militia, 1806-7, in: RGIA, f. 488, op. 1, d. 907, l. 21; on the Tsarskoe Selo militia, 1812, in: RGIA, f. 488, op. 1, d. 1060, ll. 84, 121A.

¹³ Irina Lapina, *Zemskoe opolchenie Rossii 1812–1814 gg. Issledovanie prichin vozniknoveniia gubernskikh voinskikh formirovaniia i analiz osnovnykh etapov ikh uchastiia v voine s Napoleonom*, Diss. phil., St. Petersburg 2008.

¹⁴ Aleksei Dzhivelegov/Sergei Mel'gunov/Vladimir Pichet (eds.), *Otechestvennaia voina i russkoe obshchestvo, 1812–1912*, Vol. 5, Moscow 1912, p. 43-73, and p. 114-120.

¹⁵ Janet Hartley, *Patriotism in the Provinces in 1812. Volunteers and Donations*, in: Janet Hartley/Pail Keenan/Dominic Lieven (eds.), *Russia and the Napoleonic Wars. War, Culture and Society, 1750–1850*, London 2015, p. 148-162.

¹⁶ Vasilii Babkin, *Narodnoe opolchenie v Otechestvennoi voine 1812 goda*, Moscow 1962, p. 37.

poorly regulated selection among families required to contribute, leading to conflicts between large and small and rich and poor households.

In theory, the largest families ought to have provided the most nominees. But in a world of mutual responsibility, those not making a stable financial contribution to the commune were often deemed the most expendable: The *meshchane* were keen to get rid of such undesirables before requiring stable families to contribute men. The main way to dispose of undesirables was by accusing them of dissolute behaviour. Communes had been able to nominate those who could not be tolerated in the commune for their vices, without regard to family status. To find these people, they asked whether the individual was married or not, whether he had children or elderly parents, or whether a family had contributed recruits in previous years. Individual charges were specified in the verdict signed by attendees of the commune meeting. The most frequent accusation was non-payment of state and city taxes, but undesirables might also be drunkards, brawlers, men of lewd behaviour, or absentees (people who spent months out of town without a passport). Some, particularly among the young, could be “riotous”, such as Ivan Vavilov from Novaia Ladoga, whose mother had many times requested that her unruly son be conscripted. When drunk, she alleged, he “beat his mother and sister half to death”.¹⁷ Nominated in several years, he was only sent to the militia in 1812.¹⁸ The traditional system favoured rich, influential, and large families. Some accusations were made up. Janet Hartley argues that communal nomination fossilised patriarchal relationships, fortifying the authority of the commune and household heads.¹⁹

It seems that *meshchane* were even more prone than peasants to utilise the nomination process for cleansing purposes. There were objective reasons for this, such as intensified migration to towns along with the growing inequality and pauperization that resulted from it. Marginalised people inevitably gravitated to towns. Newcomers were often former deserters or runaway serfs returning under amnesties from Sweden or Prussia. Beginning in 1787, the authorities also dispatched so-called “labourers” to provincial towns – *meshchane* from St. Petersburg and Moscow punished for minor crimes, who from 1799 on were assigned to provincial *meshchane* communes.²⁰ Such men were not welcomed, and urban communes had “the freedom to choose and the right to re-

¹⁷ On the 1810 recruit levy in Novaia Ladoga, 1810, in: TSGIA SPb, f. 685, op. 1, d. 428, ll. 9–10v, 14ov.

¹⁸ On the Novaia Ladoga Militia, 1812, in: TSGIA SPb, f. 685, op. 1, d. 500, ll. 8v, 12, 190.

¹⁹ Janet Hartley, *Russia, 1762–1825. Military Power, the State, and the People*, Westport 2008, p. 47.

²⁰ Pavel Ryndziunskii, *Gorodskoe grazhdanstvo doreformennoi Rossii*, Moscow 1958, p. 50.

fuse”;²¹ they were allowed to limit the entry of new men into their commune. But at the turn of the century, for fiscal purposes, decrees began to require that all men of no fixed abode be registered with communes, threatening defaulters with being sent to the army or to Siberia for settlement. To help integrate newcomers, in 1804 nominating them as recruits – even if dissolute – was prohibited for several years.²² But *meshchane* still seemed inclined to discriminate against the families of recent newcomers. For instance, in north-western towns there were a lot of newcomers from among Romani families.²³ In Gdov, in a list of ten men appointed to the militia in 1812, at least two were Romani: they and their father fled and were chased across several districts in the St. Petersburg and Novgorod provinces.²⁴

From the 1780s to the early 1800s, the communes of all towns reviewed nominated almost exclusively undesirables, and a great proportion of these were designated as dissolute.²⁵ Moreover, it was the usual practice to send such men as recruits throughout the year. The communes held and accumulated receipts of acceptance for these men. These receipts would then be presented and counted whenever a new levy was announced in the autumn, serving to reduce the number of “live” men who had to be sent, especially during demanding wartime levies.

