

Crisis and Response in Soviet Nationality Policy: The Case of Abkhazia

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A number of specialists in the field of Soviet nationality policy have predicted that the Soviet leadership will increasingly be faced with problems which have their origins in the diverse ethnic composition of the population. Seweryn Bialer has argued, for example, that "the multinational character of the Soviet Union poses potentially the most serious threat to the legitimacy of the Soviet state and to the stability of the Soviet regime."¹ Helene Carrere d'Encausse concludes that "of all the problems facing Moscow, the most urgent and the most stubborn is the one raised by the national minorities."²

While emphasizing the seriousness of the nationality issue, however, Western scholars have generally not devoted much attention to possible policy responses by the regime which could stabilize the situation. As Gail Lapidus has argued, "they neglect the capacity of the Soviet system to satisfy, channel or manage ethnonationalism in ways that reduce its potential for instability."³

How the leadership deals with ethnic crises is of decisive importance in determining the prospects for political stability in the Soviet Union. The purpose of this article is to examine in some detail one of the most recent examples of a crisis based on ethnic issues, paying special attention to the strategy employed by the authorities to diffuse tensions.

ABKHAZIA AND THE ABKHAZ

Abkhazia, an area located in the northwestern part of what is now Soviet Georgia, was alternately occupied by Turks and Georgians in past centuries. Much of the population converted to Islam during the period of Turkish rule, and significant numbers of Islamic believers remain in Abkhazia.⁴ In 1864, Abkhazia came under Russian control; a revolt in 1866 was unsuccessful, and many

Abkhaz emigrated to Turkey.⁵

The Abkhaz Soviet Socialist Republic was created in 1921, in part to provide a counterweight to the Georgians, and it became a component part of the Georgian republic. Ten years later Abkhazia was designated an "autonomous republic" within Georgia.

Under Soviet rule, the Abkhaz have always been a minority within Abkhazia, and large numbers of Georgians and Russians settled there as a result of collectivisation and industrialisation. Much of the political history of Abkhazia from 1931 until 1953 was dominated by Lavrentii Beria, a Mingrelian born in Abkhazia near Sukhumi (the capital of Abkhazia). Beria was first secretary of the Transcaucasian Communist Party, which included Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, until named head of Stalin's secret police in 1938. There apparently was a deliberate policy, initiated by Beria during the second five-year plan (1933-37), to resettle in Abkhazia large numbers of Mingrelians and other Georgians, Russians, and Armenians. Leading Abkhaz communists protested, including Nestor Lakoba, who was the Abkhaz Bolshevik leader. In 1937, a year after Lakoba died mysteriously, Beria launched a purge of Abkhaz officials charging they had conspired to assassinate Stalin.⁶ The result of Beria's policies was to reduce still further the relative share of Abkhaz in the population of Abkhazia from about 28 percent in 1926 to 18 percent by 1939 (see Table 1). The changing ethnic composition of Abkhazia was reflected in the composition of the Abkhaz Communist Party, since many of the new settlers were party members. Thus, the most dramatic reduction in the share of Abkhaz in the party occurred in 1929-30, from 28.3 to 18.5 percent (Table 2). The percentage of Abkhaz party members continued to decline steadily from 1936 until the late 1950s, reaching

Table 1. Ethnic composition of the Abkhaz autonomous republic (in percent)

Year	Abkhaz	Georgians	Russians	Armenians
1926	27.8	33.6	6.2	12.8
1939	18.0	29.5	19.3	15.9
1959	15.1	39.1	21.4	15.9
1970	15.9	40.0	19.1	11.4
1979	17.1	43.9	16.4	15.1

Source: R.K. Grdzeldze, *Mezhnatsional'noe obshchenie v razvitom sotsialisticheskoi obshchestve*, (Tbilisi, 1980), pp. 102-103.

a low of 13.3 percent in 1950. The Georgians, on the other hand, have always been overrepresented in the Abkhaz party organization, comprising over 50 percent since 1950.

Table 2. Ethnic composition of the Abkhaz Communist Party (in percent)

Year	Abkhaz	Georgians	Russians	Armenians
1923	10.0	40.4	35.0	4.6
1926	25.4	33.3	24.8	6.7
1929	28.3	24.9	24.5	8.8
1931	18.5	25.3	36.8	9.1
1935	17.6	25.0	35.2	11.4
1936	21.8	26.3	29.1	11.2
1937	19.7	26.8	26.1	11.4
1938	16.9	27.2	28.1	11.8
1939	15.6	36.2	22.1	13.2
1940	16.7	42.7	16.7	15.2
1945	14.8	45.2	17.8	12.7
1950	13.3	51.0	15.5	14.0
1955	13.3	54.8	13.7	12.9
1960	14.4	51.3	15.6	12.4
1965	15.5	50.5	15.1	12.4
1970	16.8	50.5	14.4	11.9
1975	17.6	50.3	14.5	11.3
1978	18.2	50.9	14.2	10.5
1979	18.2	51.0	14.1	10.5
1980	18.5	51.2	13.8	10.3
1981	18.9	51.2	13.8	10.1

All figures as of 1 January, with the exception of 1923, which were from October. Source: *Abkhazskaia oblastnaia organizatsiia kompartii Gruzii v tsifrakh, 1921-1980*, (Sukhumi, 1980).

