

Features of Socio-Political Processes in Abkhazia (Abkhaz ASSR) in the 1930–1940s

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Abstract. The article examines Stalin's repressions in Abkhazia in the 1930s and 1940s. The author revealed the specifics of socio-political processes that took place under the influence of Stalinism. As a result of the study, the main directions of Stalin's repressive policies in Abkhazia were identified. Attempts to destroy the political and cultural elite, infringe on the rights of Abkhazians and other peoples living in Abkhazia are described in detail. Official data on the forced change of the ethnic composition of the population and the persecution of representatives of the political elite are provided, as well as the conditions of Georgian-Abkhazian interaction during this period are analyzed. The author drew a conclusion about the tragic impact of Stalin's repressions on the development of the Abkhazian statehood, the preservation of national identity, as well as the construction of Georgian-Abkhazian relations.

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Keywords: Stalinism, Abkhazia, repression, resettlement policy, linguocide, statehood

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Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 became a catalyst for interethnic conflicts and the beginning of armed clashes in the post-Soviet space. One of the results of the existing contradictions was the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992–1993. Although the elimination of the centralized system of power gave rise to open aggression, the real causes of the war should be sought in the origins of the conflict itself, which began long before the end of the USSR was recorded.

Joseph Stalin, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU(b), and his policy of forcibly integrating the Abkhazian Soviet Socialist Republic into Georgia are

largely involved in the aggravation of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict. The decisions taken during his leadership formed the main trends in Georgian-Abkhaz relations, the subsequent development of which led to the war. The interethnic contradictions that already existed at the time of the establishment of Soviet power in Abkhazia and Georgia were cultivated by the Stalinist policy of the 30–40s of the XX century, which increased tension between the neighboring republics.

The chronology of the study is determined by the fact that it was from the mid-1930s that Stalin's repressive policy intensified in Abkhazia, deteriorating the political and social situation in the region. As the Georgian government strengthened, the Abkhaz government lost the ability to control the processes taking place in the republic. In the 1920s, all decisions taken here were the result of agreements between the central Soviet government and the Abkhaz government itself. This was facilitated by the friendly relationship between Stalin and the head of the Central Executive Committee of Abkhazia, Nestor Lakoba. His assassination in 1936, as well as the downgrading of the status of Abkhazia in 1931, became the starting point for the open infringement of the rights of the Abkhazian nation, which up to that point he had been able to defend. The repressive policy against the Abkhazian population continued both until Stalin's death and until the collapse of the USSR, depending on which aspect of the repression is being discussed. But the events that have been taking place since the late 1940s can actually be considered a natural consequence of the policy developed and implemented by Stalin after Lakoba's death.

The object of the study was Stalin's repressive policy in Abkhazia in the 1930–40s, and the subject is the socio-political processes provoked by this policy in the republic during the same period. The purpose of the article is to highlight the features of Stalin's repressions in Abkhazia. The relevance of the research topic lies in the fact that the establishment of the specifics of Stalinist repressions in Abkhazia is a necessary condition for understanding the current political situation in which the Republic of Abkhazia finds itself. In particular, the study focuses on the contradictions that arose in Georgian-Abkhaz relations during this period.

For a clearer understanding of the situation in Abkhazia in the early 30s of the XX century, as well as the specifics of the relationship between Abkhazia and Georgia, the reader is offered a brief summary of the conditions in which the Abkhazian Soviet Republic arose. In particular, the author draws attention to the important ethnodemographic and political changes in Abkhazia that took place before the beginning of Stalin's repressions.

One of the key issues in the process of establishing Soviet power in Abkhazia was the issue of the country's state status. Abkhazia has been counting its statehood since the creation of the Abkhazian Kingdom in the VIII century. However, over time, the state status of the country has changed. For example, at the time of joining the Russian Empire in 1810, the Abkhazian Principality was one of the few states in Transcaucasia that received the status of autonomy. Many of the neighboring Georgian principalities (Kartli-Kakheti Kingdom, Imereti, Guria, etc.) have already been abolished by the tsarist administration