The use of service nomination as a means to cleanse the town had its implications. It seems that recruits from towns were not young, on average close to thirty in the 1790s–1800s. Also, there were a lot of complaints about their low moral quality. Adjutant General F. K. Korf wrote that the number of pilferers and “known rogues” among men sent by *meshchane* was too high. He proposed to send good recruits to local units, and dissolutes to the standing army, farther from home.²⁶

The authorities were well aware of the drawbacks of commune nomination but were reluctant to make changes. Age was a concern, but not crucial: in 1812, even 40-year-old recruits were accepted.²⁷ Furthermore, nominating a large proportion of dissolutes, newcomers, and the poor minimised the state’s

²¹ Alison Smith, *For the Common Good and Their Own Well-Being. Social Estates in Imperial Russia*, Oxford 2014, p. 72–73.

²² PSZ-1 (Complete Code of Laws of the Russian Empire, Sam. 1., St. Petersburg 1830), Vol. 28, No. 21442.

²³ Smith, p. 89.

²⁴ Minutes of the Gdov town council, 1812, in: TSGIA SPb, f. 881, op. 1, d. 344, ll. 4–5, 6; Verdicts of the Gdov townsmen commune, 1812, in: TSGIA SPb, f. 881, op. 1, d. 345, l. 17.

²⁵ TSGIA SPb, f. 685, op. 1, d. 28, 49, 50, 98, 188, 230; RGIA, f. 488, op. 1, d. 6, 138, 458, 681, 835, 3286.

²⁶ F. K. Korf’s proposal, 5(17).01.1823, in: RGIA, f. 846, op. 16, d. 17980, ll. 1–2.

²⁷ Liubomir Beskrovnyi, *Russkaia Armiia i Flot v XIX v.*, Moscow 1973, p. 73.

expenditure on urban police. The most important factor was to have an uninterrupted supply: as long as the traditional system provided enough men, the magistrates and wealthy families in *meshchane* communes were left free to exercise their powers.

4. The growth of demand for recruits. The militia levies of 1806-7 and 1812

From 1805 onwards, far more men were requested from the communes: The first militia levy in 1806-7 came as a particularly dramatic challenge. Before 1806, Russia had relied solely on its large professional army.²⁸ But during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, many countries were already experimenting with universal conscription and irregular or auxiliary forces. In November 1806, when a French invasion of Russia seemed inevitable²⁹, the idea of raising a militia was proposed by emperor Alexander I.³⁰ The manifesto of 30 November stressed that Austria and Prussia had been overcome so quickly because they had failed to create an army of reserves.³¹ Russia had a patriotic tradition to fall back on: In the early seventeenth century, it was a people's militia organised by the Volga towns that had ended a turbulent period of wars and occupations and had established the Romanov dynasty. There were recent examples of mass mobilization to look to: the *levée en masse* in France in 1793-4, or the anti-invasion mobilization of British militia in 1803-5.³²

In his manifesto, the Tsar appealed to the bravery and patriotism of the Russian estates, encouraging each to do its bit.³³ Both militias of 1806-7 and 1812 were advertised as a supportive second line: Men were to serve for the period of hostilities only. Militiamen saw little combat. Most were employed in siege work, patrolling, and escorting POWs.³⁴ They were permitted to go unshaven and to wear casual uniforms. Shaved heads and green greatcoats were associated with those conscripted to full-time army service.³⁵ Even so, the burden of service in the militia fell heavily on the communes of peasants and *meshchane*.

The manifestos in 1806 and 1812 made clear that it was the responsibility of communes to nominate, equip, and send militiamen, with town councils re-

²⁸ Hartley, Russia, p. 25-26.

²⁹ Dominic Lieven, Russia against Napoleon. The Battle for Europe, 1807 to 1814, London 2009, p. 266-268.

³⁰ Sergei Gulevich, Istorii Leib-gvardii Finliandskogo polka, 1806-1906 gg., Vol. 1, St. Petersburg 1906, p. 3.

³¹ PSZ-1, Vol. 29, Nr. 22374.

