K[onstantin]. S. Shakryl and Issues of the National Liberation Movement of the Abkhaz People

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Abstract

The article explores issues connected with the national liberation movement of the Abkhaz people. The author discusses the cultural and linguistic transformations in Abkhazia which led to catastrophic consequences for the Abkhaz people, particularly in the sphere of school instruction, as well as the resulting obstacles to the development of an Abkhaz intelligentsia and the loss of national and cultural identity among young people. The study also addresses the resettlement of Greeks, Turks and other populations, and the settlement of Georgians in their place, as well as the repressions directed against peoples living on the territory of Abkhazia.

The article examines the notion of “Abkhaz letters” as an integral element of the national liberation movement of the Abkhaz people in the twentieth century. Special attention is devoted to the first letter, written by K[onstantin]. Shakryl, B[agrat]. Shinkuba and G[eorgy]. Dzidzaria. When they sent it in 1947 to Moscow, to the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), setting out the oppression suffered by the Abkhaz people, they understood that they were in effect signing their own sentence and condemning themselves to repression; nevertheless, they took this step. The article describes their subsequent fate and the hardships they were compelled to face.

Keywords: Abkhazia; national liberation movement; “Abkhaz letters”; repression; K. Shakryl; B. Shinkuba; G. Dzidzaria; language reform.

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In Abkhaz historiography of recent decades the term “Abkhaz letters” has become established. These letters constitute a component part of the national liberation movement of the Abkhaz people in the twentieth century. The demands expressed in the “Abkhaz letters” varied depending on historical context and the time of their writing, yet they were united by concerns relating to the preservation of national identity and Abkhaz statehood.

In his speech at the First Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR on 2 June 1989, V. Ardzinba emphasised: "In the history of the Abkhaz people, the years 1937–1953 became a period when the very question of the liquidation of the people as such was at stake" (*The Ardzinba Epoch*, 2009). In this connection, the opinion of the Georgian historian G. Lezhava is of interest. He writes: "The linguistic and cultural transformations in Abkhazia carried out from 1937 to 1953 were based on the theoretical constructs of the Stalinist school of linguistics, whereas critics of these transformations, by contrast, appealed to Marr's 'New Doctrine of Language'" (Lezhava, 1997).

However, the issue at the time concerned not only cultural and linguistic changes in Abkhazia. In the same speech, V. Ardzinba continued:

> "The nation was decapitated: all the most prominent state and party leaders of Abkhazia, and almost the entire intelligentsia, were destroyed. The peasantry suffered mass repressions. From 1940 the Abkhaz people were no longer referred to as the 'Abkhaz people'. From 1941 radio broadcasts in the Abkhaz language ceased. In 1945–46 the Abkhaz schools were closed, and the teachers left without work. Abkhaz were practically absent in the leading party and Soviet organs. Mass forced resettlement into Abkhazia was initiated. Enormous funds were spent on this resettlement; it did not cease even during the difficult years of 1941–42. Greeks, Turks and other peoples were deported from Abkhazia, and their homes were transferred to settlers from various regions of Georgia. Owing to this artificial growth, the Abkhaz became a minority in their ancient homeland. Original place-names in Abkhazia were altered. Grave violations of nationalities policy toward the Abkhaz people were described in collective and personal letters addressed to central party and Soviet organs by representatives of different strata of Abkhaz society – the intelligentsia, the working class and the peasantry – in 1947, 1957, 1967, 1978, and 1988" (*The Ardzinba Epoch*, 2009).

Indeed, the history of the "Abkhaz letters" begins with 1947, when members of the Abkhaz intelligentsia – K. Shakryl, B. Shinkuba and G. Dzidzaria – prepared and sent to Moscow, to the highest party organs, a letter setting out facts of discrimination and oppression against the Abkhaz people.

K. Shakryl characterised the situation preceding the appearance of the 1947 "Abkhaz letter" as a national-cultural genocide carried out by Georgia against the Abkhaz people (Shakryl, 1991).