The period after World War II until Stalin's (and Beria's) death in 1953 was an especially harsh one for the Abkhaz, as Beria launched a campaign apparently designed to obliterate the Abkhaz as a cultural entity. A so-called "reorganization" of the educational system abolished all schools where the language of instruction was Abkhaz.⁷ Abkhaz students were thus forced to attend Russian or Georgian schools. Abkhaz language radio broadcasts ceased, and Abkhaz journals stopped publication. District-level newspapers, which were published in Abkhaz, also were eliminated.⁸ Beyond that, thousands of Russians and Georgians continued to migrate to

Abkhazia. Special land grants were issued in Tbilisi allowing Georgian collective farmers to settle in the Abkhaz coastal districts.⁹ The results of the anti-Abkhaz campaign on the local party leadership can be seen in the statistics from 1949 presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Abkhaz representation in local party organs (in percent)

Party posts	1949	1963	1978
Province committee	na	na	39.4
City and district first secretaries	4.0	30.0	37.5
Heads of party departments: province, city, and district	28.0	40.0	45.0

Source: Georgian Central Committee resolution on Abkhazia, *Sovetskaia Abkhaziiia*, 24 May 1978.

The policies of the late 1940s and early 1950s were reversed after Stalin's death. Beria's campaign of overt cultural discrimination against the Abkhaz ended in 1953. The Georgian authorities adopted a decree reopening Abkhaz schools; by 1966 there were 39 such schools, and by 1978 the number had more than doubled, to 91 Abkhaz schools.¹⁰ Apparently, though, instruction in Abkhaz extends only through the first three grades and then is replaced by Russian.¹¹ In the 1950s the authorities also announced a policy designed to expand the training of Abkhaz cadres for educational, political and economic posts. Abkhaz-language radio broadcasts, journals, and newspapers were reestablished as well over the next few years.¹²

The Abkhaz were also able to reassert themselves politically in the post-Stalin period. Among local party officials and the apparat, the Abkhaz were, in fact, overrepresented by the 1960s (Table 3). There was apparently a policy in Abkhazia to promote Abkhaz officials at the expense of representatives of other ethnic groups. In 1973 Georgian officials criticized the fact that "in Abkhazia a half-baked 'theory' according to which responsible posts should be filled only by the representatives of the indigenous nationality has gained a certain currency. . . . But no one has been given the right to ignore the national composition of the population or to disregard the continual exchange of cadres among nations and the interests of all nationalities."¹³ Abkhazia, from the late 1950s through the early 1970s, was one of the few non-Russian administrative units in the

Soviet Union to have both its first and second party secretaries drawn from the native population.¹⁴

CULTURAL ISSUES AND THE LANGUAGE QUESTION

The sole official language of Georgia is Georgian, not Russian, and this presents special problems for the Abkhaz. Abkhaz is a language unrelated to Georgian or Russian.¹⁵ Relatively few Abkhaz speak Georgian — only 1.4 percent, according to the 1979 census. Even fewer Georgians living in Abkhazia know Abkhaz — 0.3 percent. Instead, both groups tend to learn Russian as a second language. Fully 75 percent of the Abkhaz claim a fluency in Russian, while 56 percent of the Georgians in Abkhazia have the same facility.¹⁶ From this it is apparent that almost 25% of the Abkhaz and 44% of the Georgians living in Abkhazia are unable to communicate with one another. In line with the ethnic composition of the population, the Abkhaz republic has three official languages — Abkhaz, Georgian, and Russian.

The language barrier has made it extremely difficult for Abkhaz students to receive higher education in the republic, thus hindering the development of native specialists for leading posts in Abkhazia. The best educational institutions in Tbilisi (this is especially true of Tbilisi State University) use Georgian as the chief language of instruction, though some technical courses are apparently taught in Russian. Entrance examinations in Georgian present an even larger obstacle to Abkhaz candidates, and they reduce Abkhaz representation in the republic's institutes and universities.