[15]. However, in 1864, as a result of the Caucasian War (1817–1864), the principality was transformed into the Sukhumi district and subordinated to the administration of the tsar's governor in the Caucasus [6:3–7]. In Abkhazian historiography, the process of establishing Soviet power in Abkhazia marked the restoration of Abkhazia's sovereignty. Although this point of view is disputed by Georgian researchers, who interpret the fact of the creation of the SSR of Abkhazia as a «trick» of the central government, but are unable to deny it due to the presence of supporting normative legal acts [7–9]. It is noteworthy that back in 1917 The local government body created here, the Abkhazian People's Council, developed international relations in three directions: integration into the Union of the Caucasian republics (in particular, the entry of Abkhazia into the Mountain Republic), the establishment of equal relations with Menshevik Georgia (from the signing of the good-neighborly agreement on February 9, 1918 to the occupation of Abkhazia by the troops of Georgian General Mazniev), as well as rapprochement with the RSFSR.

On March 4, 1921, Soviet power was established in Abkhazia. On March 28–29, 1921, a meeting of senior officials of the Caucasian Bureau of the RCP(b), the Central Committee of the KP(b) of Georgia and Abkhazia was held in Batumi on the issue «On the structure of the Soviet Power and the Communist Party in Abkhazia», at which a resolution was drafted according to which Abkhazia was declared a “socialist Soviet republic”. Based on this, on March 31, 1921 The Revolutionary Committee of Abkhazia adopted the declaration “On the Formation of the Abkhazian Soviet Republic”. The Central Committee of the RCP(b) approved the resolution of the Batumi meeting and the Declaration of the Revolutionary Committee (hereinafter – the Revkom) of Abkhazia. On May 21, 1921, the Revkom of Georgia accepted the declaration “On the Independence of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia”, in which it “recognizes and welcomes the formation of the independent Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia...” [13:114–121]. Nevertheless, the republic soon came under pressure from the center, which advocated its unification with Georgia. Stalin's economic isolation became the main instrument of pressure. So, back in September 1921, when Abkhazia had the status of a Soviet republic, he wrote to the secretary of the Central Executive Committee A. Enukidze: “Abkhazia is an autonomous part of independent Georgia, hence it does not have and should not have independent representatives under the RSFSR. Therefore, she cannot receive a loan from the RSFSR” [6:84–100]. And on July 5, 1921, at a meeting of the Plenum of the Kavburo of the Central Committee of the RCP(b) with Stalin's participation, a resolution was adopted on conducting party work «towards the unification of Abkhazia and Georgia in the form of an autonomous republic that is part of Georgia». November 14, 1921 a statement by the first Chairman of the Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC) of Abkhazia, Efrem

Eshba, was published to the Central Committee's Kavburo, in which he insisted on Abkhazia's entry into the Transcaucasian Federation as the fourth republic. In response, the Kavburo of the RCP(b) adopted a resolution on November 16, 1921, which stated: “To consider the existence of independent Abkhazia economically and politically inexpedient”; it was proposed either to unite on a contractual basis with Georgia, or to become an autonomous region in the RSFSR [13:114–121].

In February 1922, the SSR Abkhazia united with the SSR Georgia on the basis of a «special union treaty». Formal independence was maintained until February 11, 1931. The downgrade of the state status was only the first point in the plan to eliminate Abkhazia as an independent state. This is followed by the purposeful destruction of the Abkhazian nation through the use of various kinds of repression – from attempts at intellectual and physical destruction to the replacement of the indigenous people by settlers.

Materials and methods

The study of Stalinist repressions in Abkhazia is complicated by the high political importance of this topic. It often happens that the positions of the Abkhaz (S. Z. Lakoba, T. M. Shamba, V. A. Chirikba, etc.) [6, 13, 15] and Georgian (M. Lordkipanidze, Z. Papaskiri, M. Matsaberidze, etc.) [7–9] researchers when considering the same manifestations of Stalinism in Abkhazia are strikingly different. The existing diversity of opinions emphasizes the relevance and controversy of the chosen topic. In an effort to achieve maximum objectivity in his research, the author relied not only on the work of domestic scientists, but also analyzed the publications of Georgian authors on the chosen topic. Nevertheless, the degree of study of the directly stated topics in Georgian historiography leaves much to be desired. Despite the numerous works challenging the state-legal status of Abkhazia in the 20s of the XX century, only a few of them mention the events that will be discussed in this article. It seems that this is being done in order to conceal the unfavorable moments of the joint history for Georgia.

