

Abkhazia and Georgia on the Verge of Independence (1917 - 1921)

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Abstract

Abkhazia and Georgia have confronted each other in every period when the cards were shuffled in the history of the Caucasus. One of these challenges came at a time when the Romanov dynasty in Russia was ending and the independence-hopes of the peoples of imperial Russia were blooming. Including many Georgian intellectuals and politicians, large Caucasian masses idealised a Great Caucasian Confederation as the only solution to save the Caucasus from Russian imperialism. However, the chauvinistic Georgians, who could not understand that they could not be free until the whole Caucasus was liberated, again played a facilitating role in Russia's domination of the Caucasus. We witnessed a similar scene when the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was disintegrating in 1991. The events that this article reveals and which took place between the years 1918-1921 will sound extremely familiar to those who have witnessed what has happened since 1991 in Abkhazia, because the path followed by the chauvinist Georgian policies in the period after 1991 was not very different from the path followed in the period of 1918-1921. The article aims to draw the attention of the reader to the exemplary resemblance between what happened during the period of the existence of an opportunity for independence when the Russian monarchy collapsed and the experiences of the recent past and the present. Those who have witnessed the last thirty years will understand the striking similarity between the period on which the article focuses and what is happening today, and how historical scholarship sheds light on our future.

Keywords; Abkhazia, the Abaza, the Republic of the North Caucasian Mountaineers Union, the Caucasian Confederation, Georgia, Menshevik Georgians, Bolshevism, the Russian Revolution

While the Romanov dynasty had fallen into the course of collapse in the early 1900s, Abkhazia, living a completely rural life, remained alien to most of the events taking place in Russia. The revolutionary ideologies that Alexander Herzen had spread found supporters in Georgian society through liberal nationalists such as Niko Nikoladze.[1] A few intellectuals among the Caucasian Mountaineers who were educated in the well-known ideological centres of the Russian empire and who had the opportunity to be more integrated into the events in Russia were also struggling to ensure that the Caucasian Mountaineers would not be left out of this process. Wassan Girey Jabagiev in his article published in the St. Petersburg *Vedomosti* newspaper stated that the arrogant Russification policies of the tsarist regime, with its lawlessness, and bureaucracy that denied individuals and even entire nations, had aroused national consciousness and nationalist sentiments in the border-regions of the empire. Jabagiev also emphasised that, if the revolutionaries succeeded in capturing Daghestan and Chechnya, the once majestic strongholds of Imam Shamil, they would not be obliged to re-conquer the Caucasus. In another article published in the same newspaper two weeks later, as if to denounce Jabagiev, Georgian Menshevik Mikhail Mirianishvili was claiming that the turmoil in the Caucasus was caused by so-called Muslim separatists who acted entirely under the influence of the Young Turks.[2] Mirianishvili's approach alone was

a striking example of the effort of Georgian chauvinism to dominate all independence-attempts when Russia's immune system was weak and the opportunity for independence for the Caucasian peoples had been aroused. Contrary to the chauvinistic Georgian approaches, the Caucasian Mountaineers in this period not only unified against Russian imperialism but also established strategic partnerships with other Caucasian peoples to save the entire Caucasus from the Russian yoke.

When the initiative called the Caucasus Committee was established in Istanbul by the leading figures of the North Caucasian immigration during the First World War, Georgian figures such as Kamil Tavdgiridze and Prince Giorgi Machabelli were also included in that committee. A delegation of the Committee, that included Aziz Meker, an Abaza intellectual, and also the Georgian figures together went to European capitals such as Vienna and Berlin to hold talks and requested support from the representatives of the Central Powers for the independence of the Caucasus.[3] The initiative was also supported by the Ottoman intelligence service, where the North Caucasians immigrants were very influential and the delegation was furnished with broad diplomatic powers.[4] These efforts were rewarded with the following statement of the German Foreign Minister Gottlieb von Jagow;

“As a proof of its sincere interest in the cause of independence of the Caucasus, the Imperial Government from the very beginning of the war was in contact with organizations aiming to establish a confederation of independent states to liberate the Caucasus from the Russian yoke, and is ready to support the peoples of the Caucasus for the realization of their national ideals and the establishment of an independent Caucasian state.”[5]