K. Shakryl recounts in his memoirs how the idea for the letter arose and was brought to life. He, B. Shinkuba, and G. Dzidzaria were close friends and colleagues. They frequently discussed the systematic violations of nationalities policy in Abkhazia and were convinced that the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) was unaware of these distortions. After consulting together, they decided to write to the Central Committee about all that was occurring. Given the regime in Abkhazia at that time, this decision amounted to self-sacrifice; as Shakryl concluded, they could certainly have been shot for it (Shakryl, 1991). But they were not deterred.

Shakryl was a close friend of the well-known Soviet linguist, Professor G. P. Serdyuchenko. By coincidence, Konstantin Semenovich was on a work trip to Moscow at that time, where he met his friend and told him about the letter to the Central Committee. The Moscow linguist supported the idea but did not conceal the danger associated with such a step. Serdyuchenko, who was well acquainted with the Secretary of the Central Committee A. Kuznetsov, advised that the "Abkhaz letter" be addressed to him.

Shakryl replied:

> "Serdyuchenko Georgii Petrovich – a scholar, a linguist, Corresponding Member of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of the USSR. We have shared academic interests. We meet. I visit Moscow, he visits Abkhazia. But we have no 'group' of any kind."

"Do you think I believed you?" – Sharia retorted half-jokingly, half-threateningly (Shakryl, 1991).

Shortly after Shakryl's trip, G. Dzidzaria also travelled to Moscow on official business, where he met his friend, an employee of the Central Committee apparatus. When Dzidzaria informed him that a letter was being prepared for the Central Committee, the latter warned:

> "This is extremely dangerous; they may well shoot you. But it is worth the risk – write it."

(Shakryl, 1991).

The final text of the letter was prepared and signed on 2 February 1947. The problem, however, was that a document of such content could not be sent by post – it would be intercepted. Nor could one entrust anyone else to deliver it. One of the authors would have to take it personally to the addressee.

By chance, B. Shinkuba needed to travel to Moscow. He secretly carried the letter. There he found G. Serdyuchenko and showed him the text. Serdyuchenko added a short covering note, and the letter was submitted to the internal mail of the Central Committee (Shakryl, 1991). This occurred on 5 April 1947 (Lezhava, 1997).

In subsequent letters and appeals from the Abkhaz people, reference to this first historic letter was made invariably. For instance, E. and T. Shakryl in their letter to Stalin of 11 October 1952 wrote:

> "We earnestly request that you do not send our statement to Georgia, for it is well known to us that statements forwarded to Georgia have never yielded positive results, while those who sent such statements to the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) subsequently faced repressions from the Georgian central organisations."

(*Abkhaz Letters*, 1994).

They were referring to the 1947 letter and its authors.

In the “Letter of the One Hundred and Thirty” to the Soviet leadership of 10 December 1977, it was stated:

> “A manifestation of the anger and indignation of the people, provoked by this anti-Abkhaz action of Beria’s clique (the closure of Abkhaz schools – A. A.), was, among other things, the letter sent to the Central Committee of the CPSU in 1947 and signed by members of the Abkhaz intelligentsia: B. V. Shinkuba, G. Dzidzaria, and K. S. Shakryl.”

(*Abkhaz Letters*, 1994).

In the annex to the letter to the 19th All-Union Party Conference, the so-called “Letter of the Sixty” (summer 1988), it was written:

> “The question of the dire situation faced by Abkhaz schools as a result of their transfer to instruction in the Georgian language was raised in 1947 before the Central Committee of the CPSU by prominent representatives of the Abkhaz intelligentsia: B. V. Shinkuba, G. Dzidzaria and K. S. Shakryl.”

(*Abkhaz Letters*, 1994).

The authors of the letter awaited a response from Moscow, but none came. As K. S. Shakryl later wrote:

> “It turns out that by that time Beria had already built such a system that all letters of such content first ended up in his hands.”

(Shakryl, 1991).