It is worth noting that another aspect that complicated the study was the negligent attitude of the officials involved in recording information, for example, about the number of convicted citizens, penalties or the true motives of the accusation. Repeatedly, in the framework of the study, the author had to deal with incorrect or incomplete data on the fate of victims of Stalinist repression in Abkhazia. For example, it is known that many of the convicted citizens who were sent to correctional labor for 10 years without the right to correspond soon died, but according to the documents they were still alive for some time. It should be understood that the actual number of repressed persons cannot be established, since not all sentencing acts have been properly documented. This means that the data used in the study will always be relative and approximate. The work on establishing the number of victims continues today. Thus, non-profit organizations engaged in collecting and publishing lists of memory of victims of repression, such as Memorial¹, Open List (database of victims of political repression in the USSR (1917–1991), Immortal Barrack, etc., made a great contribution to the process of forming the research source base. Of immediate importance is the study of not only archival data, but also the memories of repressed officials, their family members and ordinary citizens. The mental portrait of the Stalinist

period in Abkhazia is clearly reflected in the memoirs of Adile Abbas-oglu², in the family archive and memoirs of Irina Vardania³ and the works of N. N. Ioanidi [3].

In order to objectively study the topic, the materials of both Abkhazian (S. Z. Lakoba, T. A. Achugba, B. E. Sagaria, etc.) [1, 6, 10] and Georgian researchers (M. Lordkipanidze, Z. Papaskiri, M. Matsaberidze, etc.) [7–9].

The source base of the research includes official documents: state normative legal acts, in particular: Resolutions of the Central Committee of the CPSU, the Central Committee of the CPSU, the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR and local Soviet authorities, decrees of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, as well as archival documents of the NKVD (orders, sentences, court decisions). It is important to mention that during the Georgian-Abkhazian war of 1992–1993, the State Archive of Abkhazia was destroyed. When working with Abkhazian archival data, the author had to rely on collections of documents published before 1992, as well as on preserved information⁴ [2].

Within the framework of the study, the use of the structural-diachronic method prevails. It allows us to track the development of socio-political processes that took place in Abkhazia from the early 30s to the late 40s of the XX century.

Discussion

The author has identified several characteristic directions of Stalin's repressive policy in Abkhazia (the Abkhazian ASSR) in the 30–40s of the XX century, each of which affects separate socio-political aspects.

Mass repression and persecution of the Abkhaz political elite

On December 28, 1936, the Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the Abkhazian ASSR, Nestor Lakoba, died during his business trip to Tbilisi. From that moment on, the flywheel of repression began to actively unwind in Abkhazia.

On July 20, 1937, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, L. Beria, sent Stalin a letter «About counterrevolutionary groups in Georgia». He claimed that N. N. Bukharin and A. I. Rykov had created a local counterrevolutionary organization, which allegedly included Nestor Lakoba. According to Beria, Lakoba personally launched the work of the right in order to create an independent Abkhazia under the protectorate of England and Turkey. Beria said that he intends to shoot «at least 1000 people from among the K. R. rightists, Trotskyists, spies, saboteurs, wreckers,

² Daughter-in-law of Nestor Lakoba, Chairman of the Central Election Commission of Abkhazia in the 20–30s. Abbas-oglu A. I can't forget. Moscow, 2005.

³ The daughter of Anatoly Vardania, a politician and associate of Nestor Lakob. The daughter for the father is... responsible! (Secrets of the family archive of Anatoly Vardania and Veronica von Belinsky) / Comp.: S. Lakoba, A. Dbar. Sukhum, 2018.

⁴ The Abkhazian publicist Ekaterina Bebia, who collected documents before the destruction of the Abkhazian archives in 1992, shares a significant amount of data in her works.

etc.»⁵ He did not include former kulaks or criminals in this number, but Nestor's family and friends were offered arrest because they «behave suspiciously»⁶.

From October 30 to November 3, 1937, an open trial was conducted «over a counterrevolutionary, wrecking, espionage organization in Abkhazia», in which 13 people – comrades, relatives and colleagues of Nestor Lakoba – were being held. Also known as the «Case of the Thirteen Lacobians», the trial ended with the death sentence imposed on all participants. On the list of those arrested, even before the trial began, there was a resolution by L. Beria, which read: «To shoot» [6:132–136].