Few educational opportunities were available in Abkhazia itself. Until 1979, it had no university of its own despite frequent verbal promises by officials that one would be established in Sukhumi. Many of the best Abkhaz students were forced to seek admission to universities outside of Georgia, mostly in the Russian republic. In the 1960/61 academic year 27 percent of all Abkhaz students were obtaining an education outside of Georgia. Figures available for 1966/67 show that over one-third of all Abkhaz university students were enrolled in institutions outside the republic. Comparable figures for Georgian students were 10 percent in 1960 and only one in eight for 1966.¹⁷

That these obstacles have had a real impact on the access of Abkhaz students to higher education is apparent from statistical data. After Abkhaz enrollments increased dramatically in 1966 and 1967, they began to decline through 1977 (Table 4). While the Abkhaz have done well when compared to national averages in

Table 4. Abkhaz enrollments in institutions of higher education

Academic year	Number enrolled
1960/61	1100
1962/63	1300
1963/64	1400
1965/66	1600
1966/67	2200
1967/68	2500
1968/69	2100
1969/70	2200
1970/71	1900
1972/73	1900
1974/75	1800
1976/77	1800
1980/81	2600

Sources: *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR*, various years; *Vysshee obrazovanie v SSSR*, (Moscow, 1961); *Strana sovetov za 50 let*, (Moscow, 1967); *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR za 60 let*, (Moscow, 1977); *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR, 1922-1982*, (Moscow, 1982).

Table 5. Number of Abkhaz scientists and scholars

Year	Number of scientists
1950	15
1958	69
1960	84
1965	165
1970	208
1975	249
1979	251

Sources: same as Table 4.

admissions to higher education, especially considering the rural composition of the population, their immediate reference group is the Georgian people. Georgians are second only to the Jews as the most overrepresented ethnic group in higher education, perhaps aided in part by the fact that the language barrier is so effective in preventing admission to Georgian universities by other nationalities. This undoubtedly is a source for Abkhaz resentment.

The Abkhaz also experienced difficulties as a group in gaining access to postgraduate education. In 1975, there were only 34 Abkhaz graduate students in all of the Soviet Union.¹⁸ As a result, few Abkhaz are represented among the nation's scientists and scholars (Table 5). From 1975 to 1979, the number of Abkhaz scientific employees essentially remained the same.

ECONOMIC ISSUES

When viewed alongside the rest of the Georgian republic, Abkhazia and the Abkhaz have remained relatively undeveloped and underprivileged. Abkhazia is less industrialised than the rest of the republic, and it lags behind Georgia in most economic indicators. The agricultural sector is larger in Abkhazia than in Georgia as a whole (33.2 percent versus 28 percent of total employment in 1978), and industry is less prevalent (13.7 percent versus 19.5 percent).¹⁹ The overall rate of industrial growth in Abkhazia since 1940 has been considerably less than that of the Georgian republic, despite the fact that Abkhazia in 1940 had the "advantages of backwardness" and was far less developed than the rest of the republic (Table 6).

The Abkhaz, on the whole, appear to have benefited less from the development of Abkhazia than have other ethnic groups. Indirect evidence for this can be seen by comparing the class structure of the

Table 6. Relative volume of industrial output, base year = 1940

	1940	1965	1970	1975	1980
Abkhazia	1	4.1	6.5	8.8	12
Georgia	1	5.5	8.4	12	16

Source: Ashuba (1982), p. 31.

Georgians and the Abkhaz (Table 7). The Abkhaz in 1970 had a greater percentage of their population in the collective farm peasant category than any other major Soviet ethnic group with the exception of the Moldavians.²⁰

Table 7. Class structure of the Georgians and Abkhaz, 1939 and 1970

Nationality	Workers		White collar		Kolkhoz peasants	
	1939	1970	1939	1970	1939	1970
Georgians	13.9	40.9	17.9	26.4	58.5	32.6
Abkhaz	5.7	30.1	10.6	19.0	77.8	50.7

Source: Grdzelidze (1980), p. 126.

Trends apparent in the 1970s showed that the gap between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia was being maintained in most areas, not "drawing together" as dictated by the official goal of Soviet nationality policy.

Inadequate rates of investment seem to be behind these trends. The main sectors of the Abkhaz economy are agriculture, food processing (over 70 percent of industrial output in 1975), and tourism. Much of the investment for these sectors is not allocated from Moscow, but is channeled through Tbilisi, and Abkhazia has done relatively poorly in the competition for investment funds. The state budget for Abkhazia, an important source of centralized investment, has been about 40 percent lower than that of the Georgian republic when measured on a per capita basis. The rate of increase in capital investment between the ninth and tenth five year plans (in the 1970s) for Georgia as a whole was 39.2 percent; for Abkhazia the increase was only 21 percent.²¹ What this means in practical terms is that factories in Abkhazia are more likely to have obsolete or obsolescent technology. A recent survey of industrial enterprises in Abkhazia found that almost 58 percent of their employees were engaged primarily in manual labor. Throughout the 1970s, labor productivity in Abkhazia lagged behind that of Georgia as a whole by between 15 and 20 percent.²²

Another issue of concern to the Abkhaz goes beyond the problem of inadequate investment; they see a net outflow of resources from Abkhazia which primarily benefits Georgians. The most glaring

example of this is the forestry industry. Intensive lumber operations have caused considerable environmental damage to the Abkhaz countryside. Water and air pollution have also become a significant problem, one which threatens to undermine the status of Abkhazia as a leading resort area.