As the outcome of these contacts, the Caucasian Committee was given the right to select personnel to form the core army of the future Caucasian state among the prisoners-of-war of Caucasian origin in the hands of the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires. The prisoner-of-war status of the chosen ones would end and they would be released.[6] After the Committee representatives returned to Istanbul, severe disagreements arose between the North Caucasian and Georgian members. The Georgians, thinking that the Germans, rather than the Ottomans, were a more suitable partner for their independence, undermined the cooperation. Despite such a Georgian manoeuvre, the North Caucasus immigrants voluntarily teamed up with the Ottoman forces to contribute to the liberation of Georgia.[7] The leading figures of the North Caucasus immigration in Istanbul conveyed a similar offer to the Germans, but the Germans, who were making insidious plans against their Ottoman Empire ally by using the Georgians, rejected such an offer.[8] The 3rd Conference of Nationalities, which was held in Lausanne in 1916, was another important opportunity to start a common struggle for the liberation of the Caucasus from Russian imperialism.[9] The North Caucasus delegation was presided over by Prof. Aziz Meker at this conference. There, the Georgians again pursued their priorities instead of joining in a block with other Caucasian nations, and the opportunity to form a single front against Russian imperialism was missed once again due to their attitudes.[10]

With the February Revolution, the monarchical system collapsed. Meetings and conferences were held, and enslaved nations started to discuss the options for future road-maps. Naturally, North Caucasian Mountaineers, with similar concerns, were holding congresses

one after the other to seek ways to overcome the chaotic days most safely, in close contact with each other and with neighbouring peoples. They formed an overarching structure called the Provisional Central Committee of the Union of the Mountaineers and decided to hold a congress in Vladikavkaz on 1 May 1917 (O[ld] S[tyle]), with the participation of authorised representatives of all Mountain elements.[11] The National Democrat fraction of the Georgians, unlike their Menshevik compatriots, followed a more friendly policy with other Caucasian nations and tried to find ways to establish a common future with them. They organised a conference in Vladikavkaz on 9 May 1917, with the participation of representatives of Mountaineers and Azerbaijan, to prepare the ground for the formation of a possible Caucasian Confederation.[12] Although we have not yet been able to obtain any concrete evidence regarding the outcomes of this conference, it is understood through the German archival documents that projects of the Georgian National Democrats for initiating anti-Russian rebellions in the Caucasus were not considered reliable enough by the Germans. Hence, it may be presumed that the conference did not have any practical results.[13]

After the first congress held in Vladikavkaz in May, the Mountaineers decided to hold the second congress in Andi on 20 August 1917 (OS) to make more tangible decisions and invited their Georgian neighbours to this congress. While no response was received from the Menshevik Georgians, Shalva Amiredzhibi, one of the prominent figures of the National Democrats, attended the event in Andi. One of the items on the agenda at the congress in Andi was rapprochement with the Georgian people and eliminating the misunderstandings between the Mountain people living in the region and the Georgians.[14] Shalva Amiredzhibi, who was deeply impressed by the determination of the Mountaineers to free themselves from the yoke of Russian imperialism, talked about the majestic atmosphere in Andi in an article he wrote during his years in Paris immigration.[15] The well-known political figure and cleric of the North Caucasus, Najmudin Gotsinski, who was elected as the Mufti of all Mountaineers at the Andi Congress, in an interview, instructed the public to be careful not to harm any Georgians in such a chaotic and anarchic environment.[16] Since the Andi Congress ended without the desired outcomes, a second congress was held soon after in Vladikavkaz, on 21 September 1917 (OS). The Abkhazian representatives who attended the Second Congress of the Caucasian Mountaineers in Vladikavkaz applied to join the Union of Mountaineers, and their accession was confirmed unanimously by the participants of the congress.[17]

Meanwhile, on 25 October 1917 (OS), the Bolsheviks seized power in Petrograd, which went down in history as the "Great Russian Revolution". Without wasting time, just the day after the revolution, Lenin declared Russia's withdrawal from the First World War and started negotiations with the Central Powers in Brest-Litovsk, where the German headquarters was located, on 22 December 1917. The Brest-Litovsk treaty did not please the Transcaucasian nations, and neither did the Georgians. During the negotiations started on 14 March 1918, in Trebizond, the Transcaucasian Sejm was presided over by the Georgian leader Akaki Chkhenkeli, while the Ottoman delegation was headed by Rauf Bey (Orbay), an Ottoman statesman of Abaza origin. Chkhenkeli had claims on the Ottoman-Georgian border to be drawn as per the treaty of 1914 according to the pre-war Ottoman-Russian frontier and insisted that they would not resile from their demands on Batumi. Rauf Bey, on the other hand, insisted that since the Transcaucasian Sejm had not declared independence, they were subject to the articles of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty.[18] The parties did not in any way step back

from their demands, and the Trebizond talk ended without any specific results. The representatives of the Sejm-delegation returned to Tbilisi to evaluate the situation and to find a way out from such a vicious circle.