Repressions were carried out against the entire Abkhazian intelligentsia. The initiated cases were held under the following names: «Horsemen», «Abkhaztorg», «Anthropoids», «Dynamite», «Diplomats», «Iranians», «Punishers», etc. Death sentences were imposed on the basis of falsified data and tortured testimony. In the case of the Abkhazian youths from 1937, four underage boys, from 13 to 15 years old, Rauf Lakoba and his brothers, were tried. All of them were shot on July 6, 1941⁷.

According to S. Z. Lakoba, from July 1937 to November 1938, 2186 people were repressed in Abkhazia; 748 of them were shot, 377 disappeared without a trace in prisons, many «found their end in camps» [6:132–136].

Resettlement policy and changes in the ethnic composition of the population

The Great Terror of 1937–1938 was just the beginning of a new, no less difficult stage of Stalinist repression in Abkhazia. Terror did not stop either during the Great Patriotic War, or even more so in the post-war period. On the contrary, Abkhazia was on the verge of complete disappearance due to accelerated ethnodemographic changes in the country (see Table 1).

It is worth noting that even before the establishment of Soviet power, the key role in changing the ethnodemographic situation in Abkhazia was played by «mahajirism» – the massive, forced resettlement of the Abkhazian people, which occurred as a result of the Caucasian War of the XIX century, the uprising of 1866 in Abkhazia, the Russian-Turkish war of 1877–1878. For example, a similar disastrous consequence of the Russian-Turkish War of 1877–1878 was the forced eviction of about 50.000 Abkhazians to Siberia and Turkey, as a result of which Abkhazia was «deserted». Thus, as a result of the resettlement of the 60–70s of the XIX century. The number of Abkhazians in the country has decreased to almost 46.000 [1:105–106]. For the first time in their history, the Abkhazians found themselves in a minority on their own territory [14:10].

Such conditions simplified the process of colonization of the region and formed the basis for the formation of a multiethnic population here. The imperial authorities began

⁵ A note by L. P. Beria to I. V. Stalin about counterrevolutionary groups in Georgia. July 20, 1937. Available from: <https://istmat.org/node/31615>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Rauf Lakob Memorial Day. Available from: <http://lakobamuseum.ru/24-06-2022>.

Table 1. The ethnodemographic structure and population of Abkhazia (on the materials of statistical studies conducted in different periods)

years	abkhazians	kartvelians	russians	armenians	greeks	total
1886	589636	4166	971	1049	2149	69184
1897	58697	25875	5135	6552	5393	104449
1914	91450	14731	4978	7980	9922	132538
1916	111780	37414	21978	15794	10627	197593
1926	55918	67494	20456	30048	27085	202927
1939	56197	91967	60201	49705	34621	294600
1959	61193	158221	86715	64400	9111	379640
1970	83097	213322	79730	73000	13600	462749
1977	77000	200000	93000	75000	14000	503000
1989	93267	239872	74913	76541	14664	499357

Source: Shamba T. M., Neproshin A. Yu. Abkhazia. Legal foundations of statehood and sovereignty. Moscow, 2004. URL: http://apsnyteka.org/228-abkhazia_pravovye_osnovy_gosudarstvennosti_i_suvereniteta_glava1.html

to develop the deserted lands, distributing them to the settlers as rewards and organizing Russian settlements. Gradually, Greeks, Russians, Bulgarians, Germans, Mingrelians, Armenians, etc. settled in Abkhazia. However, local climatic conditions and the diseases caused by them (in particular, malaria) slowed down the development of the region [12:88–96]. Neighboring Western Georgia took advantage of this by launching an active process of settling the Abkhazian lands. For the most part, the Megrelians settled in the vacant plots, incited to this not only by the difficult economic situation, but also by the publications of Georgian public figures. The program developed by the Russian government accelerated this process, and by the end of the 19th century Georgians, Megrelians and Svans made up a quarter of the population of Abkhazia [12:96–99].