³² Hartley, Patriotism, p. 149.

³³ Lieven, p. 252.

³⁴ Gulevich, p. 19-25.

³⁵ PSZ-1, Vol. 29, No. 22374, 22385.

ceiving concrete orders in December 1806: 1 out of 16 men was to be dispatched from the province. At the expense of communes, they were to be clothed, supplied with provisions and salary for three months (3 roubles, rising to 6 for the 1812 militia), and armed with rifles or pikes.³⁶ The age was set at 17/20-45, but fit men in their fifties were also accepted. The first militia was slow to organise: It took four months to form the first battalions.³⁷ As the danger of an invasion had already passed, in March 1807 the ratio was lowered to 1 out of 57 men.³⁸

Meshchane were right to see service in the militia as a burden: In September 1807, all militiamen were transferred to the regular army, for a 25-year period.³⁹ This caused unrest, and the administration tried to regain lost trust. The 1812 manifesto on the militia announced that the transfer would not be repeated.⁴⁰ In 1812, 1 out of 10 men were required.⁴¹ The new militia was disbanded in 1814⁴², but the losses were significant. In the towns reviewed, about 40 % died, were left in hospitals, deserted et cetera (see table 1).

Table 1: Men from *meshchane* communes mobilised for militias: 1806-7, 1812.⁴³

First militia, 1806-7	Novaia Ladoga	Sofia*	Gdov
<i>Meshchane</i> commune in 1806 (men)	741	768	139
Requested in 1806 (1 in 16 men)	46	48	9
Revised in March 1807 (1 in 57 men)	13	13	2
Sent in 1807 (% of commune men)	13 (1,75 %)	24 (3,1 %)	2 (1,4 %)

³⁶ PSZ-1, Vol. 29, Nr. 22385.

³⁷ Gulevich, p. 24-35.

³⁸ PSZ-1, Vol. 29, No. 22496.

³⁹ Beskrovnyi, p. 72-73.

⁴⁰ PSZ-1, Vol. 32, No. 25188.

⁴¹ On the Novaia Ladoga Militia, 1812, in: TSGIA SPb, f. 685, op. 1, f. 500, ll. 18, 54.

⁴² PSZ-1, vol. 32, No. 22523, 22524.

⁴³ Men returned to St. Petersburg province towns, 1814, in: RGVIA, f. 395, op. 240, d. 17, l. 26.

Second militia, 1812	Novaia Ladoga	Sofia*	Gdov
<i>Meshchane</i> commune in 1812 (men)	898	883	200
Requested by end of July (1 in 10 men)	90	83	20
Sent by October 1812 (% of commune men)	45 (5 %)	83 (10 %)	20 (10 %)

* For 1806-7 figures are for Sofia; for 1812 – jointly for Tsarskoe Selo (543 *meshchane*), Gatchina (268), and Pavlovsk (72)

5. The crisis of commune nomination during the 1806-7 militia levy

It was during the 1806-7 enrolment that the first acute crisis with the supply of manpower occurred in the towns. The problems had already begun in 1805, as the demand for recruits increased exponentially due to Russia's involvement in the War of the Third Coalition. Men sought to evade military service in growing numbers. In Novaia Ladoga, when registering on the taxation lists for 1806, 82 *meshchane* moved up to the merchant rank, since merchants were exempted from the levy. The *meshchane* commune contracted 741 instead of 814 men, and that of merchants jumped from 294 to 369.⁴⁴ However, when the first militia call-up was announced on 30.11.1806, the authorities required far more men (see table 1) than had been supplied during the regular levies in previous years. By contrast, from the late 1780s to the early 1800s, communes of up to 1000 males, such as Novaia Ladoga or Sofia, provided no more than 6-7 recruits a year, even during wartime.

During the first militia levy, the supply of dissolutes, singles, and newcomers could not provide enough men, and communes had to make difficult decisions as to which families should contribute. In all towns, this led to delay, evasion, and conflict. Wealthy and large households were usually the most reluctant to provide recruits for the militia. The commune elites attempted to place most of the burden on the poor and less fortunate families. By February 1807, the nomination of single men and those from small families to the militia was prohibited, as was the detention of nominees in fetters. This was considered to be contrary to the spirit of the militia⁴⁵ (during regular levies, nom-

⁴⁴ On the recruit levy of 1806, Novaia Ladoga, in: TSGIA SPb, f. 685, op. 1, d. 230, ll. 22, 106.

