

Georgian policy towards Abkhazia in the period 1918-1921

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In 1917, i.e. in the first revolutionary year, when everyone was just beginning to live according to the new rules, the principle of territorial demarcation in Transcaucasia was recognised to be based on ethnicity (which was associated with the economic needs of the people and topographical conditions). This is what was accepted and supported by the main political forces in the region (in particular, the representatives of the Georgian Social Democratic and Social Federalist parties took a similar position). Striking confirmation of this is one of the programme-statements of the Social Democratic Party, which emphasised that “the boundaries of territorial self-government are established on the principle of the real settlement of one or another nationality, while economic and living conditions are taken into account. When shifting national borders, a referendum of those areas that are disputed in determining borders is to be applied”. This principle did not cause heated debates and discussions at numerous meetings and commissions either during that fateful year or until the declaration of independence in the late spring of 1918 (that is, the period of the Provisional Government and the united Transcaucasian Republic).

It is extremely indicative that, if before the declaration of independence the Georgian political élite supported the ethnic principle of division, then after May 1918 it began to advocate observing the administrative borders, since this allowed it to retain some territories. It is also significant that, if in negotiations with the Armenian side Tiflis put pressure on the old administrative-territorial division of Transcaucasia, then in the north, in relations with the Volunteer Army, on the contrary, it insisted on observing the ethnic principle. With regard to Abkhazia, the leadership of the Georgian Democratic Republic, headed by N. Zhordania, acted in the simplest way, viz. with the help of pressure through force. After the entry of Georgian troops there, the People's Council, controlled by Tiflis, recognised the presence of Abkhazia as a part of the Georgian Republic in the shape of an autonomous unit (1919). Moreover, in relation to the former Sukhum District of the Russian Empire, neither the principle of administrative delimitation nor the ethnic principle worked.

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If the Georgian Republic arose on the basis of two imperial provinces, namely those of Tiflis and Kutaisi, then Abkhazia also had its own administrative-territorial unit within Russia. It met the fateful 17th year of the century in the form of the Sukhumi District, which, like the aforementioned provinces located in the neighbourhood, fell within the frontiers of the Caucasian Viceregency. After the February Revolution, the Public Security Committee headed by Prince A.G. Shervashidze began to operate on the territory of the District.

In 1917, due to the understood succession of power in the capital, no acute conflict-situations arose between Tiflis and Sukhum. On the contrary, there was a sense of hope for

the establishment of life in the region on a new basis. This is evidenced by the first contacts of the National Councils, which eventually came to the conclusion of the well-known agreement of February 1918 (which some Georgian experts like to refer to as evidence of the consent of the Abkhazian élite to become part of an independent Georgia!).

In the autumn of 1917, the Sukhumi District joined what was then in the process of formation, namely the Union of Cossack Troops, Highlanders of the Caucasus and Free Peoples of the Steppes (the agreement on organising the union dates back to 20 October 1917). In particular it declared that "The Union was concluded with the aim of contributing to the establishment of the best state-system, external security and order in the Russian State, as well as to ensure the integrity of the members of the Union, maintain internal peace, raise general well-being and thereby consolidate the boons of freedom won by the Revolution" – (At the same time, the main goal was "to achieve the earliest establishment of a Russian Democratic Federative Republic with the recognition of the Members of the Union as its separate states").

After the fall of the Provisional Government and the collapse of regional power in Abkhazia, a general congress was held, at which on 6 November 1917, its own socio-political body, the Abkhazian People's Council (ANS [for the Russian *Abkhazskij Narodnyj Sovet*]), was elected. The latter began actively to make contact with various political forces in both the North Caucasus and Transcaucasia. It is clear that in the first place in the list of contacts were neighbours from Tiflis. Georgian politicians, we recall, dominated the regional authorities and also created the National Council of Georgia, which became their mouthpiece.

The emerging consolidation of the political forces of Transcaucasia, which did not accept the coup in Petrograd and which were anti-Bolshevik, forced Georgian politicians in early 1918 to invite their Abkhazian colleagues to distinct negotiations. In the message that came to Sukhum, it was proposed to "arrange a meeting with representatives of the Abkhazian People's Council to clarify the relationship between Georgia and Abkhazia ... In view of this, the National Council of Georgia asks the Abkhazian People's Council to send its representatives to the city of Tiflis by 20 January". The letter emphasised that "the Georgians, for their part, sincerely wish to find a way to such mutual understanding and the establishment of close fraternal unity with the Abkhazians".

The ANS (headed by the chairman Prince A. Shervashidze) arrived in Tiflis, where on 9 February he took part in a meeting of the Presidium of the Executive Committee of the Georgian Council. As a result, as recorded in the protocol, the following provisions were approved on the issue "On the establishment of relations between Georgia and Abkhazia". This document, often referred to as a kind of agreement, consisted of three points:

- "1. To recreate a single, indivisible Abkhazia within the limits of the River Ingur to the River Mzymta, which will include Abkhazia proper and Samurzakan, or which is also the current Sukhum District.
2. The form of the future political structure of united Abkhazia must be worked out with the principle of national self-determination at the Constituent Assembly of Abkhazia, convened on democratic principles.