The result of the Russian-Georgian struggle for the development of Abkhazia was a change in the ethnodemographic composition of the population. According to the All-Russian Population Census of 1897, the population has almost doubled since 1868. At the same time, the number of Abkhazians was 58.700, Georgians and Megrelians – 25.000, Russians – up to 6.000, Armenians – from 1.300 to 6.500, Greeks – from 2000 to 5.400 people [1, pp. 137–138]. Historian T. A. Achugba notes that already in the Soviet period, from 1926 to 1939, the composition of the population of Abkhazia changed again. The number of Russians, Armenians and Greeks increased by 40.000, 20.000 and 7000 a person, in accordance [1:137–138]. It is worth noting that leading Georgian historians prefer to keep silent about the fact of active settlement of Abkhazia by Georgian immigrants and focus on the number of Russians resettled here [7:214–216].

The purposeful settlement of Soviet Abkhazia by Georgians began in 1937, after the trust «Abkhazpereselenstroy» was established, which set as its task the construction of ethnic settlements for immigrants from Georgia. The land fund for these needs was developed through the confiscation of plots of Abkhazian villages. The situation worsened as the central policy of the USSR changed. Resolution of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR of 1939 № 1447 the creation of a Resettlement Department under him was approved, which was entrusted with the direction of agricultural migrants from low-land areas to multi-land areas⁸. The report of the State Planning Committee of Abkhazia to the Government of 1940 states that the resettlement is taking place «on the initiative of the beloved son of the Georgian people, Comrade L. P. Beria», with the aim of «developing a huge amount of “undeveloped lands” for centuries»⁹. It is obvious that the report manipulates data on the land situation in the country, ignoring the real prerequisites and causes of land devastation in the form of a mass outflow of population. This is also evidenced by the resolution of the Council of People's Commissars of the Georgian SSR of September 2, 1941 № 1595 «On cutting off surplus undeveloped lands from 12 collective farms of the Abkhazian ASSR and transferring them to newly organized collective farms from resettlement farms»¹⁰.

And on April 25, 1940, the Council of People's Commissars of the Georgian SSR adopted a resolution «On measures for the further development of tea farming, citrus crops, viticulture and high-quality winemaking in the Georgian SSR», which accelerated the process of settling Abkhazia with new immigrants¹¹. In 1941 alone, despite the outbreak of World War II and the corresponding military expenditures, 28.9 million rubles were allocated for the improvement of collective farm settlements. By this time, 11 resettlement collective farms had already been built, accommodating 1.650 families. By 1944, it was planned to increase the number to 5.404 families [1:197–228].

The main problem of the resettlement policy was the creation of an artificial prevalence of the Georgian population in the Abkhazian territory. Relying on numerical superiority, the visiting Georgians have repeatedly influenced political decision-making in Abkhazia, turning them in their favor and not taking into account the position of the Abkhazians. In addition, speaking about Soviet Abkhazia, Georgian researchers often complain that the interests of the large Georgian population were not the main guideline of Abkhazian policy, as if implying infringement of the rights of Georgians here [7:214–216]. At the same time, they are not confused by the fact of the origin of this Georgian «majority», nor the need to represent Abkhazian interests, at least at the level of the Abkhaz government itself.

⁸ Resolution №. 1447 of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR. Moscow – Kremlin. September 14, 1939. Abkhazia: the documents show. 1937–1953. Collection of documents. Sukhum, 1992:22–24.

⁹ From the report of the State Planning Committee of Abkhazia to the government. 1940. Abkhazia: the documents show. 1937–1953. Collection of documents. Sukhum, 1992:44.

¹⁰ Resolution No. 1595 of the Council of People's Commissars of the Georgian SSR on September 2, 1941 «On cutting off surplus undeveloped lands from 12 collective farms of the Abkhazian ASSR and transferring them to newly organized collective farms from resettlement farms». Available from: <http://doc20vek.ru/node/1531>

¹¹ Resolution No. 13 of the Council of People's Commissars of the Abkhazian ASSR and the Bureau of the Abkhazian Regional Committee of the KP(b) of Georgia. Available from: <http://doc20vek.ru/node/1527>

The mental destruction of Abkhazians: from linguocide to persecution of the intelligentsia

The outbreak of the Great Patriotic War not only did not prevent the implementation of the resettlement policy, but also contributed to unpunished encroachments on the national identity of the Abkhazians. During this period, the policy of infringement of the indigenous ethnic group, which began in the 30s of the XX century, is actively continuing. For example, on August 17, 1936, the Resolution of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR «On the correct spelling of names of settlements» was adopted. According to this document, the names of three Abkhazian cities, including the capital, were translated into Georgian (Sukhum – Sukhumi)¹². A year before, the Central Election Commission of Abkhazia and, in particular, its chairman N. Lakoba appealed to the central government to assign names to Abkhazian settlements in their native language (for example, Sukhum – Akua; Akhali-Afoni – Psyrdzha, etc.). The memo noted the inexpediency of translating toponymy into Georgian, which does not correspond the ethnographic origins of the Abkhazian names. Of course, the offer was rejected¹³.