The Transcaucasian Sejm declared independence and announced the newborn Federal Transcaucasian Republic on 22 April 1918. The Government, headed by Akaki Chkhenkeli, decided to carry on the talks with the Ottoman side in Batumi on 26 April 1918. The negotiations that started in Batumi on 11 May 1918 had reached a dead-end from the very first day due to the disagreements between the parties. Pleasing the Menshevik Georgians, the German Ambassador to Moscow, Count von Mirbach, manipulated the Soviet Foreign Commissar Chicherin and requested him to send a representative to Batumi to participate in the talks.[19] The Menshevik Georgian administration was relying on the Bolsheviks to implement their plans in the region. Due to the uncertainty between the Central Powers and the Transcaucasian Government and the growing Bolshevik danger, the North Caucasian delegation declared the independence of the Republic of the Union of the Mountaineers of the North Caucasus on the same day. On the map presented with the declaration of independence, Abkhazia, which at the 2nd Congress of Mountain Peoples linked its fate with the Union of North Caucasian Mountaineers, was also included within the borders of the young republic.[20] The declaration of independence of the Republic of the Union of the North Caucasian Mountaineers was followed by successive agreements with the representatives of the Ottoman and German empires. The clauses of the agreement were as follows:[21]

“The Imperial German government on the one hand and the government of the Republic of Mountaineers of the Caucasus on the other, deciding to establish friendly relations between their countries on legal, economic and political grounds, have concluded among themselves the following:

Contract:

- 1. A permanent peace and indestructible friendship are established between the Imperial German government and the government of the Republic of the Mountaineers of the Caucasus.*
- 2. The Imperial German Government undertakes to come to the aid of the government of the Republic of the Mountaineers of the Caucasus by armed force if the latter will ask to ensure peace and tranquillity in his country.*

Note: Representation of the specified armed force up to two battalions should follow if the circumstances so require and before the ratification of this treaty.

- 3. Given the conclusion of this treatise, in the absence of any agreements, conditions, acts, and other legal relations of international nature between the Imperial German government and the Government of the Republic of the Mountaineers of the Caucasus, both contracting parties contracted to conclude a consular convention, a commercial treaty and other acts that are not finding it necessary for the establishment of legal and economic relations. The Consular Convention will be concluded two years from the date of the exchange of ratifications. During this transitional period, the Consul*

General, Consul, and the vice-consuls of the said states shall enjoy, in respect of their privileges and duties, favoured nation position based on international law.

4. *Until the Republic of the Mountaineers of the Caucasus enters the international postal telegraph union, postal and telegraphic relations between the German Empire and the Republic of the Mountaineers of the Caucasus will be established immediately after the exchange of ratifications of these contracts, according to the terms of the contracts, orders, and rules of the international postal telegraph union.*
5. *The Imperial German Government itself recognises the independence of the Republic of the Mountaineers of the Caucasus and provides diplomatic assistance to the recognition of this independence by other states.*
6. *The Imperial German Government likewise undertakes to render to the Government of the Mountaineers of the Caucasus support through diplomatic means to establish the borders of the republic based on the national principle, and in particular to the establishment in the north of the border, passing through Gelendzhik - Kubanskoje (20 versts north of Armavir), Stavropol, Svjatoi Krest (Karabalyk) the course and mouth of the Kuma River, and in the south of the border, passing along the Ingur River, along the main ridge of the Caucasus Mountains (along the watershed) and with the inclusion of the Zakatalskyj district and the Dagestan areas.*
7. *The number of German troops within the Republic cannot be increased without the consent of the government of this republic.*
8. *The Government of the Republic of the Mountaineers of the Caucasus undertakes to take effective measures to remove from the borders of the Republic of missions and agents of countries at war with the Central Powers.*
9. *The contracting parties mutually undertake to establish economic relations and organise the exchange of goods based on provisions to be established, possibly soon by additional agreements.*
10. *This treaty will be approved and the exchange of ratifications will take place in Berlin not later than one month, or, if possible, earlier.”[22]*

The sixth article of the agreement was unmistakably explicit enough to expose the liabilities of the Imperial German Government. However, the Germans did not provide any opportunity for the ratification of this agreement. While they were negotiating such a treaty with the North Caucasian Mountaineers, at the same time they were making secret plans with the Georgians and Cossacks in order not to lose control in the Caucasus to her ally, the Ottoman Empire. The diplomatic talks between General von Lossow, Head of the Delegation of the State of Emergency of the Imperial German Government, and Haydar Bammatt, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Caucasus, resulted in Germany's *de facto* recognition of the independence of the North Caucasus; von Lossow asked Bammatt about the status of the relations between the Republic of the North Caucasus and Moscow, and added;

“The situation regarding the Terek and Daghestan regions is clear. Nobody has any doubts about the belonging of these lands to the Republic of North Caucasus. But the Cossacks of the Kuban region are ethnographically close to Ukraine. The German Government does not want a new source of conflict to emerge in this region and cannot allow such a thing. In addition, the recognition of Kuban as the territory of the Republic of the North Caucasus would mean breaking the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty.