This letter, too, ended up with him initially. G. Lezhava indirectly confirms this:

> “The letter was transferred to the Head of the Science Department for review on 6 June, meaning that it remained in the Secretariat of A. A. Kuznetsov for no fewer than two months. During this period, other Secretaries and members of the Politburo of the Central Committee could have familiarised themselves with it, including Stalin and Beria.”

He continues:

> “It is possible that, as often happened, they discussed the option of examining the facts set out in the letter; afterwards it was forwarded to G. Aleksandrov for a conclusion. On Aleksandrov’s recommendation, it was sent to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia.”

Lezhava then, seeking to justify this procedure, asks:

> “One might ask: did this practice not continue after March 1953?”

(Lezhava, 1997).

Lezhava poses the question as though failing to understand that such a practice – whether before or after 1953 – was unjust towards the Abkhaz. For the very fact of ignoring letters and appeals from representatives of the Abkhaz people in Moscow, and returning them for examination in Tbilisi, created conditions not for clarifying the facts presented but for punishing their authors. This practice rendered the Abkhaz fully dependent on Tbilisi, reducing them to fertiliser for the “cultivation” of the Georgian nation – and this was done openly in fact, while accompanied by loud proclamations of “friendship of the peoples”.

One may well ask: was such a practice not inherently flawed?

To Lezhava’s credit, he later writes:

> “It must be acknowledged that such a procedure for examining disputed matters, particularly those relating to interethnic relations, was illogical.”

Yet he adds:

> “But evidently one must also take account of another side of the matter: the dissatisfaction of republican leaders when their elementary sovereign rights were violated.”

(Lezhava, 1997).

In the historical circumstances under discussion, this cannot serve as an argument in favour of returning the letter to Georgia. At that time, relations operated within a rigidly regulated totalitarian hierarchy based on the cult of the “Father of the Peoples”. Under such conditions, to assert that Moscow “had to take into account” the views of republican leaders is absurd.

In reality, both Moscow and Tbilisi, when convenient, cynically shifted responsibility downward, hiding behind decisions of subordinate organs.

Thus, the letter was redirected to Tbilisi. On 17 July, the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia decided to investigate the facts set out in it, and already on 8 August, Secretary of the Central Committee P. A. Sharia reported the results. According to Lezhava, this “promptness shown in studying the matter” testified to the “principled importance” attached to the question by the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) (Lezhava, 1997).

Another Georgian author, Z. Papaskiri, reports that:

> “Having examined the situation on the ground, P. A. Sharia compiled a report addressed to the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Georgia, Kandid Charkviani, in which the accusations against the Abkhaz Regional Committee and the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Georgia were refuted.”

(Papaskiri, 2010).

Regarding the methods used, Lezhava explains:

> “Sharia travelled to Abkhazia, visited Sukhum, Gudauta, and Ochamchira districts. In Gudauta and Ochamchira he held conversations with party district committee officials, with the chairman of the village council of Duripsh, Tskañ Ya. D., with the chairman of the collective farm of the same village, Ardzınba G., and with the Stakhanovite collective farmer Temur Tarba. Because of the summer holidays, he was unable to visit schools. ‘All these comrades expressed satisfaction with the measures taken,’ Sharia wrote in his report to Charkviani.”

This twelve-page report was devoted entirely to refuting the accusations made by Dzidzaria, Shinkuba, and Shakryl (Lezhava, 1997).

Yet Lezhava is perfectly aware of what sentiments prevailed in Abkhazia regarding these measures, for Georgian security services continuously recorded them. These grievances intensified after the closure of Abkhaz schools.

Here Lezhava affects naïveté, as though taking at face value everything written in official reports about the situation in Abkhazia. Documents intended for broader circulation, including Moscow, reported what was required, not what was actually occurring. They bore no responsibility to truth; they were formalistic reports of “work accomplished”.