At the same time, radio broadcasts in the Abkhaz language, newspaper and magazine publications were closed. Persecution of Abkhazian authors began, books of repressed writers were seized (S. Chanba, L. Labakhua, S. Ashkhatsava, Z. Agrba, B. Zantaria, etc.). Signs with Abkhazian inscriptions were removed throughout Abkhazia, the use of the Abkhazian language in office work was prohibited¹⁴.

The repressions did not stop either. This time, the Abkhazian intelligentsia was subjected to them, and cases were reopened on falsified charges. A detailed description of these repressions, as well as information about the persons subjected to them, is provided by historian B. E. Sagaria [10:20–22].

Intensive efforts have begun to assimilate the local population into the Georgian cultural environment. School education and the use of the Abkhaz language have undergone fundamental reform. Back in 1938, the Abkhaz alphabet was translated into the Georgian graphic basis. Since 1940, the name of the Abkhazians has disappeared from official circulation. In January 1945, a commission was convened to reorganize Abkhazian schools. It was stated that it was necessary to translate education in schools from Abkhaz (in the first three grades) and Russian exclusively into Georgian. The reason was the difficulties in learning that arose from students who allegedly did not speak their native languages. It was also mentioned about the insurmountable complexity of the Abkhaz language, which complicated the educational process [11:88–96]. The Abkhazian Pedagogical College was

12 Resolution of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR «On the correct spelling of names of settlements» // Abkhazia: the documents show. 1937–1953. Collection of documents. Sukhum, 1992:488–489.

13 The Central Executive Committee of the Soviets, Workers', Peasants' and Red Army Deputies of the ASSR. Abkhazia – to the Central Executive Committee of the USSR. Copy: To the People's Commissariat of Communications of the USSR. 1935. A memorandum by [Nestor Lakoba on the renaming of Abkhazian settlements] // Ibid:486–488.

14 Avidzba A. F. Abkhazia in 1945–53. History of Abkhazia. A course of lectures. Sukhum, 2021:358–364.

liquidated, which led to a change in the personnel in educational institutions in favor of Georgian teachers who came from Georgia¹⁵.

The personnel imbalance existed not only in the field of education. As A. M. Khashba notes, in 1938 it was impossible to find a single abkhaz in either government or trade bodies¹⁶. As for the consequences of the reorganization of schools, the academic performance of students in primary school has declined sharply. It was 66.1% in the 1945/46 academic year, a figure lower than it has ever been. Academic performance in grades 5–8 decreased to 48.9% [5].

Discrimination based on language caused natural discontent in the Abkhazian society. Some parents announced a boycott of schools, not allowing children to attend classes. There were cases of denunciations of Abkhazians who called the reforms an initiative of the current Georgian government of Abkhazia, «which hates Abkhazians»¹⁷. The popular sentiments of this period are reflected in the so-called “Abkhazian letters”, which are part of the national liberation movement of the Abkhazians. In 1947 representatives of the Abkhazian intelligentsia (K. Shakryl, B. Shinkuba, G. Dzidzaria) a letter was sent to the Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU(b) A. Kuznetsov, in which the facts of the infringement of the Abkhazian people were cited, and the current situation was called a national cultural genocide¹⁸.

Eviction of other ethnic groups of Abkhazia

The continuation of the policy of changing the ethnodemography of Abkhazia was the mass deportation of Greeks living here in 1949. According to the Abkhazian historian-archivist N. Ioanidi, the prerequisites for this event arose much earlier than its implementation. For example, according to his information, from 1938 to 1949, Greeks were not mentioned in Abkhazian newspapers as permanent residents of the region. In addition, he believes that the replacement of Greek leaders with cadres of other nationalities was carried out. During the same period, Greek schools and theater studios were closed [3:11].