Therefore, this issue should be left open for now. If you agree to this, I am ready to invite the representatives of the Ottoman Empire and the Transcaucasian Republic to establish the parts of the peace-treaty related to the North Caucasus.”[23]

So, neither in the context of the agreement nor in von Lossow’s words was there a single mention of Germany's territorial objection to Abkhazia. Moreover, Georgian and Abkhazian representatives, who met in Tbilisi on 9 February 1918, shortly before the start of the Trebizond and Batumi talks, stated that the future political structure of Abkhazia will be determined in the Abkhazian Constituent Assembly under the principle of self-determination. Besides, Georgian and Abkhazian representatives had signed a treaty about the territorial integrity of Abkhazia, confirming the recognition of the Georgian National Council that the area between the Mzymta and Ingur rivers was Abkhazians’ historical boundaries. As an indicator of the ideal of uniting all Caucasian peoples under a confederative roof in the future, and to prevent any problem at that stage, the parties also promised that they would not engage in commitments with third parties without informing each other.[24] The ink was not dry on the signed agreement when the Georgian troops of the Federal Transcaucasian Republic under the command of Valiko Dzhugheli, who used the Bolshevik structures in Abkhazia as an excuse, occupied Sukhum on 17 May 1918. After the occupation, they began to manipulate the structure of the Abkhazian People's Council through some traitors whom they suborned for various personal gains.[25]

Georgia left the Federal Transcaucasian Republic on 26 May 1918, because they were under the threat of the Ottoman Empire, and declared independence. The fact that Georgia's declaration of independence was made by the Marxist Mensheviks, who aimed to remain a federal part of Russia during the days of the February Revolution, revealed an interesting contradiction. After the declaration of independence of Georgia was echoed in Sukhum, the Abkhazian People's Council convened on 2 June 1918, and issued a statement:

1. With the declaration of Georgia's independence, all legal ties between Abkhazia and Georgia became null.
2. The power of the Abkhazian People's Assembly in Abkhazia declares that the conditions of the agreement dated 9 February 1918, must be improved.
3. Solidarity is an essential element to establish a strong state-structure in both countries. If the Georgian Government misses this historical opportunity, Turkey will certainly invade Abkhazia soon.

In addition, it was emphasised that the Abkhazian side must participate on equal terms with the other elements in the process of the disintegration of the Transcaucasian Government.[26] On the other hand, the Tbilisi administration made individual agreements with some members of the Abkhazian People's Council on 8 and 11 June 1918, in return for personal benefits, and began to drag things into a dead-end by claiming that these individual agreements bound the Abkhazian People's Council. While preparing to invade Abkhazia, the Menshevik Georgian Government signed a friendship-treaty with the Government of the Republic of the Union of the Mountaineers of North Caucasus. Despite repeated proposals of the representatives of the Government of the Republic of North Caucasus for the establishment of a Caucasian Confederation, the members of the dispersed Federal Transcaucasian Republic left the issue tabled due to their hidden agendas with the British,

German, and the Ottomans.[27] The Menshevik Georgian Government occupied Sukhum on 13 June 1918, with the support of the German army. Haydar Bammat's ultimatum to the Head of the Diplomatic Mission of the German Empire, F.W. Schulenburg, which strongly condemned the invasion, did not change the attitudes of the Germans and the Georgians, who were determined to stand by their own guns.[28]

The Georgian armed forces, led by General Mazniashvili and supported by the Germans, seized full control of the territory of Abkhazia between 17 and 19 June. Mazniashvili declared martial law on 23 June and declared himself the governor-general of Abkhazia, asking the people to obey Georgian laws unconditionally.[29] Menshevik Georgians tried to legitimise the occupation by distorting the treaty of 9 February 1918. They claimed that the agreement in question consisted of autonomy granted by the Georgians to the Abkhazian side. However, this was not a convention between two sovereign powers. Neither the Georgian side nor the Abkhazian had the status of a sovereign state yet. Therefore, the Georgians did not have the status required to offer autonomy to the Abkhazian side. Neither the Georgian National Council nor the Abkhazian People's Council was a governmental body.