THE EVENTS OF 1978

1978 was a watershed year in Georgia for ethnic protests and demonstrations. The specific trigger for these events was the controversy surrounding the adoption of new constitutions for the republic and the autonomous republics. Both for the Georgians and the Abkhaz, the constitutional drafting process proved to be a catalyst for focusing attention on perceived ethnic inequities and the erosion of national identity.²³

In Abkhazia, the drafting of a new constitution engendered a protest letter by 130 prominent Abkhaz intellectuals addressed to the Central Committee and the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Among the signers were a number of party members, including a few in responsible positions. In general, the letter complained about the status of the Abkhaz in Abkhazia and blamed Georgian leaders for pursuing a "Beria-ite" policy aimed at the Georgians of the republic.

The protest letter also implicitly attacked the local Abkhaz political leadership, and the party first secretary, V. Khintba, reacted in kind. At a meeting of the Abkhaz party *aktiv* on March 18, Khintba rebuked the letter and its supporters. In a vitriolic speech Khintba accused the protestors of writing "an apolitical, slanderous letter distorting both the essence and meaning of the course of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia in relation to the Abkhaz republic . . . and the work of the province committee in regulating nationality relations in the autonomous republic." It was, he argued, "an attempt to mislead the CPSU Central Committee in relation to the state of the socio-political and moral situation" in Abkhazia. Khintba denied point-by-point the contentions raised in the letter on cultural and political discrimination, and he labelled most as lies or provocations. Khintba also charged that some signatures had been forged or obtained under false pretenses.²⁴ According to a Georgian *samizdat* account of events in Abkhazia at this time, many of the letter's supporters were expelled from the party and forced out of their positions.²⁵

The ethnic protest in Abkhazia was not confined to signing petitions. The spring of 1978 was marked by demonstrations and a

general disintegration of public order, apparently stimulated by the intransigence of local authorities. Georgian historical and cultural monuments were defaced. In a well-organized operation that took place one night, all road signs in Georgian were painted over with tar and windows or other signs with Georgian inscriptions were broken. In one typical incident, slogans including "Down with the Georgian language" and calling it a "dog language" were reportedly painted in a Georgian school in Gagra.²⁶ There were claims of random attacks by Abkhaz on Georgians living in Abkhazia, including several killings.²⁷

There were also, according to unofficial accounts, major political protests in Sukhumi and other cities. The largest concert and public meeting hall in Sukhumi, the Philharmonia, was reportedly occupied for three days and three nights by protestors who gathered from all over Abkhazia to demand revisions in the new constitution. The authorities eventually restored order and made a number of arrests. They resisted the temptation to call in the army, however, and violence was avoided. There were also major demonstrations in the village of Lykhny in the Gudauta district, which reportedly attracted 12,000 people.²⁸

Khintba, the Abkhaz first secretary since 1975, was forced out of his position in mid-April. (He later served for a brief period as head of the Department for Foreign Ties of the Georgian Central Committee.) Subsequent accounts by party leaders obviously blame Khintba for rising popular disenchantment among the Abkhaz. The Abkhaz province bureau, according to one authoritative statement, "did not take into account the advice of higher organs on the need for an attentive, careful, and principled approach to studying and reviewing the proposals raised, and committed a number of flagrant errors, not distinguishing questions demanding explanations and decisions from questions put forward mistakenly."²⁹ In other words, Khintba had gone too far in denying that the Abkhaz had legitimate complaints. Thus, as the Georgian first secretary Shevardnadze put it, the Abkhaz leadership failed to be "close to the people, share their interests, and have full control over the situation."³⁰ Khintba was replaced by another Abkhaz, Boris Adleiba, serving at the time as first deputy chairman of the Abkhaz republic Council of Ministers.³¹

The Politburo considered events in Abkhazia serious enough to send a high-level delegation headed by I.V. Kapitonov, at the time head of the Central Committee's Organizational Party Work Department and a secretary of the Central Committee. He arrived in the latter part of May 1978 and spoke before a meeting of the Abkhaz party *aktiv* which had been called to examine the course of the discussion on the new constitution.³² Kapitonov acknowledged

that the Central Committee and Supreme Soviet had received a large volume of letters, telegrams, and petitions critical of Abkhaz and Georgian officials. The Central Committee studied complaints relating to the neglect of the Abkhaz language and culture, errors in the training of Abkhaz cadres, disputes over place names, and differences in historical interpretation, and found that "some have a definite basis." He announced that a "whole system of measures" had been worked out by party and state organs to correct the situation.

