Publication of Party and Government Decisions in the USSR: a note

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Sources of the Decisions

Several years ago, Robert H. McNeal published a guide to the Decisions of the CPSU between 1917 and 1967. This guide was based mainly on publications in the party-press and McNeal did not, for instance, make use of the Official Gazette of the Government of the USSR, published up till 1949 and again from 1957 until the present day. This Gazette contains hundreds of joint decisions of the party and government and is therefore one of the most important sources for party decisions. Other valuable publications are chronicles in the Yearbooks of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia, in *Ekonomicheskaia Zhizn' SSSR, Khronika Sobyti i Faktov 1917-1959* and *1917-1965*, and in *Industrializatsiia SSSR 1926-1941 gg.* The number of party decisions over the 50 years covered by McNeal's guide is not 3265 as suggested by McNeal, but 4000 at least and, very likely, many more.

Joint Decisions of Party and Government

The importance of the Official Gazette of the USSR for the history of the party stems, among other things, from the fact that many government decrees take the form of joint decisions of the Government and the Central Committee of the Party. In the twenties it was already the practice that important government decisions were considered by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and, apart from this, all kinds of addresses, appeals and directives were issued by party and government together. Occasionally, such joint acts contained legal norms: the Address of the Council of People's Commissars and the Central Committee of the Party of February 5, 1931 "On River Transport" defined the legal status of a ship by stating that a ship was an enterprise, working on the basis of *khozraschet* and the Plan. The first time that such a joint act was called a decree (*postanovlenie*) was in 1931. The number of (published) decisions of the party (at times conjointly with the government) became considerable and remained rather high up to 1936. In 1937-1938 the number was relatively small, but during 1939-1941 it rose to previous
levels. During the War and its aftermath, the number of party decisions was probably very low and they were nearly all concerned with agricultural policy. After 1953, the number began to rise again, see table 1.

From the years 1961-1967, 202 joint party and government decisions (USSR) are known. These 202 decisions account for less than 3% of all decisions (postanovleniia) taken by the Council of Ministers of the USSR in that period, but they constitute about 15% of those decisions which are known to the outside world. Taking into account that joint decisions are usually considered to be of great political importance and therefore should give more cause for action by lower governmental and other bodies we could estimate that about 10% of all decrees of the USSR government during the 1960's were joint actions of party and government.

Issuing joint decisions of government and party is also practiced in the Union Republics (with the exception of the RSFSR up till 1955 and from 1967 on), see table 2. According to Shabanov, the Government of the Belorussian SSR has taken quite a number of decisions jointly with the party and/or the trade unions: 80 in 1954; 82 in 1956 and 82 in 1961.

Table 2 suggests that the number of published joint decisions has risen, but there is no evidence of a relation between the total number of joint decisions and the number of published decisions, at least as far as the Union Republics are concerned. It seems likely that the number of joint decisions given for the Belorussian SSR for different years has to be interpreted with care: probably, the number of decisions made jointly with the trade union has risen to a considerable amount since the December 1957 Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU. The number of joint government-union decisions was rather high in the years 1966-1967: 26 such decisions are known to have been published in the RSFSR (1966, but only 12 in 1967), 28 in Latvia (1967) and 43 in Estonia (1967).

It seems very hazardous to draw any conclusion from the variation in number of decisions as listed in table 1. The variation could as well be explained, at times, in terms of openness and publicity in the policy making process in the USSR.