Against the growing Bolshevik threat in Abkhazia and the invasion of Menshevik Georgians, an armed group called the Sukhum Detachment, consisting of about 800 individuals from the Abaza and Circassian elements among Ottoman subjects, prepared a landing in Ochamchira. However, a part of the detachment, which failed to reach the Ochamchiran shores in stormy weather, had to disperse and landed at different points, while a part of it had to return to Ottoman lands. 120 people who were able to get ashore engaged in fierce battles against the disproportionate German-backed Georgian forces, but they were defeated.[30] Due to Mazniashvili's threats of collective punishment, the civilian population was hesitant to help the members of the platoon.[31] The operation had also caused a diplomatic crisis. Georgian leader Akaki Chkhenkeli sent a protest-note to Hakkı Pasha at the Berlin embassy of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of July 1918. Ignoring the ethnic identities of the platoon personnel, Chkhenkeli described them as "Turks". Chkhenkeli also played the German card and threatened the Ottoman state not to interfere in the Abkhazian issue.[32]

While some of the surviving personnel of the detachment were captured by the Menshevik Georgians, some of them were able to return to Batumi by their own means. Some of the survivors in the mountains were rescued by the Abaza Bolsheviks, while some succeeded in crossing to the North Caucasus and joined the forces of the North Caucasus Mountaineers' Union.[33]

The invading Georgian forces began to engage in serious plundering. They loaded all the cattle and horses on vessels and shipped them out of Abkhazian territory. The civilian population, who could not get help from anywhere, was in a desperate situation.[34] The Mensheviks, proponents of Marxist socialism, fuelled the class-conflict, but the Abaza were generally not swayed by such provocations. However, Megrels [aka Mingrelians] and Gurians joined the Mensheviks in hopes of taking possession of the lands of others. When disagreements started between the Abaza, the Megrels, and others, the Mensheviks launched a boycott, repression, and terror. The Russians took advantage of the situation in the first place and deepened ethnic distinctions. They humiliated non-Menshevik Georgians and manipulated their influence and reputation with provocations. The Abaza distanced themselves from the other groups a little

more each day. Despite all the negativities caused by the Menshevik Georgians, there were also Abazas, such as Tatash Marshania, who insisted on keeping themselves distant from the Russians. He, as a well-known Russophobe, wanted the freedom of Georgia and Abkhazia. The Russians knew this very well and were very much afraid of him. However, the Georgians, who did not learn from their mistakes and eventually lost his sympathy too. Due to the terror of Georgian Mensheviks on civilians, Tatash Marshania did not oppose the Bolsheviks during their first temporary reign in Abkhazia despite his great influence on the people. Marshania always looked for a way out of the Russian traps, but the attitude of the Georgian Mensheviks always discouraged his efforts.[35] Simon Basaria, representative of Abkhazia in the Union of North Caucasian Mountaineers, in his message to Haydar Bammam on 5 September, with the code "top priority", stated that the Abkhazians were in danger of being completely annihilated if they did not deliver help immediately and that he, like other Abkhazian patriots, would be arrested by the Georgian Mensheviks.[36]

Today, many historians claim that the Abaza were always on the side of the Bolsheviks during the years of the Russian civil war, and the detachment known as the "Sukhum Platoon" was called to help the Bolsheviks against the Georgians. Therefore, based on this allegation, they defend the idea that Abkhazia's initiative to take part in the Union of North Caucasian Mountaineers had no practical value. However, the Abkhazians would declare at the Vladikavkaz Congress on 21 September 1917 that it was not just something that remained on paper. When the Menshevik Georgian forces invaded Abkhazia, the Abkhazians did not appeal to the Bolsheviks but to the Mountaineers' Government, which was fighting both the Bolsheviks, on the one hand, and the White Volunteer Army, on the other. Menshevik Georgian leader Noë Zhordania portrayed this situation in the memoirs as follows;

"Prince Shervashidze, dissatisfied with us, fled to the North Caucasus and at one rally presented them with all of Abkhazia. Instead of asking him by what right or by whose authority he speaks, they immediately accepted this gift and made a complaint to us: "Abkhazia is ours, get out of there!" These are the kind of neighbours we had."[37]

The Germans appointed General Kress as the representative to Tbilisi in June 1918.