3. In the event that Abkhazia or Georgia wish to enter into political treaty-relations with other nationalities or states, they mutually undertake to have preliminary negotiations on this matter between themselves.”

Interestingly, this small document is the basis of the Georgian argumentation about the alleged unification of Georgia and Abkhazia, and the subordination of the latter to Tiflis. However, as we can see, these three points are reminiscent of fixing intentions.

Analysing the document, it is worth paying attention to several important points. Firstly, the negotiations (which resulted in a protocol with points) were conducted by two newly-minted political organisations that were endowed with no authority at that time. There were several national councils – in addition to the Georgian, there were Armenian, Muslim, Russian ones. Their members were members of the regional authority, but the councils themselves did not represent it. Recall that at the end of 1917 the power in the region was represented by the Transcaucasian Commissariat, which in early 1918 transferred it to the Transcaucasian Seim, assembled from representatives of the major political parties of the region and deputies of the Constituent Assembly from Transcaucasia. Secondly, the Georgian Democratic Republic was proclaimed only at the end of May 1918, therefore, there can simply be no talk about any process of unification with Georgia in February. Thirdly, the February agreement confirms a certain independent status for Abkhazia and does not mention anything about a possible autonomy within the then non-existent Georgia. Fourthly, in one of the points the territory of Abkhazia is fixed in and of itself.

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In March 1918, the Second District Peasant Congress was held in Sukhum, on which the Georgian Social Democrats (who saw the ANS as a threat to their plans) were betting. Sukhumi mayor V. Chkhikvishvili, who was a Georgian protégé, was elected chairman by an overwhelming majority of votes. The Transcaucasian Seim was recognised as the highest body and the presence of Abkhazia in this association (and not in the North Caucasian Union) was confirmed. At the same time, it is worth noting that none of the local politicians of the Social Democratic persuasion offered to consider or support the agreement concluded with the National Council of Georgia (NSG [for the Russian *Natsional'nyj Sovet Gruzii*]) of 9 February 1918 (or to emphasise the political line on gaining independent status of Abkhazia). On the contrary, speaking at the Congress on behalf of the NSG, its representative D. Suliashvili stated that "Abkhazia will be an integral autonomous unit based on the territorial-national principle". It is clear that these statements, which demonstrated the true intentions of Georgian politicians and their vision of the future position of Abkhazia, were a threat to the plans of the ANS, but until May 1918 it seemed illusory.

A real threat and clear danger came in the first half of the year from the another side. At that time (that is, even during the existence of a single Transcaucasian space), the ANS faced other contenders for power in the shape of local Bolsheviks, their ardent opponents, and a group of local élites orientated towards Turkey.

The Bolsheviks, led by Nestor Lakoba and Ephrem Eshba, made two attempts to seize power during this short period of time – in February and April 1918. The first attempt failed

immediately, whilst the second was successful. During April, the Bolsheviks took control of a significant part of Abkhazia (with the exception of the Kodor area) and proclaimed Soviet power there. Having seized Sukhum, they disbanded the Soviet and arrested its prominent representatives (interestingly both Abkhazian politicians and their pro-Georgian opponents - S. Basaria, G. Zukhbaja, I. Ramishvili, V. Shervashidze and others) were taken into custody. Priest G.D. Tumanov was sent to Tiflis to the then still common Transcaucasian government for help. The latter experienced staunch rejection of the Bolsheviks and allocated forces to eliminate the "distemper" in the Sukhum District. By government order, detachments under the command of Colonel A. Koniev and the commander of the Red Guard V. Dzhugeli entered there. In May 1918, these units took Sukhum and liquidated Soviet power, pushing back the Bolshevik forces.

This military contingent was partially withdrawn after the end of the operation, but a detachment of the Red Guards remained on the territory of the district. This is important in the light of the sharp change in the general political situation in the region associated with the collapse of the Transcaucasian Federation. It was at the end of May that Georgia, and then Azerbaijan and Armenia, declared their independence. Thus, the detachment sent by the still unified regional government to Abkhazia automatically turned into a Georgian one, which gave Tiflis a strong trump card in seizing the territory of the Sukhum District.

The second entry of troops sent from Tiflis in June of the same year to protect against the Bolsheviks turned out to be fatal for Abkhazia. The military unit under the command of General Mazniev, having knocked out the weak detachments of the Abkhazian rebels, quickly took control of the entire district. Moreover, immediately after the declaration of Georgia's independence, the Georgian units used the Abkhazian territory as a springboard for a further offensive on the Black Sea coast. Taking advantage of the beginning of the Civil War in Russia, the virtual absence of authority and the anarchy, and with German support at the same time, the Georgian units went forward in the direction of Taman, where German troops were already present.

