The Succession Crisis of 1730

Introduction

By the decree of 5 February 1722 (PSZ, No. 3895), Peter the Great abolished the customary law of succession and provided that every ruling monarch was to appoint his own successor. But neither Peter the Great himself nor his immediate successors ever had a chance of exercising their new right. As a result, the death of each ruler provoked a succession crisis which was settled by the intervention of outside forces and pressures—court favorites, regiments of the Guards, intrigues of foreign diplomats.

When the adolescent Peter II died suddenly on January 19, 1730, having failed to appoint a successor, the contest for the vacant throne was opened again. At the instigation of the capable Prince Dmitri Mikhailovich Golitsyn, the members of the Supreme Privy Council (which had held most of the powers of government ever since the disgrace and exile of Prince A. D. Menshikov in 1727) offered the crown to the niece of Peter the Great, Duchess Anne of Courland (Anna Ioannovna). Prince Golitsyn, however, felt that this was also an opportunity for restricting the autocratic power of the
they deal mainly with specific concrete demands for relief of hardships created by the patterns of servitude, inheritance, and justice stemming from Peter the Great's reforms. The main object of attack, however, was the role played by the members of the Supreme Privy Council. It was feared that Russia would fall prey to a narrow oligarchy, that the unity of its sovereignty would be undermined, and that the country would gradually decline to the condition of Poland. Naturally, the general officers, as well as the rank-and-file noblemen, were not so much concerned with Russia's hypothetical future development as worried about the excessive advantages which would accrue to the Supreme Privy Council.

Remembering the rule of court cliques in the seventeenth century and recalling the times when Russian sovereignty had been split up among several princely families, the rank-and-file noblemen came out against the "conditions." Assistance was informed of their sentiments, which were confirmed by the petition Prince Cherkeskii submitted to her. Upon arriving in Moscow she contrived to confront the Supreme Privy Council with the mass of the nobility and have her acceptance of the "conditions" shouted down. She then "designed to tear up the 'conditions';" and, following suit to the petition submitted by Prince Trubetskoi, she assumed complete autocratic power. She did not fail to make full use of her unlimited prerogatives, and the ten years of her reign may be considered among the most tyrannical and arbitrary of the eighteenth century.

This summary of events should provide the background for the projects reproduced below. We have three distinct orientations: the Supreme Privy Council, whose aims are expressed in the "conditions"; the ideas of the group of general officers, represented by Matushkin's project; and to some extent by Grekov's paper; and the opinions of the rank-and-file noblemen, illustrated by the "outline" and the petitions of Cherkeskii and Trubetskoi. In the final analysis, as shown by the sequence of these projects, the majority of the nobility preferred the re-establishment of full autocratic rule to any kind of "constitutional" or limiting settlement. The old Muscovite traditions, as well as the new pattern of service introduced by Peter the Great, made the nobility completely dependent on the autocracy whose creation they were, so that nothing was expected outside the good graces of the autocratic

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1 It has been thought—on the fragmentary evidence of reports by foreign diplomats—that Prince Golitsyn conceived of the "conditions" as the first step to the introduction of a genuine constitutional system in Russia. The constitution would have been modeled on the Swedish pattern, giving the major role to the upper ranges of the nobility, while also safeguarding the basic interests of the rank-and-file noblemen and townsmen and imposing the lot of the peasantry. But the very existence of such a far-reaching scheme is to be doubted, as W. Recke argued in his frequently neglected study, "Die Verlassungspolitik der russischen Oligarchen im Jahr 1735 und die Thronerhebung der Kaisertochter Anna Ivanovna," Zeitschrift für Geschichte Osteuropas. II (1911), pp. 11-64, 161-205. Recke's arguments convinced such an outstanding scholar of the eighteenth century as A. Kreiswetter ("Dworzanskie polityczne proekty," Nowoczesna Studia Historyczne. Narodowe Uniwersytetu w Pradze, I (1989), pp. 77-88), and we follow his interpretation in the present anthology by omitting the alleged constitutional project of Golitsyn. On the basis of a careful review of hitherto neglected or unknown archival materials, the Soviet scholar G. A. Protasov reaches a similar conclusion. G. A. Protasov, Konditsii 1735 goda (Avtoedukat dissertatsii na soiskanie stopont kandidata istoricheskikh nauk), Moskovskii oblastnoi pedagogicheskii institut, 1955, and Konditsii 1735 goda i ikh podrobnost', "Echenye Zapiski, Tambowskii pedagogicheskii institut, XV (1957), pp. 215-31.
monarch. The noblemen's political horizon did not extend beyond
an expression of hope that the worst abuses and hardships would be
alleviated in time (which they were, over a span of three genera-
tions). Noteworthy, too, is the absence of any theoretical notions.
The only person who had some understanding of the theoretical
issues involved and still remained representative of the rank-and-
file nobility was V. N. Tatishchev, but even he used his readings
and knowledge of Western political theory to advocate the re-es-