Kapitonov rejected two concrete proposals that were apparently advanced by a number of Abkhaz party members. One would have added a provision to the constitution giving Abkhazia the right to secede from Georgia and attach itself to the Russian republic. This, he argued, would not conform to the Soviet constitution and "will benefit neither the Abkhaz nor the people of other nationalities who populate your republic." Another proposal would have eliminated Georgian as an official language in Abkhazia. This was rejected as "contradicting Leninist nationality policy." Such proposals, he argued, attempt to set one nationality against another and this "only plays into the hands of our opponents."³³ Approval of the new Abkhaz constitution was delayed as a result of these developments. The Abkhaz Supreme Soviet was scheduled to meet on 26 May to review the draft; it was not convened until 6 June.³⁴

Several important personnel changes were also made at this time. The chief of the Abkhaz republic KGB and the Minister of Internal Affairs were both "transferred to other work" in mid-May. The new Minister of the Interior, the official responsible for the uniformed police, was a Russian brought in from Moscow.³⁵ Changes were also made in the leadership of the Gagra city and Gudauta district party organization.³⁶ In the case of Gagra, the local party plenum elected another Georgian to the post of first secretary. Four hours later, as word of this spread among the Abkhaz, a crowd gathered outside party headquarters demanding that an Abkhaz be named to that position. They reportedly stayed all night, and the next morning Shevardnadze himself arrived to intervene in the matter. Another plenum was convened (without a quorum), and a new, Abkhaz first secretary was chosen.³⁷

POLICY RESPONSE

The principal policy responses to the events in Abkhazia were contained in important resolutions on Abkhazia issued by the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party and by the

CPSU Central Committee and the Council of Ministers. The former resolution, as Shevardnadze admitted some months later, was adopted "following the instructions of the CPSU Central Committee."³⁸ The Georgian resolution was not published in the republic press; a detailed version appeared only in the Abkhaz newspapers, perhaps out of concern that its provisions would provoke resentment among Georgians in the rest of the republic.³⁹ It was said to have been adopted on 21 April, just after the new Abkhaz leadership had been installed, but the text was not published until 24 May.⁴⁰ The CPSU and Council of Ministers resolution was adopted on 1 June and provided instructions to national ministries whose actions were necessary to implement the Georgian resolution.⁴¹

The Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party created a special commission headed by the republic second secretary at the time, G.V. Kolbin (who is a Russian), to follow up on implementation problems. This group met monthly in Sukhumi and other Abkhaz cities and submitted regular reports to the Central Committee secretariat.⁴²

The resolutions provided for considerable new investment and policy changes apparently designed to meet the complaints voiced by Abkhaz nationalists. All in all, the package of economic and cultural measures put together in Tbilisi and Moscow had a cost of approximately 500 million rubles. This represents funds to be used by 1985 which went beyond previous budgetary allocations to Abkhazia.⁴³ In early 1985, the Bureau of the Georgian Communist Party examined the progress made in fulfilling the previous measures and outlined additional funding priorities. These were quickly adopted in a new Georgian Central Committee and Council of Minister decision on the socio-economic development of Abkhazia in the next five-year plan.⁴⁴

1. CULTURAL POLICY

The 1978 resolutions set in motion the process for turning the Sukhumi Pedagogical Institute into the Abkhaz State University in 1979, thus providing additional educational opportunities for Abkhaz students. The change in status was accompanied by a major expansion, from 265 students in 1978 to 3700 by 1983, with an instructional staff of 500. New programs were opened in law, accounting, economics, and physics, among others. Physical expansion plans included a new classroom building, laboratories, dormitories, and a sports complex. Classes are offered in three languages, including Abkhaz and Georgian, though presumably Russian is the

most widely used.⁴⁵ One Georgian *samizdat* account complained that Georgian sections were not being created in all departments and that a major change in the composition of the student body to favor the Abkhaz was underway to satisfy "Abkhaz extremists".⁴⁶

Provisions were also adopted to allow Abkhaz students greater access to higher education outside of Abkhazia. In late May 1978, the Georgian Central Committee and Council of Ministers approved a request by Abkhaz officials to allow some students to take entrance examinations in Russian at republic institutions of higher education. Instruction would also be provided in Russian for this group. Other students would be admitted outside the competitive examination system. The reasons for this were stated explicitly: the shortage of Abkhaz cadres and the presence of the language barrier.⁴⁷ Between 1978 and 1980, over 500 students from Abkhazia were admitted to universities in Tbilisi and outside the republic without having to compete through entrance examinations.⁴⁸ It is not known how many of these students were ethnic Abkhaz, since Georgians and Russians living in Abkhazia could also presumably take advantage of the program. In 1983, however, Shevardnadze revealed that higher educational institutions in Georgia had allocated a set number of spaces "for representatives of small ethnic groups."⁴⁹ Thus, quotas based on purely ethnic criteria were established. Enrollment figures for higher education in 1980/81 show a major increase in the number of Abkhaz students (see Table 4).