Georgian politicians, who were in a state of euphoria after the declaration of independence of Georgia and the quick conclusion of an agreement with Germany on assistance, decided to expand the borders of the republic as far as possible, and the Black Sea coast became the most attractive direction for expansion in the light of the presence of German troops in the Ukraine, the outbreak of the Civil War in Russia, as well as anarchy in the South Caucasus. The newly formed Georgian government decided to expand the traditional border of the Kutaisi Province (and, accordingly, the Sukhum District) along the River Bzyp.

Mazniev, having dispersed the detachments of the Abkhazian rebels, quickly cleared the territory of the Sukhum District and reached the border of the Black Sea province. Taking advantage of the fact that the armed forces of the Kuban-Black Sea Soviet Republic were linked through battles with the Volunteer Army pressing upon them, the Georgian units invaded the Sochi District of the Black Sea Province, and on 3 July 1918, they occupied Adler, and on the 5th – Sochi. By 26 July General Mazniev (virtually unopposed) captured the territory of the Black Sea coast as far as Tuapse. On 27 July Tuapse, which became a Georgian border-town, also found itself under his control. As the modern researcher V.

Tsvetkov rightly emphasises, "[D]istracted on fighting the 'Denikin gangs', the Red Guard detachments were not ready to repel the offensive of the Georgian regular division, reinforced by detachments of the People's Guard." It should be noted that the plans for the advance of the Georgian troops were coordinated with the German command (which was informed of this offensive), especially since already in June 1918 German occupation-units had landed on Taman.

As General A.I. Denikin wrote, "[I]n the first period of the Turkish-German occupation, the desires of Georgia were directed towards the Black Sea Province. The reason was the weakness of the Black Sea." Another leader of the White movement, General A.S. Lukomsky in September 1918 gave the following explanation of the Georgian plans (and actions), very fairly by the way: "... for Georgia, the Sochi District was of great importance in the sense of the zone separating the Sukhum District, inhabited by the freedom-loving Abkhazian people, from the Volunteer Army. The Georgian government feared that, if the Sochi District became part of the Black Sea Province, then this could have an influence on the secession of Abkhazia from Georgia."

In order to resolve controversial issues, the command of the Volunteer Army offered the Georgian government to negotiate, but the two-day meeting in Ekaterinodar did not bring any positive result, rather, on the contrary, it aggravated Denikin's already difficult relations with the Transcaucasian Republic.

Unfortunately, the political leadership of Georgia did not show any will or desire to compromise, which led to the deepening of the conflict between Denikin and Tiflis. It should be noted that, if the newly emerged Georgian politicians who had seized power were disposed to such an adventure, then some experienced representatives of the national élite opposed such steps and provocative operations with sad consequences for Tiflis. For example, Zurab Avalov, one of the most famous Georgian international lawyers and diplomats of that era, emphasised that "the accession of the Sochi District to Georgia created a new plane of friction, and there were already enough of them ... complications that were not caused by necessity should have been avoided in the position of Georgia", and therefore firmly stated that "not only in Tuapse, but also in Sochi, the Georgians had no business." Unfortunately, such sound thoughts were not understood and accepted by the leadership of the republic.

It is clear that Denikin did not want to follow the lead of the Georgian politicians, but he had neither the time nor the means immediately to resolve the controversial issue by force (due to the difficult situation on other fronts, he tried to avoid a war with Georgia). The main result was that the Russian border on the Black Sea coast after the so-called Sochi Conflict was established, effectively, along the indicated line of demarcation of 1919, i.e. along the River Psou. This was also established in the Moscow Treaty with Georgia of 1920 – this border, having been administrative, passed into the Soviet border, and it was preserved after the collapse of the USSR. At present, the Gagra District is the Republic of Abkhazia's border-region with Russia.

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The territory of the Sukhum District in the same June 1918 was declared a general-governorship [*gubernia*] within the Georgian Republic, headed by Mazniev, who had distinguished himself there. This was a direct contradiction with the statements of the ANS, which, after the collapse of the Transcaucasian Republic, became a local government that had the support and trust of the population. According to the decision of the ANS of 2 June 1918, in view of the collapse of the Transcaucasian Republic, the council assumed "all power within Abkhazia". At the same time, it was noted that "from the moment of the collapse of the Transcaucasian Federal Republic and the declaration of Georgia's independence, Abkhazia has lost the legal basis for ties with Georgia, and the detachment of the Transcaucasian Red Guard, being currently a military unit of the Georgian Republic, has found itself outside the borders of its state, but all fullness of power has effectively come to lie in its hands".

According to the documents issued at that time, it is clear that the ANS tried to settle its relations with Tiflis through negotiations. However, the Georgian politicians who had just come to power, on the contrary, preferred to talk with the Abkhazians from a position of strength, which was already there in the person of the Mazniev detachment¹.