dtablishment of autocracy.8

Conditions Imposed on Emperor Anne by the
Members of the Supreme Privy Council
From Potsdam: empirecity Army camp
by D. A. Konakov (Kazan: 1869), "First Draft," pp. 8-9;

First Draft

Herewith, we firmly promise that my primary concern will be
not only the preservation but also, as much as possible, the dis-
semination of our Greek Orthodox faith. Inasmuch as the integrity
and welfare of any state is the result of good counsel, we also
promise to retain always the presently existing Supreme Privy
Council of eight members, and without the Council's consent (we
promise):

1. Not to start war with anyone;
2. Not to conclude peace;

8 Tatishchev used the arguments from natural law, and more particularly
the notion of social contract, to justify, as Hobbes had done, the necessity
of undivided sovereignty vested in an absolute, autocratic monarch; cf.
is his "Pravilnoe i sobstvennoe razumienie 1 ustanov uchrezhdenia silakh-
entso ruskogo o pravlenii gosudarstvennom," 4 February 1720 in Ora,
1853, pp. 509-78. In so doing, he was following in the footsteps of Fedor
Pokrovskii, who had made similar use of Western concepts to justify
Peter the Great's decision to change the customs of succession and who,
by the same token, had provided theoretical justifications for the au-
tocratic power of the Russian monarch; cf. his treatise Pравдо воли мона-
ршего (St. Petersburg: 1719).

Final Draft

Whereas by will of God Almighty and the common wish of all
the Russian people we have ascended the imperial throne of All
Russia upon the demise of the most glorious and sovereign Lord,
Peter II, Emperor and Autocrat of All Russia, our beloved sovereign
and nephew, and [whereas] in accordance with God's law I intend
and wish to rule in such manner as to glorify first God's name and
to serve the welfare of our whole state and of all our loyal subjects;
Wherefore, we promise firmly that my main concern and effort
will be not only to maintain but also to disseminate as much as
possible our Greek Orthodox faith; and upon accepting the Russian
crown I promise not to enter into bonds of marriage for the
duration of my life and not to appoint any heir. And as the in-

tegrity and welfare of any state consists in good counsel, we promise
to maintain the existing Supreme Privy Council of eight members,
and without this Supreme Privy Council's consent:

1. Not to start war with anyone;
2. Not to conclude peace;
3. Not to burden our loyal subjects with new taxes;
4. Not to promote to high ranks (in the civil as well as the
military services) above those of colonel, and not to appoint
to high office, and to have the Guard and other regiments
under the authority of the Supreme Privy Council;

This refers to the act of Peter the Great of 5 February 1722 (PET. No.
507), making succession to the throne dependent on appointment by the
sovereign.
5. Not to deprive [members of] the nobility of life, property, and honor without trial;
6. Not to grant estates and villages;
7. . . . Not to promote either Russians or foreigners to court offices;
8. Not to spend state revenue;
And to keep all loyal subjects in our good graces irrevocably. And if I do not fulfill or keep any of these promises, I shall be deprived of the Russian crown.

Project of the Generals (Project of Matiushkin)\(^4\)
From Korasov, op. cit., Appendix, pp. 9-11.

1. In our opinion, the present membership of the Supreme Privy Council should be increased by several persons, so that there be a total of twelve or thirteen members. And as the general officers [generalités] and nobility should be called together for important matters concerning the administration or the general weal of the state, as seen in article 6 below, there would be not a small but an oversubscribed assembly. For the conduct of daily routine affairs the above-mentioned number of members is sufficient.

2. For filling vacancies in the Supreme Privy Council, at the present time and in the future, the general officers in the civil and military services and the nobility will elect three candidates for each vacancy and submit them to the Supreme Privy Council, who will then select the most suitable, either by vote or by lot, at their discretion.