Sharia did not deem it necessary to mention the following exchange in his report:

> “If such violations truly exist, why is it that no one but you sees them? Are you the only farsighted ones?” he asked the letter’s authors during their meeting at the Regional Committee on 5 August.
>
> “Anyone can see it – even the blind. Many see it, but they fear to speak.” they replied.
>
> “So only you three are the heroes?” Sharia retorted irritably.

(Shakryl, 1991).

During his “investigation”, Sharia somehow “failed to find” anyone holding such views.

Sharia had been sent to Abkhazia to prove the impeccable conduct of the Georgian Central Committee before the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks). Nothing other than refutation could have appeared in the report, for the outcome was predetermined once the investigation of the facts raised in the letter was entrusted to the Georgian Central Committee.

If Moscow had truly wished to establish the truth, they would have dispatched an investigation from Moscow itself, for it was to Moscow that the authors had appealed, and it was the Georgian organisation they were criticising. Modern Georgian authors remain silent on this point; they surprisingly become the staunchest defenders of the conduct of Stalin-era Georgian communist officials, even while at all other times describing themselves as democrats and condemning the Soviet regime as “occupational”. They denounce Bolshevism, communism, and the entire Soviet past in Georgia – and yet, simultaneously, praise and attempt to justify the policy of forced assimilation of Abkhaz carried out by Georgia during Soviet rule.

The Conversation of 5 August 1947 in the Abkhaz Regional Committee

On 5 August 1947, in the presence of the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia, M. Delba, and the First Secretary of the Abkhaz Regional Committee, I. Mgeladze, a conversation took place in the Regional Committee between P. Sharia and the authors of the letter:

> “Do you still agree today with what is written in the letter?” he asked.
>
> “We believe that we wrote the truth. And to this day, nothing has changed,” one of them replied.

During the further course of the conversation, after another long pause, Sharia suddenly declared:

> “Cadres like you are needed not only for Abkhazia but for the whole republic. I do not want to ruin your careers. You acted hastily; it happens to anyone – ask for forgiveness, and everything will return to normal.”

But they replied that such a suggestion was meaningless. At this point, M. Delba joined the conversation. In rather coarse terms, he urged the authors of the letter—in Abkhaz—to accept Sharia’s proposal.

Realising that persuasion was ineffective, Sharia began to intimidate them:

> “If you do not agree, things will go badly for you.”

A. Mgeladze then joined in:

> “You have heard what is required of you. Think carefully. You still do not understand your mistake. Go, and bring a document stating that you were wrong. Do not ruin your lives.”

(Shakryl, 1991).

Although the authors refused, they were nevertheless given twenty-four hours “to think it over”.

The next day they returned to the Regional Committee with the same position. They were then summoned, in a rather harsh tone, to appear before the Bureau in Tbilisi. At the Bureau meeting, particular interest was shown in identifying who had encouraged them to send a letter to the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), and who else might belong to their “group”. The very fact of their appeal was regarded as a grave offence.

They were issued severe reprimands, with the decision formally recorded in their party files under the charge: **“For attempting to misinform the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and slandering the Abkhaz party organisation.”**

During the meeting, K. S. Shakryl's party card was seized and he was expelled from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union – a punishment tantamount to a death sentence. It is no surprise that he and his friends said farewell to one another, for when he was summoned again late at night, they believed he was being arrested. But as it turned out, Shakryl had been called in so that his party card could be returned.

Much later, after many years and many events, P. Sharia—by then having served a ten-year sentence—claimed that it was at his insistence that Shakryl's party card had been returned on the night of 8 August 1947.

Curiously, less than a year after this "trial" of the authors of the Abkhaz letter, their "judge" himself became the subject of discussion at a meeting of the Bureau of the Georgian Central Committee. Sharia was accused of the following:

> "In 1943, following the death of his son (who died of tuberculosis), Sharia P. A. wrote an ideologically harmful poem permeated with deep pessimism and religious-mystical sentiments."

It is unknown why these "mystical" and "incorrect" verses were remembered only five years after their publication, but the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Georgia condemned the publication of this "ideologically harmful book of poems", removed Sharia from his post as Secretary of the Central Committee for propaganda, and reassigned him to academic work.