Members of the ANS, sent to Tiflis at the beginning of the summer, signed the well-known agreement of 11 June 1918, which Georgian historians declare as key in the process of Abkhazia's joining the Georgian Republic. It should be noted that at that time the politicians of Georgia were in some euphoria after the bright declaration of the independence of the GDR, the conclusion of a peace treaty with Turkey and the receipt of support from Germany, and therefore they acted so decisively in the Abkhazian issue, considering it both less significant in comparison with the above and also simpler. At the same time, they needed an agreement (that is, an official document) with Abkhazia in order legally to establish their actual presence there (in addition to having further confirmation of their jurisdiction over this territory during the process of the international recognition of Georgia). In particular, Tiflis especially needed such a document in its relations with Turkey, which supported the Mountain Republic, which also claimed an alliance with Abkhazia. Abkhazian researchers believe that this document was written under strong pressure from the then Georgian politicians (with which is hard to disagree).

Here is the full text of the agreement between the government of Georgia and the Abkhazian People's Council from the date specified:

"The Abkhazian People's Council decided to empower its representatives R.I. Kakubava, G.D. Tumanov. V.G. Gurdzhua and G.D. Adzhamov to conclude the following agreement:

"The Government of the Georgian Democratic Republic, represented by its representatives (Minister of Justice Alekseev-Meskhiev and of Agriculture Khomeriki) and the Abkhazian People's Council, represented by representatives Razhden Ivanovich Kakubava, Georgij

¹ As the modern historian B. Mailjan rightly notes, "[A]t the time of the declaration of independence of Georgia, Abkhazia was ruled by the command of armed detachments subordinate to the NSG. Thanks to this circumstance, the Georgian government not only established its hegemony in the region of Abkhazia, but also gained a significant advantage in the ongoing discussion about the possible status of the District [*okrug*]."

Davidovich Tumanov, Vasilij Georgievich Gurdzhua and Georgij Davidovich Adzhamov, in the furtherance and supplementation of the agreement between the Georgian National Council and the Abkhazian People's Council held on 9 February 1918, concluded the following agreement:

“1. The concluded agreement will be reviewed by the National Assembly of Abkhazia, which will finally determine the political structure and fate of Abkhazia, as well as the relationship between Georgia and Abkhazia.

“2. Attached to the Government of the Georgian Democratic Republic is an authorised representative of the Abkhazian People's Council, with whom the Georgian Government communicates regarding the affairs of Abkhazia.

“3. The internal administration in Abkhazia is in the hands of the Abkhazian People's Council.

“4. In matters of foreign policy, Georgia, being the official representative of both treaty-parties, effectively acts in conjunction with Abkhazia.

“5. Credits and funds necessary for the administration of Abkhazia are released from the funds of the Georgian Democratic Republic for disposal by the Abkhazian People's Council.

“6. For the speedy establishment of revolutionary order and the organisation of a firm government, the Georgian Democratic Republic sends a detachment of the Red Guard to help the Abkhazian People's Council and to remain at its disposal until the end of the need for it.

“7. The Abkhazian People's Council will organise military units, and the equipment, uniforms and means necessary for these units will be released by the Georgian Democratic Republic to be at the disposal of the Council.

“8. Social reforms will be effected by the Abkhazian People's Council on the basis of common laws promulgated by the Transcaucasian Seim, but in relation to local conditions.

“This document is taken into account and is attached to the agreements concluded between the Georgian National Council and the Republic of Georgia, on the one hand, and the Abkhazian People's Council, on the other hand. City of Tiflis, 11th day of June 1918.”

It is impossible not to pay attention to one clear trend in the actions of the Georgian politicians. Inspired by the support of Germany and the newly declared independence, they began to put pressure on the Abkhazians, since the territory of Abkhazia and further along the Black Sea Province gave them direct access to German troops, and one cannot discount the simple desire to “round out the borders”. They tried to realise this understandable desire in the course of the Paris Conference and the actions of their own delegation there (in the form of territorial claims for a significant part of the Black Sea coast as far as Tuapse).

Moreover, for the Georgian politicians who declared independence, Abkhazia turned into the most important outpost against any threat from the north, whether White or Red. Even if the campaign in the Black Sea Province was recognised by many as an adventure, control over Abkhazia was assessed as a vital necessity for Georgia. Thus, from the very beginning of independence, the GDR government exerted serious pressure on Abkhazia, its élite and population, which only intensified after the actual occupation by Georgian troops and the announcement of the creation of the Sukhum General-Governorship.