In the name of serving the interests of the Georgian Government, Kress left the North Caucasian Mountaineers alone in the fight against Bolshevism and gave orders to the Georgian forces to shoot the Abaza who were trying to flee from the combat-zone to safe areas. Haydar Bammam, on the other hand, conveyed to Kress that, if they insisted on being patrons to the Georgians in this way, Georgia's neighbours would not be able to be independent. Thus, Georgia would not be able to remain independent either.[38] Despite these warnings, the Georgian Mensheviks under German protection tried to capture Vladikavkaz at the end of July, but the detachment they sent could not get beyond Lars.[39] The Germans signed a complementary treaty with the Soviets on 27 August 1918, in Berlin. As per the agreement, Germany would prevent the Ottoman State from intervening in the Caucasus if it would be given a share of the Baku oil, and in return, Russia would recognise the independence of Georgia. Germans and Menshevik Georgians gave Bolsheviks a helping hand to facilitate their work in the Caucasus.[40] When the World War ended in the defeat of the Central Powers, all the balances had changed, and the British started to keep the Caucasus on a string as of November 1918. The Volunteer Army of General Denikin, under

the auspices of the British, initially defeated the Bolsheviks, and from the beginning of 1919, rapidly began to occupy the lands of Southern Russia and the territory of the Republic of the Union of North Caucasian Mountaineers. The Abkhazian-Georgian issue and the Bolshevik-Menshevik fight fell off the agenda thereupon, and everyone focused on the fight against Denikin's Volunteer Army. The Georgian Mensheviks even released Nestor Lakoba and many prominent Abkhazian Bolsheviks they had detained in a Tbilisi prison. During this period, an interesting conversation took place in a cell in the Tbilisi prison between Valiko Dzhugheli and Nestor Lakoba, the Bolshevik leader of Abkhazia;

Dzhugheli: *"What would you do if I had become your prisoner?"* To this Lakoba calmly replied: *"We would shoot you, of course."*[41]

Abkhazian nationalists sought to cooperate with Denikinist forces to change the balance in the pro-Georgian Abkhazian People's Council in order to seize power, but the Menshevik Georgians suppressed this attempt and arrested most of the Abkhazian nationalists. The Georgian Mensheviks were preparing to define a high autonomous status in order to retain occupied Abkhazia. The Foundation of the Commissariat of Abkhazia was announced in May, and the definition of the administrative unit named the "Sukhum Region" was renamed as "Abkhazia". In March 1919, a group of Abkhazian Social Democrats, including Mikhail Tarnava, broke away from the Georgian Mensheviks and united with the "Independents" (*nezavisemtsy*) to form the Faction of Social-Democratic Internationalists. This group, which parted company with the Georgian Mensheviks, made a statement and called on the Menshevik Georgians to end the "chauvinist policies" in Abkhazia.[42] Abkhazian Bolshevik leaders, who had been fighting against Denikin's army in the north since the beginning of 1919, returned to Abkhazia in the last quarter of the year. The Abkhazians who were under severe threat from the Menshevik Georgians, on the one hand, and the monarchist Denikin, on the other, were inclined towards the Bolsheviks. To find a compromise, the Menshevik Georgian administration proposed a conference in Tbilisi with the participation of the representatives of the republics of the North Caucasus, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. Despite a fourteen-day meeting-schedule, the Congress could not continue after the first meeting on 14 November, due to border-disputes between the parties.[43]

Fleeing Denikin's forces, the Bolsheviks were secretly infiltrating Georgian lands and hiding in the mountains.[44] The Georgian Mensheviks very well understood how the North Caucasus was important as a defensive wall for them and could predict what would happen, if harmful elements such as Bolsheviks and monarchists were able to break through this wall. On the one hand, Denikin's boisterous attacks, and, on the other hand, the anarchy caused by the Bolsheviks in Georgian lands prompted the Georgian Menshevik leaders such as Evgeny Gegechkori and Grigol Lordkipanidze to seek help from the allies.[45]