This decision was criticised—retrospectively—by V. M. Molotov at the Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU on 2 July 1953, who called it too lenient. Sharia, after all, was the **actual author** of the book published under L. Beria's name, *On the Question of the History of Bolshevik Organisations in Transcaucasia* (Beria, 1936). As such:

> "Beria especially protected him and apparently considered him his ideological adviser. Up until Beria's arrest, Sharia worked in his secretariat as his assistant for ideological matters."

(Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU, 1953).

At that time, however, these future developments were seemingly far away…

The Fate of the Authors After the Letter

As for the future fate of the authors of the 1947 letter, they endured persecution for a long time, up until Stalin's death. Everything possible was done to discredit them. They were constantly accused of **"bourgeois nationalism"** and **"fascism"**, labels that at the time were effectively synonymous with "enemy of the people".

However, it appears that the authors' **principal crime** in the eyes of Tbilisi officials was not simply their dissatisfaction with Georgia's assimilationist policies toward the Abkhaz, but the fact that they dared to write to **Moscow** about it. This wounded the pride of Tbilisi's political strategists—an attitude with deep roots extending back to the period of the Russian Empire.

Already in exile in Moscow, driven out of Abkhazia, K. S. Shakryl wrote in 1950 to Malenkov:

> "In speaking with me about my letter to the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), A. I. Mgeladze declared:
> 'What do you (meaning the Abkhaz) have in common with Russians or with the Russian language? You should look not to Moscow but to Tbilisi. You have no commonality with Russians but with Georgians.'"

(Lezhava, 1997).

Tuskadze, Secretary of the Abkhaz Regional Committee, was similarly outraged:

> "They wanted to tear the history and culture of the Abkhaz away from the native soil of the all-national history and culture of Georgia. In my work on ideological questions, especially regarding the history of Abkhazia and of the Abkhaz, I proceeded from the following:
> the Abkhaz are a **Georgian tribe**, like the Mingrelians and the Svans, and throughout their entire history have been an integral part of the Georgian people;
> secondly, Abkhazia was and is an integral part of Georgia not only politically but in terms of its national composition."

(Lezhava, 1997).

At that time, Abkhaz officials used entirely the same terminology. Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia M. Delba accused the authors of the same ideas in identical wording (Delba, 1951).

Support from G. Serdyuchenko and Continued Repressions (1949–1951)

On 22 and 26 July 1949, G. Serdyuchenko addressed letters to the Chief Academic Secretary of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Academician A. Topchiev. In these letters, he **supported the authors of the Abkhaz letter** and condemned the position and behaviour of Secretary P. Sharia (Lezhava, 1997). In one of his letters, he wrote:

> "According to as yet unverified information, in many schools in Abkhazia the teaching of the Abkhaz language, as one of the school subjects, is now being discontinued…
> The discrediting [of the authors] continues to this day."

(Lezhava, 1997).

Beginning from the new academic year, September 1949, **G. Dzidzaria was removed from his position** as a lecturer at the Sukhum State Pedagogical Institute:

> "Political distrust has been expressed,"
> as he himself wrote in a letter to Mgeladze dated 18 October 1949 (Dzidzaria, 2006).

Twice, on 12 October 1949 and again on 9 March 1950, the Institute's director, R. Tsulukidze, issued notices requiring him to vacate the residential accommodation provided to lecturers (Dzidzaria, 2006).

Meanwhile, it appears that **the primary irritant in Tbilisi**, and for its adherents in Sukhum, had become **K. S. Shakryl**.

At the meeting of the Bureau of the Communist Party of Georgia on 8 August, A. Mgeladze stated that the group of scholars had been assembled by **K. Shakryl**, and that he should therefore be severely punished (Shakryl, 1991). It was he whose party card was seized—though later returned.