In particular, strong pressure was exerted on the small Abkhazian delegation that arrived in Tiflis in early June to discuss the current situation. The Abkhazian delegates were immediately frightened by the cessation of assistance from Tiflis, which was provided to them when they were in the Transcaucasian Republic, and also by the fact that Abkhazia might be occupied by Turkish troops. Delegate Kakubava, in his telegram from Tiflis, demanded authority to sign a treaty with an already independent Georgia, without waiting for "a congress of plenipotentiary representatives of Abkhazia". He emphasised that "according to the statement of the Government of Georgia, the urgent issue of our relations is caused by this extremely serious political moment which can often change within several hours". For this reason, the Georgian side insisted on the urgent signing of an agreement. As Kakubava reported to Sukhum, "[W]ithout such an agreement, the Government of the Georgian Republic does not find it possible to speak with foreign powers on behalf of Abkhazia. If the Government of Georgia is deprived of this opportunity, it has no doubt that Turkey will occupy Abkhazia in the coming days. Neither this nor any other treaty, of course, can we sign without authority from you; so let us know as soon as possible whether the Council gives us the necessary authority." Furthermore, Sukhum was requested to select one of the delegates as temporary representative of Abkhazia to the Georgian government. Kakubava asked for an answer promptly - "no later than tomorrow".

Well-known is the draft-treaty between the government of the GDR and the Abkhazian People's Council (dated 8 June)², which was, in all probability, submitted for discussion – it is

² "The Government of the Georgian Democratic Republic, represented by its representatives, Ministers of Justice Sh.V. Alekseev-Meskhiev and Agriculture N.G. Khomeriki, and the Abkhazian People's Council, represented by representatives Razhden Ivanovich Kakuba(va), Georgij Davidovich Tumanov, Vasilij Georgievich Gurdzhua and Georgij Davidovich Adzhamov, in furtherance and supplementation of the agreement between the People's Council, held on 9 February 1918, concluded the following agreement:

"1. A Minister for Abkhazian Affairs is invited to the Government of the Georgian Democratic Republic upon submission of the Abkhazian People's Council.

"2. The internal administration and self-government in Abkhazia is in the hands of the Abkhazian People's Council.

"3. Credits and monies necessary for the administration of Abkhazia are issued from the funds of the Georgian Democratic Republic and are at the disposal of the the Abkhaz People's Council for the needs of Abkhazia.

"4. For the speedy establishment of revolutionary order and the organisation of a firm government, the government of the Georgian Democratic Republic is sending a detachment of the Red Guard to

interesting that some Georgian historians take it as the final one, despite the existence of a later version dated the 11th. The well-known text of the final agreement between the parties, signed on 11 June, allows us to speak of the great haste with which this document was agreed and signed – it was essentially unchanged.

The haste and psychological indoctrination of the Abkhazian delegates had their effect. In a telegraph-conversation with Sukhum the next day (starting at 10 pm!), these insisted on the need to conclude an agreement with Tiflis as soon as possible: “The delegation once again confirms the categorical need for the immediate conclusion of the proposed agreement. The information we have received here gives us the right to say that the political situation of the moment is clearer to us than to you, and we find the moment catastrophic.” “Take all measures so that the People's Council agrees to conclude an agreement, especially since this temporary agreement does not bind Abkhazia in any way. Such a temporary agreement gives the Georgian Government the right to speak on behalf of Abkhazia. We are all deeply convinced that the Georgian Government will act and speak only in favour of Abkhazia. If you are afraid of responsibility before the People's Council for the proposed treaty, then we can take responsibility before the People's Council for the proposed treaty,” was what the Abkhazian delegates said by telegraph from Tiflis.

To discuss the draft-treaty and the current situation, on 10 June 1918 a meeting of the ANS was held, which, having accepted the arguments of the delegates, instructed them to conclude the draft agreed with them in order to stabilise the situation. Although there was no unity among the members of the Council, since an alternative opinion was also recorded

help the Abkhazian People's Council and to be at its disposal. The equipment and funds necessary for the detachment are issued by the government of Georgia.

“5. An international detachment is being organised in Abkhazia, which is at the disposal of the Abkhazian People's Council.

“6. Social reforms will be carried out by the Abkhazian People's Council on the basis of common laws, but taking into account local conditions.

“7. A Congress of the population of Abkhazia will be convened on democratic principles as soon as possible for the final resolution of issues relating to organisation in Abkhazia, and

“8. The agreement will be reviewed by the National Assembly of Abkhazia.

Noë Georgievich Khomeriki

Shalva Vladimirovich Alekseev-Meskhiev

Georgij Davidovich Adzhamov

Vasilij Georgievich Gurdzhua

Father Georgij Davidovich Tumanov

Razhden Ivanovich Kakuba(va).”

in the minutes of its meeting: “In view of the fact that the draft-treaty proposed by the Georgian Republic between Abkhazia and Georgia has the character of an ultimatum, hindering the possibility of deliberate, free discussion, and in view of the fact that an important act such as the proposed treaty between Abkhazia and Georgia is being effected by force, with a limited number of members of the Abkhazian People's Council and without the knowledge of the population of Abkhazia, which thinks of its political freedom without any guardianship on anyone's part, I propose that the Abkhazian People's Council respond to Georgia's ultimatum with the request that an opportunity be given to the population to arrange an Abkhazian National Congress, authorised finally to determine the political structure of Abkhazia, assuring the Georgian Democratic Republic that Abkhazia, as an independent national organism, will certainly enter into good-neighbourly, treaty-alliances and agreements with Georgia.”