3. Alternatively, the Supreme Privy Council may select three candidates, one of whom is then appointed by the general officers from the military, the higher officials, and the nobility. No less than seventy persons have to be present at such an election, and no more than two from one family. Those who select the candidates (that

is, members of the Supreme Privy Council) may not participate in the vote and will be replaced by other persons so that the electoral assembly have a full membership.

4. In our opinion the Senate should have eleven members. The selection of members of the Senate, of presidents of the Colleges, and of governors is left to the Supreme Privy Council, or it may be done by society [that is, the nobility] by ballot. The reason for increasing the number of senators is that some of them will be ordered into the provinces to supervise the governors and voevodas [army commanders].

5. There should be no more than one candidate from each family.

6. Everything that will be needed in the future to complete the statutes concerning the state administration or the common weal must be confirmed by the common counsel and wish of the Supreme Privy Council, the general officers, and the nobility. [Variant reading: Supreme Privy Council, Senate, general officers, and nobility.]

7. The best system for service promotions of members of the nobility and of the military personnel should be devised and terms set for the service's duration. No one [in them] the nobility should be made [to serve] forcibly as sailor or artisan.\(^8\)

8. To the extent that it is feasible, give satisfaction to the complaints of the nobility, the clergy, the merchants, and of all others, according to their respective status, as this is the foundation and preservation of stable government; as to the peasants, upon adequate investigation, give them some tax relief.

9. Discuss the [rules of] promotion of officers and soldiers and the regular payment of their salaries, setting definite terms for this purpose.

10. Draw up rules for inheritance of real estate and the succession of extinct families for future guidance.

11. As to the capital, for the sake of the common good, we wish it to be in Moscow.

\(^4\) Mikhail Afanasyevich Matiushkin (1676-1739): military and political figure; helped to draft the Table of Ranks act; head of the Chancery for Criminal Affairs.

\(^8\) Peter's regulations for service required that everyone, including members of the nobility, start service at the bottom of the hierarchy, that is, as ordinary soldiers, seamen, or craftsmen.
12. We humbly request the Supreme Privy Council, if it is agreeable to it, to solicit Her Majesty's assent to all the aforementioned.

(FIFTEEN SIGNATURES)

First Project of the Nobility (Project of Gresham) From Pomiatniki novoi russkoi istorii—Shorskii uchenychi svet i materialy by V. Khapilov (St. Petersburg: 1871), Vol. I, Part 2, pp. 4-5.

On this 7th day of February, in the Supreme Privy Council, at the meeting of the general officers from the military and civil services, the "articles" subscribed to by Her Imperial Majesty, the sovereign Empress, having been read, the following was stated in the name of the Supreme Privy Council: whoever can devise something for the greater good of the state and of society, and not for his own personal interest, and who, fearing God's judgment, can give advice in all conscience, let him make himself known. And in accordance with this announcement we submit what we have been able to devise in good conscience for the better benefit of the state and of society, as follows:

1. To begin with, set up a High Government [authority] of twenty-one persons. (2) And in order not to burden this Government with too many affairs, set up a Senate of eleven [variant: one hundred] members to take care of the other [current] business. (3) The general officers and nobility are to select and vote on candidates to the High Government, the Senate, the governorships, and to the presidencies of the Colleges. And there should be no more than one candidate from any one family, and no more than two persons from one family participating in the election; and the quantum for voting should be no less than one hundred persons, and no members of the candidates' families may participate in the vote. (4) Except for the present members of the Supreme Privy Council, in the future there should be no more than two persons from one family in the High Government and Senate counted together. (5) Important affairs of state and necessary additions to the statutes pertaining to the government of the state should be drafted and approved by common consultation between the High Government, Senate, general officers, and the nobility. (6) Devise the best system of service for the nobility, so that no one is compelled to serve more than twenty years against his will, and in order not to oblige any noble to serve as sailor or artisan against his will; and, after investigation, render a decision in the case of those nobles who are sailors or artisans at the present time. (7) Give the clergy and the merchants relief from the burden of quartering troops, and give tax relief to the peasantry, as will be estimated proper. (8) Devise an orderly system of promotions and pay for officers and soldiers, so that they will be made at appointed time. (9) Make an examination of retirement and inheritance [rules], and of what is to be done about them in the future. (10) Consider and award compensations and cost of upkeep for those officers and soldiers who are retired for old age and wounds and who do not have their own sources of income.