G. Lezhava considered that the "initiators" of the decision to raise these questions before the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) were **G. Serdyuchenko and K. Shakryl** (Lezhava, 1997).

Z. Papaskiri referred to the signatories as **"K. S. Shakryl and his team"** (Papaskiri, 2010).

M. Delba wrote that the group of scholars who had advanced the **"overt bourgeois-nationalist thesis about the inadmissibility of violating the ethnographic integrity of the Abkhaz population"** had been led by **K. Shakryl** (Delba, 1951).

Forced Departure of K. S. Shakryl from Abkhazia

G. Dzidzaria and B. Shinkuba, in their letter of 5 November 1953 addressed to leaders of the Central Committee of the CPSU, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, and the Abkhaz Regional Committee, wrote:

> "The mockery of the runaway, would-be leaders reached the point where one of us, Comrade Shakryl K. S., was completely driven beyond the borders of Abkhazia."

(*Abkhaz Letters*, 1994).

A similar statement is found in Dzidzaria's letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia of 19 March 1955, except that there the name "Mgeladze" replaces "the runaway leaders" (Dzidzaria, 2006).

Ultimately, under the pretext of enrolling in doctoral studies at the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, K. S. Shakryl was forced to **flee Abkhazia in 1949** during the temporary absence of First Secretary A. Mgeladze, who was furious that Shakryl had been allowed to leave. Shakryl began working as a research fellow at the **Institute of National Schools** in Moscow.

From Moscow, he regularly wrote letters to the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), outlining the **worsening situation** in Abkhazia and providing additional evidence of the discrimination faced by the Abkhaz people (Shakryl, 1991).

The Central Committee forwarded these letters to Tbilisi, which in turn forwarded them to Sukhum. The responses sent back to Moscow asserted that his descriptions did not correspond to reality and that the author was “insane”.

Nevertheless, **Shakryl was summoned to the Central Committee in Moscow**, where he was shown the text of the responses. This did not deter him.

The “May 1951 Provocation” Against K. S. Shakryl

It appears that this persistence prompted yet another attempt to destroy him. In the document sent by G. Dzidzaria and B. Shinkuba on 5 November 1953, they wrote:

> “In May 1951, former Secretary of the Abkhaz Regional Committee Mgeladze summoned us to his office and declared that Comrade Shakryl K. S., who was then in Moscow, had committed a most heinous crime before the Party, for which there was a special communication from the Central Committee…
>
> We later learned that the ‘crime’ consisted merely in his submitting a new statement to the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), in which he repeated some of the points from our joint letter of 1947 and requested that his party penalty be lifted.
>
> Only recently have we also learned that Mgeladze concocted a slanderous denunciation against Comrade Shakryl, attempting to deceive higher organs and attributing to him monstrous charges.”

(*Abkhaz Letters*, 1994).

A similar description—aside from minor editorial differences—appears in Dzidzaria’s letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia of 19 March 1955 (Dzidzaria, 2006).

Shakryl himself later wrote:

> “In May 1951, a rumour was circulated within the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia that I had committed some grievous crime before the Party and the people…
>
> By that time I had already been living in Moscow for three years and maintained close connections with the Transcaucasian Department of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks).
>
> When the above documents from Georgia arrived at the Department, I was summoned to familiarise myself with them.
>
> I read them personally.
>
> Of course, it was a deliberate provocation and crude slander – sheer baseness.”

(*Abkhaz Letters*, 1994).

Linguistic Politics and the “Abkhaz Letter”

Reflecting on the “Abkhaz letter”, Lezhava concluded:

> “The circumstances surrounding the writing and subsequent discussion of the letter by Dzidzaria, Shinkuba and Shakryl, as well as the debate on the evaluation of linguistic and cultural policy in the Abkhaz and South Ossetian Autonomous Republics, were closely linked to the struggle between the Marrist and anti-Marrist schools in linguistics that unfolded during that period.”

(Lezhava, 1997).