However, due to the haste and pressure of the Georgian side, it was not possible to hold a congress or at least a public discussion of the treaty in Abkhazia, and on 11 June it was signed in the version close to the original, sent from Tiflis.

Nevertheless, the agreement can be designated as preliminary, since it practically did not contain specifics in matters of the division of the powers of the parties, their obligations to each other (it declared a kind of union between Georgia and Abkhazia; however, all the elaboration was left to the Constituent Assembly of Abkhazia, which should soon have been convened). For obvious reasons, there were no specific mechanisms for interaction, since the ministries and departments of the GDR were just being formed, and the main legislative documents were at the initial stage of development.

According to the June agreement, under the Georgian government the post of a Minister for Abkhazia was established, who was supposed to coordinate the activities of local authorities with the republican ones; all external relations passed into the hands of Tiflis³, while all issues of internal administration remained in the hands of local bodies (the ANS being recognised as the highest of them). Thus, the subordinate position of Abkhazia was consolidated. At the same time, one of its members, Isidore Ramishvili, who represented the Social Democratic faction of the Council, became the official Georgian representative under the ANS. However, this idyll did not last long, since General Mazniev, having taken into his own hands control of Abkhazia, already in August 1918 actually dissolved the Council, which had no real levers of influence.

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³ It should be noted that from the very beginning of its march towards independence, Tiflis in every possible way prevented contacts between Abkhazians and the outside-world, especially outside the former imperial space – for example, with Turkey, Germany, Great Britain, France and other countries. Georgians, starting from 1918, tried to block such contacts for Abkhazians, to prevent their presence at international conferences and meetings. The goal here was simple and clear: to tie the Abkhazian élite to Tiflis and bind all their external ties to itself. A vivid example is the meeting of the Abkhazian delegates with Zhordania in Istanbul, where they were asked to go home immediately. On the way to the Turkish capital, various obstacles and difficulties had been created on Georgian territory, and problems arose also on the way back ...

A conflict between the People's Council and the Georgian high command, headed by General Mazniev, arose immediately, because a situation of dual power developed, whilst real power, for obvious reasons, ended up in the hands of the Georgian military leader.

Mazniev's first orders were already a direct violation of the agreement between the ANS and the government of the GDR. The latter, referring to the order of the Minister of War of Georgia, announced the creation on the territory of Abkhazia of the Sukhum General-Governorship under his command. Following this, he publicly informed the population that the laws of the GDR were in force throughout Abkhazian territory and demanded unconditional obedience to them.

The next conflict-situation arose during the presence in Abkhazia of the Turkish landing force in Abkhazia and its liquidation. Members of the ANS were able to agree with part of the *mukhajirs* who had landed from this detachment on the surrender of weapons and their departure back to Turkey. However, Mazniev, considering the surrendered military property (weapons, cartridges and horses) as his military booty, immediately ordered the Georgian units to take control. In addition, he announced the introduction of the death-penalty, in accordance with the law adopted by the National Council of Georgia. In this regard, on 4 July 1918, a protest was sent to Tiflis, signed by the chairman of the ANS, Prince V. Shervashidze, in connection with violations of the terms of the Agreement of 11 June by the Georgian army. Addressing the head of the government of the GDR, Prince Shervashidze asked "to point out to the general that the only source of power and emergency-powers on the territory of Abkhazia is the Abkhazian People's Council ... The above actions of the Governor-General in Abkhazia essentially create mistrust in the masses of the population of Abkhazia towards the Government of the Georgian Republic. According to paragraph 8 of the Agreement, the laws issued by the Transcaucasian Seim in Abkhazia are implemented by the Abkhazian People's Council with regard to local conditions. As for the law on the death-penalty, issued by the National Council of Georgia, it cannot be extended to the territory of Abkhazia until the Abkhazian People's Council has spoken about it".

It should be noted that Turkey became another power that took part in the struggle for Abkhazia, since a significant number of Abkhazian *Mukhajirs* and their descendants lived there. The news of the occupation of Sukhum by Georgian troops and the announcement of Mazniev's general-governorship there prompted part of the Abkhazian élite to take action. On the night of 27 June 1918, an armed landing-force from Turkey landed near the River Kodor (part consisted of Abkhazian *Mukhajirs*, part of Turkish *askers*) and was supported by Princes Alexander Shervashidze and Tatash Marshania.

Istanbul was not averse to gaining control over the Abkhazian territory, and primarily over the port of Sukhum. However, nothing came of this venture, since the *mukhajirs*, after meeting with members of the ANS, handed over their weapons and ammunition⁴ and abandoned military operations in their homeland (some of them went back, whilst the others remained in Abkhazia). The Turkish contingent, on the contrary, was ready for clashes, but by mid-August, after several days of fighting, Mazniev dispersed it.

⁴ Representatives of the ANS were issued with 180 rifles and more than 1 million rounds of ammunition.