⁴⁵ On the Serpukhov militia, 1806-7, in: TsGA g. Moskv (Central State Archive of Moscow), f. 1036, op. 1, d. 107, ll. 87, 90, 98.

inees would often be kept under close guard). Not all men sought to avoid military service deliberately. Many lived in cities – Moscow, St. Petersburg, or port cities such as Kronstadt – employed as coachmen, carpenters, builders et cetera. The labour migration of the townspeople in Russia in this period was lower than in Western and Central Europe, but may be underestimated. Lastly, the lack of means to enforce the verdicts of the communes, especially in critical times, was an acute problem of the Russian provincial town. There would be no more than a handful of investigators, employed by the commune, and several policemen under the chief of police paid from the council (town) budget.

As a result, during the 1806-7 militia call-up, a high degree of violence was reported in all towns. When those in hiding were found, it could even lead to bloodshed. The failings of the first militia in 1806-7 drew the government's attention to a range of problems – notably that the communal system of supplying men had reached its limits. Procrastination, evasion, and conflict led to supplies of militiamen being delayed.

6. New legislation on nomination 1808-1810 and changes in recruitment

In response, between 1807 and 1812 the government introduced important legal improvements to the system of nomination. First, in April 1808 new legislation appeared with regard to dissolutes, lending the process a quasi-judicial aspect. Many, so the preamble stated, had been abused by commune elders, “who during the last militia levy bypassed the rich and large families, and turned all the burden of duty on to poor single men, releasing from the militia only those who were able to satisfy their greed”.⁴⁶ New rules were introduced for state peasants (free peasants), and in 1809 they were also applied to *meshchane*.⁴⁷ Verdicts had to be signed in the town council building in the presence of the town head. At least 24 men were required to sign the verdict and swear under oath that any man accused “left no hope for improvement”. Headmen, tax collectors, and other commune elders were excluded from signing, so that “they could not use the power assigned to them for evil, and, favouring the rich, controvert the regulations by issuing verdicts which selected recruits by imputing to them various vices of which they were not guilty”.⁴⁸ Verdicts were approved by the town head, and sent to the governor within three days for ratification.

The poorly regulated selection from families changed with the recruitment manual of 1810, which implemented a system of recruit family groups. Families

⁴⁶ PSZ-1, Vol. 30, No. 22982.

⁴⁷ PSZ-1, Vol. 30, No. 23872.

⁴⁸ PSZ-1, Vol. 30, No. 22982.

were now arranged in groups depending on the number of labourers they contained. For example, in the first group there could be families with 9 labourers, in the second those with 8 – and in the last one, households with 1-2 men. During the levy, the largest families from the first group would be the first to provide men; and of these, the first to contribute were those families who had not done so in the recent past.⁴⁹ If a levy was large, families from the second group contributed their set of recruits, and so on. This spread the obligation, providing less opportunity for large families to evade.

These new measures helped lessen the number of disputes, delays, and appeals. Already during the regular levies of 1811-12, the process of nominating went faster. The new militia levy in 1812 caused significantly fewer problems and delays in towns, although more men were required than in 1806-7 (see table 1). The first parties of militiamen left the towns within two weeks after the manifesto of 6 July 1812 was received, and later contingents left every 7 to 10 days.⁵⁰ Of course, during the Patriotic War of 1812 there were more incentives for many men to join the militia voluntarily than there were in 1806-7 during the War of the Fourth Coalition.⁵¹ But evasion and absenteeism were still a problem. In Tsarskoe Selo, the commune suggested not renewing passports if any absentee showed up in the town – only such a measure could ensure that men remained available when needed.⁵² Tsarskoe Selo and Gdov eventually provided the required 1 out of 10 men. But rich Novaia Ladoga, the second town in the province after St. Petersburg, stopped at 1 out of 20. Moreover, the council rejected the governor's requests several times, insisting that if 1 out of 10 were sent, there would remain almost no men to pay taxes, only the elderly and children. It has often been argued that Russian towns – unlike their counterparts in Western and Central Europe – were powerless. In fact, the degree of their independence from the authorities may have been underestimated.

The legal improvements did not eliminate violations, but now there were fewer opportunities for them. For instance, the Novaia Ladoga commune appointed three men to the 1812 militia who had been held in the town prison for burglary and theft. This fact outraged the governor, who had ordered the appointment only of men who were of decent behaviour and who were present in the town.⁵³ In smaller towns violations were more frequent as Leontii Belokhvastov's account of a "commune meeting" in Pavlovsk reveals. On his way

⁴⁹ Lists of recruit groups in the towns of Moscow province, 1814, in: TsGA g. Moskvyy, f. 17, op. 1, d. 585.