Yet Z. Papaskiri writes:

> “The already mentioned G. P. Lezhava, having thoroughly studied the materials relating to the history of the Abkhaz scholars’ complaint to the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), quite reasonably asks why the letter was addressed specifically to A. Kuznetsov—who supervised the Administrative Department and Personnel Administration of the Central Committee—and not to A. A. Zhdanov, Secretary for Agitation and Propaganda.
>
> It is entirely obvious, as Lezhava shows, that the addressee was not chosen by chance, and that in Kuznetsov’s apparatus there were individuals who may have even stimulated the ‘initiative’ of the Abkhaz scholars.”

(Papaskiri, 2010).

However, Papaskiri selectively quotes Lezhava. The original text states:

> “It creates the impression that the problems raised by G. Serdyuchenko and scholars from the Abkhaz Institute were submitted to the leadership of the Central Committee through Secretary A. Kuznetsov, who supervised the Administrative Department and the Personnel Administration.
>
> Yet they were examined by the Department of Agitation and Propaganda, supervised first by Zhdanov, later by Suslov.
>
> Subsequently, these same issues were submitted to Secretary G. M. Malenkov.”

(Lezhava, 1997).

And further:

> “There is reason to assert that one of the contentious issues between Kuznetsov on the one hand, and Zhdanov and Suslov on the other, was the language policy pursued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia in the Abkhaz ASSR.”

(Lezhava, 1997).

Thus, nothing in Lezhava's analysis suggests the kind of far-reaching conspiracy that Papaskiri implies. On the contrary, Lezhava writes that it was entirely natural for Serdyuchenko—**a committed follower of Marr**—to support the authors, since the evidence they provided favoured Marr's linguistic ideas.

He concludes:

> "The attack was aimed not only at L. Beria—the former Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, directly involved in national policy in Abkhazia—but at Stalin's linguistic doctrine itself.
>
> This explains why the letter was addressed not to Stalin personally but submitted to Secretary A. A. Kuznetsov."

(Lezhava, 1997).

The Fall of A. Kuznetsov and Renewed Harassment of the Authors

Meanwhile, on 28 November 1949, **A. Kuznetsov** was relieved of his duties as a member of the Organisational Bureau of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) (Lezhava, 1997), **arrested**, and on **1 October 1950 executed**.

This circumstance became yet another reason for renewed mockery of the authors of the Abkhaz letter.

In his letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia dated 19 March 1955, G. Dzidzaria wrote:

> "After Secretary of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) Comrade Kuznetsov – to whom we had directly addressed our letter – was innocently repressed,
>
> Mgeladze, somehow emboldened by this event, repeatedly declared in his hysterical official speeches:
>
> 'You addressed your letter precisely to Kuznetsov. That is no coincidence, of course.
>
> Kuznetsov is an enemy of the people.
>
> Try writing to him now. Go on, write!'"

(Dzidzaria, 2006).

Significantly, at the same meeting of the Organisational Bureau on 28 November 1949, when Kuznetsov was removed, the following appointments were simultaneously confirmed:

- **K. N. Charkviani – First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia**
- **A. I. Mgeladze – First Secretary of the Abkhaz Regional Committee**

- **M. Kh. Delba – Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Abkhaz ASSR**

Thus, the very figures responsible for the persecution of the Abkhaz intelligentsia were politically strengthened at the centre.

The Defeat of Marrism and Closure of the "Abkhaz Question" (1950)

Subsequently, following the so-called "Linguistic Discussion", Marr's doctrine was **denounced** and **Marrism officially defeated**. With the final ascendancy of the anti-Marrist direction in Soviet linguistics, the question of the letters concerning the situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia was **removed from the agenda** of both the Organisational Bureau and the Secretariat on **22 November 1950** (Lezhava, 1997).

The ideological shift had immediate repercussions in Abkhazia.

One such reaction appears in **M. Delba's article**, "On the Question of Studying the Language and History of the Abkhaz", published in 1951. Already in its opening lines, he declared:

> "The doyen of Marxist science, Comrade I. V. Stalin, has smashed to smithereens the false, unscientific doctrine of N. Ia. Marr concerning language, a doctrine based on vulgar-materialist and idealist philosophical principles."