The participation of the Abkhazian princes in this adventure and the meeting of the members of the ANS with representatives of the landing-force served as a pretext for accusations of treason and betrayal of national interests, which, in turn, allowed the Georgian administration to break up the composition of the Abkhazian Council, which was unacceptable to them, and even to place under investigation some of its members who were not ready to cooperate with Tiflis. The work of the ANS was completely terminated by October 1918.

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Recall that the first Abkhazian Soviet appeared in November 1917, and was dissolved by the Bolsheviks during their seizure of power in April 1918. It was able to recover only after the capture of Sukhum by a detachment of the Transcaucasian Red Guard in May of the same year.

On 20 May, in the newly liberated Sukhum, at the initiative of the command of the guard, a meeting of the ANS was held. An important circumstance was the absence of Prince A. Shervashidze, who went to Batum to defend the interests of the Abkhazians who wanted to be in the Union with the Mountain Republic (its delegates were invited by the Turks to participate in the peace-conference). Georgian politicians, who in those days had just begun negotiations with the Germans regarding support for the recognition of Georgia's independence, could not approve such activity on the part of the head of the Abkhazian Council.

The composition of the ANS was modified by diluting it with new pro-Georgian socialists, and a new chairman was elected – Varlam Shervashidze, who was set on a close alliance with Georgia and locating Abkhazia in the Transcaucasian political orbit. The modern historian B. Mailjan believes that “the diplomatic intrigues that unfolded around the fate of Abkhazia in May-August 1918 arose because of the German-Turkish rivalry in the Caucasus. All the efforts of the Turkophile part of the Abkhazian leaders for the recognition of Abkhazia as part of the Mountainous Republic remained without consequences, since Germany took over the patronage of the Georgian independent state proclaimed on 26 May 1918”. An interesting sketch of the behaviour of the Abkhazian delegates is given by the Georgian researcher L. Bakradze, who relied on documents of the German Foreign Ministry: “... German sources note with regret that the Abkhazian delegates were under Turkish influence to such an extent that they did not even approach the German delegation.”

Difficulties in relations with Tiflis after the declaration of independence and the arrival of Georgian troops quickly led both to a conflict within the Council between supporters of joining Georgia as well as of their own independence, and to its actually being pushed out of real control. The shameless intervention of the Georgian authorities in the socio-economic and political life of Abkhazia led to protests from the ANS, which referred to the articles of the June Agreement.

An extremely harsh resolution was adopted on 4 August 1918 in response to the Georgian government's order to introduce a monopoly on the sale and export of tobacco to Germany (under the Georgian-German agreement). In particular, it was rightly noted that “according

to the design of the agreements of 9 February and 11 June 1918, the Abkhazian People's Council was granted the inalienable right independently to manage the natural wealth and sources of income of Abkhazia, which follows from paragraphs 1, 3 and 4 of the Agreement of 11 June 1918". Attention was also drawn to the fact that "economic relations between the Republic of Georgia and Abkhazia, i.e. everything related to issues of industry, railways, telegraph-lines, the system of customs' fees and taxation of export- and production-items has not yet been determined by any agreements".

The ANS demanded that Tiflis immediately cancel this order, which led to a split within the Council itself. The pro-Georgian group headed by V. Shervashidze was afraid of an open break with Georgia and its possible consequences, and therefore, in response to the adoption of this resolution, they (namely, Varlam Shervashidze, Dzhoto Shervashidze, Vladimir Emukhvari, Arzakan Emukhvari, Lavrenti Khonelidze and others) left the Council on the same day. However, their return to the Council proved to be imminent. Immediately after the liquidation of the Turkish landing-party in mid-August, the Georgian command dispersed the ANS by force, making a number of arrests. Its members were accused of complicity with the enemies of the republic, particularly of being pro-Turkish.

The backbone of the new composition was the group of Varlam Shervashidze, who advocated autonomy for Abkhazia as part of the Georgian Republic. He stated that "the political position of Abkhazia and relations with Georgia in the future will be determined by a people's representative assembly".

The composition of the ANS was seriously diluted by the Georgian authorities with representatives of the non-Abkhazian population of the district in order finally to exclude their ardent opponents (for example, S. Basaria and D. Marshania disappeared from it). Thus, the original national character of this body was destroyed, since the remaining national councils of the district delegated two of their representatives to the ANS. Thus, it became both multinational and more predictable in his actions and, most importantly, came under strong Georgian influence. In other words, the Georgian authorities managed quickly to change the ANS: from being a socio-political body that defended Abkhazian interests, it turned into a standard body of local self-government.

Such dismissive behaviour on the part of the Georgian authorities towards the ANS against the backdrop of a reverent and respectful attitude towards their own national body, the NSG, which, we recall, became the actual basis for the formation of the main authorities in Georgia itself (transforming into the parliament and government of an independent republic!), is extremely indicative. The Abkhazians were not given a similar chance – quite the contrary, Tiflis did everything to prevent a real chance from even appearing ...