Other measures were taken to increase the visibility of Abkhaz culture. Local television broadcasts in Abkhaz began in November 1978 using mobile facilities, and 7.5 million rubles were allotted to construct new television and radio studios in Sukhumi.⁵⁰ In publishing, a decision was made to increase the volume of books published in Abkhaz, and two new Abkhaz journals on art and education began to appear.⁵¹ A young people's dance ensemble was upgraded to become the State Folk Dance Ensemble of Abkhazia.⁵² The theater in Sukhumi, which previously included both Abkhaz and Georgian performing groups, was divided into two separate theaters. The Abkhaz group was given the higher status of State Dramatic Theater, while the Georgian company was left without a place to perform until a new theater could be built.⁵³

One issue of special concern to the Abkhaz was the treatment of Abkhaz history by Georgian historians. The Georgian resolution called for the creation of a special commission on creating a textbook on the history of Georgia "relying on strictly scientific data." The final version would be reviewed by the Georgian Central Committee bureau itself.

2. ECONOMIC POLICY

Substantial amounts of new economic investment were channeled into Abkhazia as part of the 1978 program. Separate resolutions were adopted by the Georgian Central Committee to speed the social-economic development of regions of Abkhazia with special problems. The city of Tkvarcheli, for example, has experienced significant unemployment as a result of declining coal mining operations. New industry is to be sited in Tkvarcheli to "solve the problem of full employment of the local employable population."⁵⁴ New plans were also worked out for the Ochamchira and Gudauta districts. One of the most important enterprises in Sukhumi, the Sukhumi Instrument Factory, received major new funds from the Ministry of Instrument-Making, Automation, and Control Systems which effectively doubled its capacity and raised the level of mechanized labor to 70 percent.⁵⁵

A large portion of the new funding was designated for the construction of highways to relieve traffic congestion and air and noise pollution in the major coastal cities. Routes to bypass Sukhumi and Gagra were begun, with the latter costing almost 40 million rubles.⁵⁶ The Sukhumi airport was expanded to handle larger aircraft at a cost of 7 million rubles.⁵⁷ Additional construction projects included a new hospital, schools, a new government office building for Abkhaz republic officials, and hothouses for year-round vegetable growing.⁵⁸

The deforestation of Abkhazia was halted in 1979 by a high-level order closing down lumber operations in the republic.⁵⁹ A major program to replant over 13,000 hectares with new trees was initiated, and the territory set aside as forest preserves was increased by a factor of three. A new national park in Abkhazia containing over 100,000 hectares has also been promised.⁶⁰ Another provision of the 1978 resolutions was designed to combat the problem of pollution in Abkhazia. Republic and national ministries were ordered to stop their enterprises from discharging untreated effluents in cities or other population centers.

CONCLUSION

The strategy pursued by the authorities was one that was highly conciliatory to the Abkhaz. In essence, the Georgian leadership was forced to admit that many of the complaints made by Abkhaz nationalists were legitimate. Authors of the 1978 protest letter were reportedly readmitted to the party and returned to the posts from

which they had been removed.⁶¹ Extensive new investment for Abkhaz cultural and economic facilities was the most concrete result of their efforts. Changes in the political leadership of the Abkhaz republic also followed the protests.

The reaction by many Georgians, both within and outside Abkhazia, is that these measures are worse than unjustified concessions — many are perceived as discriminatory. Indeed, there have been allegations by Georgians that policy changes in Abkhazia have gone much beyond those outlined in published resolutions. One claim is that, in practice, Georgians are now prevented from moving to Abkhazia by a new rule which prohibits the registration of their internal passports there. It has also been said that Georgians are not allowed to build new homes at least in certain districts of Abkhazia, thus preventing grown children from starting their own households.⁶² Other allegations concern the work of the Abkhaz republic Ministry of Internal Affairs. A *samizdat* document apparently written by Georgian employees of the ministry claims that the new minister, a Russian transferred to that post in May 1978, has pursued a policy of promoting only non-Georgian officers, including many with dubious credentials. As a result, crimes by Abkhaz nationals are often covered up, especially cases of wrongdoing by Abkhaz police officials.⁶³ There have also been two cases in which apparently false criminal charges have been brought against Georgians living in Abkhazia who have spoken out against discrimination by the minority against the majority.⁶⁴

It is obvious that no solution exists to these problems which would satisfy both the Abkhaz and the Georgians. Both perceive the nationalist strivings of the other ethnic group as a threat to their own rights. This conflict is especially clear in language and cadre policies. The Georgian goal of maintaining their language against the encroachment of Russian restricts the rights of the Abkhaz to use their own language and their preferred second language, Russian. The fact that Abkhazia has the status of an autonomous republic combined with the traditional policy of "indigenisation" leads almost inevitably to the overrepresentation of the Abkhaz and underrepresentation of Georgians in positions of power. Quotas designed to help a disadvantaged minority restrict the opportunities available to other ethnic groups, a fact which has been openly acknowledged in Soviet publications.⁶⁵