On May 17, 1949, in a secret decision of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU(b) “On the eviction of Greek subjects”, a plan for the deportation of Greeks was adopted. The purpose of this operation was declared to be the “cleansing” of the Black Sea coast, Georgia and Azerbaijan from “politically unreliable elements”¹⁹.

Researcher T. Achugba believes that the true motive for the eviction of the Greeks was the liberation of the territory for Georgian immigrants who received empty houses free of

15 Abkhazia: the documents show. 1937–1953. Collection of documents. Sukhum, 1992:481–531.

16 Khashba A.M. Abkhazia in the era of Stalin's totalitarian system. // History of Abkhazia. A course of lectures. Sukhum, 2021:358–368.

17 The memorandum. About certain statements of some anti-Soviet-minded people in the Gudauta district, in connection with the introduction of education in the Georgian language in Abkhazian schools Available from: <http://doc20vek.ru/node/1511>

18 Abkhazia in the Soviet era. Abkhazian letters (1947–1989). Collection of documents. Volume 1. Sukhum, 1994:81–86.

19 The decision of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU(b) “On the eviction of Greek subjects, former Greek subjects who currently do not have citizenship, and former Greek subjects who have been accepted into Soviet citizenship”. May 17, 1949. In: Pobel N. L. Stalin's deportations. 1928-1953. Moscow, 2005:665-666.

charge [1:228–229]. This was indicated by the fact that the decree on the deportation of the Greeks contained a decree on the placement of newly arrived Georgians in their homes. On May 28, 1949, the decision was fixed by order, and Turks and Dashnaks of the Georgian SSR, Armenian SSR and Azerbaijani SSR were added to the Greeks in the list of deportees.

It is important to note that in 1942, Greek foreign nationals had already been evicted. The wave of resettlement in 1949 became the second phase of the deportation of the people [3:21–23]. Thus, from June 14 to 16, 4.830 families (28.043 people) were evicted: Turks – 361 families (1.058 people), Greeks – 4.474 families (21.837 people), Dashnak Armenians – 45 families (148 people). On July 17, another 1.092 Greek families (5.124 people) and 10 Turkish families were expelled under the pretext of voluntary desire. Thus, in 1949, about 34.000 people were deported, 22.000 of whom were Greeks. The migrants were sent to Kazakhstan, whose government took care of the economic arrangement of the arrivals. 60% were employed in unprofitable collective farms, 20% – in state farms [4:35–36]. The forced eviction continued until the arrest of L. Beria in July 1953, and the rehabilitation of the evicted peoples by the government took place only in 1956.

Conclusions

Stalin's activities, which unfolded after the assassination of the leader of Abkhazia Nestor Lakoba in 1936, put the Abkhazian people on the brink of survival, limiting their rights to a fair personnel policy, as well as depriving them of the opportunity to speak and develop in their native language in their own state. Stalin's repressions in Abkhazia, which included the extermination of the intelligentsia, the persecution of dissent, the closure of national schools and even the expulsion of entire peoples, left a heavy imprint on the entire population of the country. The problems that arose in the 30–40s of the XX century were not solved during the XX Congress of the CPSU in 1956 and the «Khrushchev thaw», not later, as they affected much more ambitious aspects than the need for amnesty for political convicts or the elimination of instances of extrajudicial sentencing. In particular, Stalinism in Abkhazia (the Abkhazian ASSR) led to tension in relations with the Georgian ethnic group, to the formation of a tendency to infringe on the rights of the Abkhazian people, to the problem of preserving the Abkhazian national identity and to the almost complete destruction of the political elite. Not only Abkhazians themselves were subjected to repression, but also Greeks, Armenians, Estonians and many other representatives of the Abkhazian Republic.

In general, Stalin's repressions in Abkhazia (the Abkhazian ASSR) not only radically changed the ethnic composition of the population, provoked a decrease in state status and led to a decrease in the number of the Abkhazian population, but also determined the further course of history in the region. It was during this period that the foundations of the confrontation between Abkhazia and Georgia were laid, which in 1992 led to the Georgian-Abkhazian war. The territory of Abkhazia turned out to be the object of claims by indigenous residents and settlers supported by the central government. Stalin's death in March 1953 and the arrest of L. Beria in 1956. The repressive policy was suspended for a while. It was a

short respite within the framework of the national liberation struggle of the Abkhazians, which will soon resume and last for more than a decade.

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