Panicked Menshevik Georgians held a Conference in Tbilisi to discuss the measures to be taken against invasions by the Denikinist forces, under the chairmanship of North Caucasian politician Ahmet Tsalykkaty, and with the participation of Georgian, Azerbaijani, and North Caucasian delegates. Kapba Kazim Kap, a young officer of Abaza origin of the Ottoman army, was elected as the commander of the Caucasus Front on 10 August 1919, with 49 votes of the 52 delegates during this conference. The Georgian Government placed General Tasov and several Georgian officers of various ranks under the command of Kazim Bey, along with 49

wagons of weapons, ammunition, and provisions.[46] At the beginning of October, the Georgian government also supported an uprising in Daghestan, organised by Kapba Kazim Bey, and another ethnic Abaza Ottoman politician Mkanba Aziz Meker. The report prepared by Major E. De Nonancourt, the commander of the French Military Mission in the Caucasus, was composed of explicit statements about the role of the Menshevik Georgian administration in the events of the era in the Caucasus. The Menshevik Georgian administration considered the North Caucasus as a buffer-zone to secure their own independence, and both kept the enemy outside the Georgian territory and also wore out the enemy without being battered with the mess fabricated in the north. The fact that the Mountaineers' non-conflict environment with the Volunteer Army was disturbing the Georgian Mensheviks as much as the Bolsheviks.[47] As a matter of fact, after a year of intense clashes, the Union Assembly of the Caucasian Mountaineers functioning in Tbilisi and the national forces of the Defence Council stationed in Daghestan defeated Denikin's Volunteer Army. While Denikin's collaborators were fleeing the territory of the Republic of the North Caucasus, a Provisional Government of the Union of North Caucasian Mountaineers was established at the meeting held in Vladikavkaz in March 1920, and Haydar Bammat, who was in Tbilisi at that time, was elected head of the government in his absence.[48] Trying to avoid confronting the Bolshevik terror in the Georgian territory, the Mensheviks issued a decree on 6 April and decided, at the North Caucasus Defence Council's demand, that the members of the Volunteer Army detained in Georgia, who were of North Caucasian origin, be released and sent to the north to fight against the Bolsheviks. In line with this decision, a group of 100 individuals was released and sent from the Poti concentration camp to Daghestan as a result of the investigation conducted by Ismael Abaev, the representative of the North Caucasus Defence Council in Tbilisi.[49]

General Erdeli, who was appointed as the governor of the Caucasus by General Denikin, also accepted that the sole sovereign power in the North Caucasus was the Mountaineers' government until the planned meeting of the All-Russian constituent assembly.[50] Entente forces also realised that they were betting on the wrong horse by supporting Denikin, but somehow they could not take any concrete steps to help the Mountaineers' government. British High Commissioner Oliver Wardrop texted the Allied headquarters before the beginning of January 1920. He urged the Allies to recognise the North Caucasus and the Trans-Caucasian Republics immediately instead of supporting General Denikin, who retreated south while fleeing from the Bolsheviks in pursuit. He also warned London that, if effective measures would not be taken, the Mountaineers would have to come to terms with the Bolsheviks.[51] Menshevik Georgians, trying to prevent the Allies from aiding the Mountaineers directly, imposed their cause on the Allies by assuming a "facilitator" role. The British, who did not find the Menshevik Georgians convincing, consulted the information of the National Democrat Zurab Avalishvili, a member of the Georgian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference. Zurab Avalishvili's statements about Abkhazia were very striking. Avalishvili, who is known to be a very true and consistent politician, was giving clues to interesting facts about the Georgian presence in Abkhazia. Stating that in the second half of the 19th century, most of the indigenous population of Abkhazia were deported to Asia Minor and cleansed through the genocidal practices of the Russians, Avalishvili was revealing that the Abkhazians were the real owners of the country and the fact that the existence of the ethnic Georgian majority was purely derived from the demographic disaster that the Russians

caused.[52] After a year had passed following the consultation of Avalishvili, other striking truths started to appear in the British intelligence reports on Abkhazia;

“The population of Abkhasia and Transcaucasia is wonderfully mixed. On a territory of 7.5 thousand square versts live Abkhasians, Russians, Mingrelians, Armenians, Turks, Greeks, Estonians, etc, who have mixed in a queer way. Despite that mixture of nations, there is a nation in Abkhasia that may and must be considered as the owners of the land, That nation is the Abkhasian one. No matter how far we peep into history, we shall always meet on the Abkhasian territory, the Aborigines of the land of the Abkhasians. Other nations come later, after intervals of centuries, and, without a doubt, are newcomers for the Abkhasians.”[53]