(Signed by 550 persons)

"Outline" Submitted to the Ranks-and-File Nobility From Kaspishev, op. cit., pp. 78.

At the present, the following is drafted by the nobility:

1. The Senate should have thirty members. Her Majesty is to preside and have three votes; and there should be no Supreme Privy Council.

2. For [the performance of the] small business, delegate ten members [of the Senate, presumably] every year; but all members are to consult together on matters of state.

3. Members to the Senate should be elected, but there should be no more than two persons from a single family.

4. The army should be under the Military Colleges, while the Guard is to be under the Senate.

5. The nobility is to fill by vote the vacancies occurring in the Senate, the presidencies of the Colleges, and the governorships, and the Senate should not interfere in the elections.

6. Court officials are to be elected anew.
7. In the future, the Diet (zemstvo) should devise, and the nobility confirm, whatever is necessary for the reform and welfare of the state.

8. Noblemen should not be appointed to the military ranks of private and artisan, but special companies should be established for them, and for those in the navy, units of marine Guards.

9. The seniority rule in matters of inheritance should be abrogated and complete freedom given to the parents; and, if there are no parents left, the inheritance is to be divided in equal shares.

### Petition of Cherkaskii
From Korsakov, op. cit., pp. 271-72.

Most glorious and most gracious Sovereign Empress! Although You have been elevated to the throne of the Russian Empire by the will of the Almighty and the unanimous consent of all the people, in testimony of Your high favor to the whole State, Your Imperial Majesty has deigned to sign the articles presented by the Supreme Privy Council, and we thank You most humbly for this gracious intent. Not only we, but also our descendants will have cause to render thanks and display through their words and feelings their sincere respect for Your name in all eternity. However, most Gracious Lady, some of these articles raise such doubts that the majority of the people is in fear of future disturbances, which can benefit only the enemies of our Fatherland; and although, after sober deliberation, we have written down our opinions and presented them to the Supreme Privy Council with all due respect and in all humility, requesting that there be devised a safe system of government for the peace and welfare of the state in accordance with the opinion of the majority, yet, most Gracious Lady, they still have not decided on it, and the written opinions of many have not even been accepted. But they have announced that no decision can be reached without Your Imperial Majesty's will.

*Prince Aleksei Mikhailovich Cherkaskii (1680-1742): High Chancellor, cabinet minister, and senator.*

### Petition of Prince Trubetskoi
From Korsakov, op. cit., pp. 275-76.

Most illustrious and most sovereign High Lady, Empress Anna Ioannovna, Autocrat of All Russia!

When Your Imperial Majesty graciously deigned this day to put Your own hand to our humble petition for the better security and welfare of our Fatherland, we had to acknowledge that we were unworthy of expressing gratitude for such an outstanding favor from Your Imperial Majesty. However, the zeal of loyal subjects, which our duty commands, compels us to show ourselves grateful to the extent of our ability; as a sign of our gratitude, therefore, we most humbly submit our request that You graciously resume such autocratic power as Your glorious and praiseworthy ancestors possessed and abrogate the article sent to Your Imperial Majesty by the Supreme Privy Council and signed by You.

We, Your most loyal subjects, only beg Your Imperial Majesty

*Prince Ioann Vsevolodich Trubetskoi (died 1750): General Field Marshal.*
that in place of the Supreme Privy Council and the High Senate, 
You deign to establish a single Governing Senate, as it was under 
Your Imperial Majesty’s uncle, Peter the First of glorious memory; 
and it would be adequately staffed with a membership of twenty-
one persons; and that it also be ordered that the nobility [szlachta] 
elect by ballot to the present membership and fill future vacancies 
to the above-named Governing Senate, governorships, and presiden-
cies [of the Colleges], as it had been established under Your Impe-
rial Majesty’s uncle, Peter I.

And withal, as Your most loyal subjects, we request that a form 
of administration be now instituted under Your signature for future 
times. In addition, we, Your most obedient slaves, hope that we will 
be provided with wise administration, justice, and a lightening of 
taxation in accordance with Your Imperial Majesty’s natural good-
heartedness, and that we shall enjoy a quiet and peaceful existence 
in prosperity and abundance.

Your Imperial Majesty’s most humble slaves

(166 signatures follow)