At the same time, it is clear that a potentially explosive situation has been rather effectively defused. The Abkhaz, like the Georgians, have shown a willingness to engage in illegal, mass demonstrations to achieve political concessions. A strategy based on vigorous and violent repression, which characterized the Stalin and Khrushchev

periods, is apparently no longer considered effective by the Soviet leadership in such a situation. Instead, in the case of the Abkhaz, they responded with substantial economic and cultural concessions. What this implies for the question of political stability is that the Soviet authorities, when faced with ethnic tensions that reach the crisis stage, are capable of reacting in ways which prevent crises from becoming political disasters.

Whether the authorities in Moscow would act so benevolently in a case where Russians, and not Georgians, were the target of protests cannot be so easily answered. In such a case, there might be a stronger temptation to resort to coercion. Another factor differentiating the Abkhaz from other, major nationalities is their relatively small size. Could the authorities afford to be as generous to a much larger ethnic group? Perhaps not. On the other hand, the relatively low visibility of the Abkhaz may have led party leaders to ignore their protests until the crisis stage had been reached. A similar escalation of nationalism and political protest among a major ethnic group would probably draw the attention of the leadership at a much earlier stage and could result in preemptive measures such as those employed in the Abkhaz case — a combination of restrained coercion, personnel changes, cultural concessions, and economic largess.

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NOTES

1. Seweryn Bialer, *Stalin's Successors: Leadership, Stability, and Change in the Soviet Union*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 212.
2. Helene Carrere d'Encausse, *Decline of an Empire: the Soviet Socialist Republics in Revolt*, English Translation (New York: Newsweek Books, 1979), p. 275.
3. Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, "Ethnonationalism and Political Stability: The Soviet Case," *World Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (July 1984), p. 562.
4. All mosques were destroyed many years ago, but there are still mullahs, for the most part concentrated in the Gudauta district. See G.V. Smyr, *Islam v abkhazii i puti preodoleniia ego perezhitkov v sovremennykh usloviakh*, (Tbilisi, 1972), pp. 148–51, 170.
5. David Marshall Lang, *A Modern History of Soviet Georgia*, (New York: Grove Press, 1962).
6. Walter Kolarz, *Russia and Her Colonies*, reprint of 3rd. ed., (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1967), pp. 236–237; Lang, *op. cit.*, p. 256; Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), pp. 269, 299.