⁵⁰ Beskrovnyi, p. 73.

⁵¹ Lieven, p. 259-265.

⁵² On the Tsarskoe Selo militia, 1812, in: RGIA, f. 488, op. 1, d. 1060, ll. 92, 94.

⁵³ On the Novaia Ladoga militia, 1812, in: TSGIA SPb, f. 685, op. 1, d. 500, l. 101.

home, he was hailed by the town head of Pavlovsk, the merchant Timofei Builov, who invited him to the tavern. A company of men sat “all drunk, but Builov sober”. Many of them had been fined for misdeeds and were thus not supposed to take part in town business. But they set about drafting lists of militiamen and soon demanded from Leontii 30 roubles, threatening to nominate him. Builov did not allow him to leave to fetch the money and already began demanding a written promise from Leontii to go for a soldier. Leontii had a wife, a 5-year-old son, three daughters, an elderly mother, “always paid taxes on time and had no fines” – whilst there were unmarried men from families with 2 and 3 unmarried males. He escaped only with difficulty.⁵⁴ Builov’s administration was a regular source of complaint, but he was not removed until after 1812. The arbitrariness of such individuals was inevitable in small towns. Self-government had only been introduced to Russian towns in the 1780s and legal awareness was still in its infancy.

The long-term social and political implications of legal adjustments to nomination were important. New procedures improved the power of individuals to resort to the law to defend themselves. The number of appeals to governors grew. Now governors overturned all verdicts that discriminated against small families, demanding that the commune select from large families. It became too difficult to send men from small families, the poor, newcomers, or “dissolutes” into the army.

The process of nomination begins to look increasingly well-regulated in the first decade after the end of campaigning in 1814. The book of receipts for recruits from Tsarskoe Selo in 1817-41 shows that by the 1820s nomination for dissolute behaviour had disappeared. In the early 1820s, urban communes also stopped buying receipts, for instance from nobles for non-returned militiamen, to be counted during the next levy – a normal practice in the previous decades, especially in the countryside. The age of recruits decreased: closer to 30 on average in the 1800s, and from the 1820s onward recruitment was restricted largely to 18 to 26-year-olds.⁵⁵ The entire process became far more regimented: One family supplied one of their youngsters, during the next levy another one, and so on. The rich, of course, still had more options – hiring substitutes or buying a waiver (500-2000 roubles). Thus, the bulk of recruits still came from low- to middle-income families.

Legal improvements could also have demographic implications. Discussion continues as to whether recruitment by commune played a role in preserving the large families of peasants in Russia or vice versa.⁵⁶ But in towns, increased

⁵⁴ Belokhvastov’s case, 1812, in: RGIA, f. 1060, op. 1, d. 1057, ll. 2-15.

⁵⁵ Tickets for Tsarskoe Selo recruits, 1817-1841, in: RGIA, f. 488, op. 1, d. 1152.

⁵⁶ Hartley, Russia, p. 33-38.

conscription could foster the division of big families. In view of the improved position of small families, the desire to evade military service was an important incentive to split.

7. Conclusion

The impact of the Napoleonic Wars on European society can be studied from different angles. The role of the increased demands of the state during the 1800s and 1810s in the social and political evolution of urban communities in various parts of Europe is an important field of exploration. This article has examined the role of mobilizations during the Napoleonic Wars in the evolution of social traditions, practices, and political culture of ordinary people in Russian provincial towns.

Alexander Martin argued that the war with Napoleon in 1812 irrevocably changed Russian urban communes.⁵⁷ In fact, their largest contribution to the war effort, by way of supply of recruits and militiamen, increased exponentially between 1805 and 1813.⁵⁸ The two militia levies were especially burdensome. The mobilization of manpower resources during the Napoleonic Wars led to crises in supplies of recruits, and to legal revision of the nomination by commune. The changes secured uninterrupted supply, but more importantly transformed the social and political milieu of the Russian provincial town. New norms had a modernising, pacifying effect. The rural political culture of old was giving way to norms which would shape towns to the present day.

⁵⁷ Alexander Martin, *The 1812 War and the Civilizing Process in Russia*, in: Janet Hartley/Pail Keenan/Dominic Lieven (eds.), *Russia and the Napoleonic Wars. War, Culture and Society, 1750–1850*, London 2015, p. 228–242.

⁵⁸ Lieven, p. 252.