(Delba, 1951).

According to Delba, Marr's principal error consisted in studying the Abkhaz language and history:

> "primarily in isolation from the general history of the Georgian people."

(Delba, 1951).

It is noteworthy that this same M. Delba had earlier, in 1937, referred to Marr as:

- "our outstanding polyglot, founder of the new doctrine of language" (Delba, 1937)
- "the greatest linguist of our era" (Delba, 1937)

But the times had changed, and the new political conjuncture demanded new epithets.

That the denunciation of Marrism was considered a matter of great importance is also shown by the fact that Delba's 1951 article was **published not only in a journal but also separately as a brochure** (Delba, 1951).

The Question of the Alleged “Confession” by the Authors

One more point must be addressed. Some may regard it as minor, but without it the historical picture is incomplete—especially as Georgian authors frequently raise this issue. It concerns the so-called **“confession”** or statement of “repentance” allegedly made by the authors of the 1947 letter.

A document of this sort does exist; it has even been published. But its **authenticity is, to put it mildly, highly questionable**. Several circumstances indicate this.

G. Dzidzaria and B. Shinkuba wrote on 5 November 1953 to the leadership of the Central Committee of the CPSU, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, and the Abkhaz Regional Committee:

> “Having been placed in unbearable conditions, we were forced even to declare mainly the erroneousness of our statement.”

However, what is consistently ignored in Georgian accounts is the sentence **immediately preceding** this admission:

> “On the basis of falsified materials from this ‘investigation’, an equally anti-party discussion of our case was organised in a form convenient for its organisers, in order to hide their crimes and discredit us in the eyes of the Party public and the Central Committee.
>
> And the examination of our case in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, which lasted for five hours, resembled more a torture session than a genuine discussion.”

(*Abkhaz Letters*, 1994).

Moreover, the alleged “confession” document is dated **2 August 1947**. Yet the authors themselves repeatedly state that they **first learned of the reaction to their letter only on 5 August**, when P. Sharia arrived from Tbilisi and summoned them to the Regional Committee.

Furthermore, after the first conversation with Sharia on 5 August, Shakryl—as the eldest—advised his younger colleagues to think carefully about the matter “in light of all the circumstances” (Shakryl, 1991). This itself contradicts the idea that they had already signed a “repentance” statement on 2 August.

Nevertheless, Z. Papaskiri, without troubling himself over the moral aspect, writes:

> “Later (1991), one of the authors, K. S. Shakryl, issued a refutation and began claiming that his signature under the ‘confession’ was forged.”

(Papaskiri, 2010).

He fails to consider that the **document he treats as unquestionably genuine may itself be the forgery**.

K. Shakryl, upon learning of the document's existence, wrote:

> "It is addressed to no one. It bears the date 2 August 1947.
> But at that time we knew absolutely nothing about the fate of our statement.
> Only on 5 August did we learn of the reaction to our letter, when Secretary P. Sharia arrived in Sukhum and summoned us to the Abkhaz Regional Committee…
> On 8 August our case was examined at the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, where our statement was declared an attempt to misinform the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), and a severe party penalty was imposed on us.
> One involuntarily asks: why were we so severely punished if we had already 'repented' in writing?
> The fact that this manuscript 'renunciation' was not among the Bureau's documents shows that it had not yet been fabricated."

(*Abkhaz Letters*, 1994).

He concluded:

> "A renunciation of our statement to the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) would be tantamount to betrayal and treason against our people.
> It would mean justifying the national-cultural genocide then being carried out by the leadership of Georgia and Abkhazia."

(*Abkhaz Letters*, 1994).

The author of the present study adds:

> Unlike certain Georgian writers, I have no logically motivated reason to doubt the words of K. S. Shakryl, one of the patriarchs of the national-liberation movement of the Abkhaz people.

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