The Democratic Republic of Georgia under the leadership of the Menshevik leader Noë Zhordania approached, on the one hand, the allies, and the Soviets, on the other. Towards the end of April 1920, Grigol Uratadze, furnished with broad powers, was sent to Moscow for a secret mission. As per secret agreements made with the Soviets, on 5 May, Lenin texted Sergo Ordzhonikidze, demanding that the Red Army units in Georgia be withdrawn to the border and prevented from attacking Georgian territory. Immediately afterwards, on 7 May, Lev Karahan and Grigol Uratadze signed a 16-point agreement in Moscow. According to the first article of the Treaty, Russia unconditionally recognised the independence of the Georgian State and renounced all Russia's claims of sovereignty over Georgian territory. While in the 5th article of the treaty, Georgia promised that it would not allow any formation on its territory that could pose a threat to Soviet Russia, with the 6th article, Soviet Russia made the same commitment to Georgia. The Mensheviks also promised to stop punishments against the supporters of the Soviets. As per the secret clause added to the treaty, the Georgian side would allow Communist organisations to broadcast propaganda in their territory and legalize the secret Georgian Communist Party as well.[54] The Georgian Mensheviks, who thought they had secured their land, were relieved. Thinking that the Bolsheviks would no longer pose a threat to them, they began to increase the pressure on the representatives of other Caucasian peoples who had gathered in Tbilisi for the anti-Bolshevik struggle. They immediately arrested the prominent nationalists and monarchists who tried to take refuge in Georgia and immediately deported the dissidents they caught to Turkey in order not to have problems with the Russian Bolsheviks.[55]

The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, had conquered the war-torn North Caucasus, which could not get any support from anywhere, without difficulty in only two months and were advancing towards the Georgian border like an avalanche. More than 60,000 people were trapped on the Georgian border of occupied Abkhazia.[56] Pro-independence Abkhazians boycotted the elections for the representatives to be selected for the Georgian Constituent Assembly. The Abkhazians, losing all their hopes for establishing a life together with their Georgian neighbours, were inclined towards the Soviets. *“The majority of the Abkhazians are hesitant and entirely do not support us, as if they are waiting for somebody,”* Valiko Dzhugheli wrote to the Central Committee of the Georgian Mensheviks in Tbilisi. Many members of the Abkhazian People's Council were arrested by the Georgian Mensheviks on the grounds of allegations they had ties to the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks were also incessantly strengthening their organisation in Abkhazia. The Georgian Communist Party, which became legitimate in

Tbilisi, especially after the secret agreement between Uratadze and the Bolsheviks in Moscow, intensified underground activities in Abkhazia.[57]

The short-sighted attitude of the Entente towards supporting the Mountaineers and the chauvinistic policies of the Georgian Mensheviks were pushing Abkhazians into the Bolsheviks' trap. In the autumn of 1920, the Georgian Mensheviks also realised their fate when the Bolsheviks gained an absolute victory in the north.[58] Abel Chevalley, the French High Commissioner in Tbilisi, rose from the dead and texted Paris to send urgent and direct aid to the Mountaineers to stop the Bolsheviks.[59] Closing the stable door after the horse has bolted did not help anyone. The Georgian Mensheviks, who left the Mountaineers alone in the face of the Bolsheviks, believing that they would secure their independence, would watch bitterly as their country was trampled under Bolshevik boots. Although the Menshevik Georgians knew very well that they would never have Abkhazia, they pushed Abkhazians into the lap of the Russian Bolsheviks through their insatiable passions. The Entente, which first relied on the surviving monarchist Russians, then followed the Menshevik Georgians and blatantly handed over the Caucasus to the Bolshevik Russians. On the eve of the Bolshevik victory in Georgia, the Mountaineer-Azerbaijani Committee was organised in Tbilisi on 17 February 1921. The committee formed detachments of Mountaineer and Azerbaijani volunteers for the defence of Tbilisi, but they could not prevent the Bolsheviks from capturing the city on 25 February.[60] On the night of 24 to the 25 February, the Menshevik leader Noë Zhordania left Tbilisi by the last train while Mountaineer-Azerbaijani detachments were carrying on close combat against the Bolsheviks for the defence of Tbilisi.

A week later, Abkhazia would join the USSR with the status of a union republic. Abkhazia, which was one of the republics that formed the basic mortar of the USSR, was forced to sign a special union agreement with the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic on 16 December 1921, united with Georgia and received the status of a "treaty" socialist republic. Even so, it was not an autonomy within Georgia, but a stakeholder of the republic which united with Georgia on equal rights.

The chauvinistic Georgian state-system tried to destroy Abkhazia with the conspiracies of the world-renowned Georgian tyrants of the USSR, Stalin and Beria, from 1931. With the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Abkhazia experienced a *deja vu* of the turbulent days from 1917 through 1921 once again. If Georgian chauvinists cannot learn from their mistakes in history, they must bear in mind that Abkhazia will not be losing its independence to them. Moreover, even if Abkhazia may lose its independence, it will not be only Abkhazia which will lose it...

The chauvinist Georgians' greed means they are cutting off their nose to spite their face...!

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