7. V.I. Karchava, *Abkhazskaia ASSR na etape stroitel'stva razvitoogo sotsializma (1945-1965 gg.)*, (Tbilisi, 1981), p. 138.
8. Karchava, *op. cit.*, p. 188.
9. Kolarz, *op. cit.*, p. 237.
10. *Sovetskaia Gruziiia k 50-letiiu velikoi oktiabr'skoi sotsialisticheskoi revoliutsii*. (Tbilisi, 1967), p. 224; *Sovetskaia Abkhaziia*, 24 May 1978.
11. 1981 letter by the Georgian writer Revaz Dzhaparidze in *Arkhiv samizdata*, No. 4638, p. 6.
12. Karchava, *op. cit.*, pp. 138, 153, 205-206.
13. *Zaria vostoka*, 27 April 1973, cited in Richard B. Dobson. "Georgia and the Georgians," *Handbook of Major Soviet Nationalities*. (New York: Free Press, 1975), pp. 185-185.
14. Carrere d'Encausse, *op. cit.*, p. 144.
15. The shifting emphasis from Georgianisation to Russification can be seen even in the alphabet used for written Abkhaz. In 1928 the roman alphabet was first used to create a written alphabet. The Georgian alphabet was substituted in 1938 at a time when most other alphabets were switched to Cyrillic, and this was replaced by Cyrillic (the Russian alphabet) in 1954. "Abkhazskii iazyk," in *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, 3rd. ed., Vol. 1 (Moscow, 1970), p. 45.
16. *Vestnik Statistiki*, No. 10 (1980), p. 68.
17. *Vyshee obrazovanie v SSSR*, (Moscow, 1961), pp. 85, 136; ~~Soviet~~ *sovetskoi* ~~na 50 let~~. (Moscow, 1967), pp. 280-81; *Sovetskaia Gruziiia k 50-letiiu velikoi oktiabr'skoi sotsialisticheskoi revoliutsii*, (Tbilisi, 1967), p. 233.
18. *Narodnoe obrazovanie, nauka i kul'tura v SSSR*. Moscow, 1977, p. 313.
19. B.Sh. Ashuba, N.E. Bushina, A.R. Gulia and R.M. Lagvarva. *Problemy razvitiia regional'nogo khoziaistvennogo kompleksa Abkhazskoi ASSR*. (Tbilisi, 1982), p. 55.
20. R.K. Grdzeldze, *Mezhnatsional'noe obshchestvo v SSSR i sotsialisticheskome obshchestve*, (Tbilisi, 1980), p. 126.
21. Ashuba *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 27, 61, 68.
22. Ashuba *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 22, 213.
23. For a discussion of the events in Georgia, see Ronald Grigor Suny, "Georgia and Soviet Nationality Policy," in Stephen F. Cohen, Alexander Rabinowitch, and Robert Sharlet, eds., *The Soviet Union Since Stalin*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp. 200-226.
24. *Sovetskaia Abkhaziia*, 21 March 1978.
25. 1981 "appeal" from prison by Boris Kakubava. *Arkhiv samizdata*, No. 5233, p. 2.
26. 1981 letter of protest by Boris Kakubava. *Arkhiv samizdata*, No. 5232, pp. 5-6.
27. 1981 "Demands of the Georgian People," *Arkhiv samizdata*, No. 4639, p. 2.
28. *The New York Times*, 25 June 1978.
29. From the Georgian Central Committee resolution on Abkhazia, *Sovetskaia Abkhaziia*, 24 May 1978.
30. *Zaria vostoka*, 16 January 1979.
31. Born in 1931, Adleiba was trained in law and held district and city party first secretary posts from 1971 to 1977. *Zaria vostoka*, 20 April 1978.
32. *Sovetskaia Abkhaziia*, 23 May 1978.
33. *Zaria vostoka*, 26 May 1978.
34. *Sovetskaia Abkhaziia*, 16 May 1978 and 6 June 1978.
35. *Sovetskaia Abkhaziia*, 19 May 1978.
36. *Sovetskaia Abkhaziia*, 24 May 1978.
37. As recounted in a 1981 "appeal" from prison by Gagra party member, Boris Kakubava, *Arkhiv samizdata*, No. 5233, pp. 3-4.
38. *Zaria vostoka*, 16 January 1979.

39. *Sovetskaia Abkhaziia*, 24 May 1978.
40. *Sovetskaia Abkhaziia*, 23 May 1978.
41. *Zaria vostoka*, 7 June 1978 and 17 February 1985.
42. *Zaria vostoka*, 10 September 1981: Gogokhiia, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
43. *Zaria vostoka*, 15 May 1981.
44. *Zaria vostoka*, 17 February 1985 and 19 April 1985.
45. D.V. Gogokhiia and A.E. Kuprava. *Vklad trudiashchikhsia Abkhazskoi ASSR v razvitie ekonomiki i kul'tury sovetskoi Gruzii, 1971-1982 gg.*, (Tbilisi, 1982), pp. 70-71; *Pravda*, 24 February 1980; *Zaria vostoka*, 31 May 1983 and 17 March 1985.
46. May 1979 letter by the writer Revaz Dzhaparidze. *Arkhiv samizdata*, No. 4638, pp. 5-6.
47. *Sovetskaia Abkhaziia*, 20 May 1978.
48. Gogokhiia and Kuprava. *op. cit.*, p. 71.
49. *Zaria vostoka*, 12 July 1983.
50. *Zaria vostoka*, 31 May 1983.
51. *Zaria vostoka*, 15 May 1981 and 2 August 1984.
52. *Zaria vostoka*, 3 September 1980.
53. Gogokhiia and Kuprava. *op. cit.*, p. 91; 1981 letter on disturbances in Georgia, *Arkhiv samizdata*, No. 4640, p. 1.
54. Gogokhiia and Kuprava. *op. cit.*, pp. 23, 29.
55. *Zaria vostoka*, 30 January 1979 and 31 May 1983.
56. Gogokhiia and Kuprava. *op. cit.*, p. 29; *Zaria vostoka*, 22 January 1985 and 23 February 1985.
57. *Zaria vostoka*, 31 May 1983.
58. *Zaria vostoka*, 7 June 1978; 12 June 1981; 31 May 1983.
59. *Zaria vostoka*, 17 November 1978.
60. *Zaria vostoka*, 31 May 1983.
61. 1981 "appeal" by Boris Kakubava. *Arkhiv samizdata*, No. 5233, pp. 2-3.
62. 1981 "Demands of the Georgian People." *Arkhiv samizdata*, No. 4639, p. 2.
63. 1981 document "On the Work of the MVD of the Abkhaz ASSR," *Arkhiv samizdata*, No. 5263, pp. 1-4.
64. The cases of Markoziiia and Kakubava, discussed in *Arkhiv samizdata*, No. 4415 and 5233.
65. See the material cited in Lapidus. *op. cit.*, pp. 569-570.