* * *

Even G.N. Andzhaparidze, who was the representative of the NSG in Abkhazia, insisted on this very option. HE considered both the holding of elections to the separate Constituent Assembly of Abkhazia and, even more, its further convocation and operation to be unnecessary and counterproductive for Georgian policy in the district. Andzhaparidze advocated the election of a new Soviet, which should be turned into an ordinary *zemstvo*-

body. In one of N. Zhordania's messages, he insisted on the creation in Sukhum of only a local organ of self-government, requesting "the fulfilment of our desire as soon as possible, namely to have a representative body from the population of the whole of Abkhazia, adopting our point of view as its stance".

Thus, he, like many other Georgian politicians, advocated the creation of a standard local self-governing body in Sukhum, and not the convening of a separate Abkhazian parliament, which would be a serious threat to the plans of the Georgian political élite to turn Abkhazia into one of the provinces of the republic. This point of view found full support and understanding in Tiflis. The Georgian leadership, having gained real control over the territory of the district by the summer of 1918, no longer wanted to take into account the signed agreements and promises previously given to their Abkhazian counterpart.

As Mikhail Tarnava, one of the prominent members of the ANS, noted: "In the towns military command-offices have been created: in the centre there is the district military administration going by the name of defence-headquarters and headed by Colonel Tukhareli; in the counties military units operate at their discretion, replacing the local administration – in a word, the entire military administrative control of the country is in the hands of the military agents of the Georgian government."⁵

The second membership of the ANS also did not last long – until October of that year, when it was dissolved for the second time by the Georgian armed forces, some of its active deputies being arrested and sent to Tiflis (imprisoned in Metekhi Fortress).

The Georgian government decided finally to dissolve the Council on 10 October 1918. This happened after a stormy meeting on 9 October when the opposition group raised the question of confidence in the presidium of the ANS, headed by Varlam Shervashidze. As a result of the election, a vote of no confidence was expressed in him. As Mikhail Tarnava, one of the ANS deputies, recalled: "At this meeting of the Council it proved possible to vote for a chairman, namely Var[lam] Aleks[androvich] Shervashidze. And then the opposition demanded that he leave, i.e. to give up his chairmanship to a representative of the opposition, as whom, it seems, Semjon Mikh[ailovich] Ashkhatsava was selected. But the elected chairman Shervashidze did not yield to this, and he arranged a break in the meeting, during which he secretly called the regiment to send a military unit to eliminate the 'disturbances' in the Soviet. Having established contact with the military authorities, the same chairman resumed the meeting of the Council, during which soldiers gradually began to enter the meeting-room singly and in twos. So gradually, in a short time, ranks of soldiers formed along the walls and inside the premises of the Council. The opposition felt something was wrong and untoward - the betrayal and treachery of the Chairman of the Council were understood. But before anything could be done, the Chairman of the Council

⁵ It is indicative that even Georgian authors, who considered Abkhazia as an ordinary territory of Georgia, recognised the fact of gross interference by the Georgian command, characterising it as frankly a *diktat*: "Even the most flagrant interference of the military authorities in civilian life, the restriction of the autonomous rights of Abkhazia can be qualified in any appropriate way (for example as: arbitrariness of the military, violation by them of the Agreement, failure to fulfil statutory duties, a manifestation of indiscipline, even sometimes even as a crime, etc.), but only not by the term 'occupation' of their own territory."

raised the question of treason against the State and the danger stemming from some deputies, pointing to the leaders of the opposition ... However, at this meeting of the Council no more drastic measures were taken, and the meeting of the Council was closed, and the military units that had arrived left peacefully at the direction of the Council.

“But on the same night, or the next day, soldiers or policemen were sent to the apartments of the most active opposition-deputies, and these deputies were arrested. They turned out to be Sem[jon] Mikh[ailovich] Ashkhatsava, Iv[an] Nik[olaevich] Margania, Dm[itrij] Iv[anovich] Margania and Georg[ij] Dav[idovich] Adzhamov. They were immediately sent to Tiflis and imprisoned in the Metekhi Fortress. After that, the Council was effectively dissolved and was no longer convened with this membership ...

“This shows that it was dangerous after the arrest of the leaders of the opposition to convene the Soviet with the participation of the rest of the opposition, so that they would not reveal from the deputies’ rostrum the lawlessness committed by the Mensheviks by seizing the deputies physically. It would also have been inappropriate officially to announce the dissolution of the Council with its present composition, i.e. its disbandment. This was done cunningly and behind the scenes, without any official act. But in fact the Soviet was dissolved by the most surreptitious act of arresting some deputies and not convening others. ... Thus did the second Abkhazian People's Council end its existence and its struggle /in terms of the opposition/ with the occupying Georgian Menshevik authorities in Abkhazia without any results.”

One of the instigators of the vote of no confidence in the chairman of the Council was Semjon Ashkhatsava, who made the following statement, which served as the beginning of events (as recorded in the Sukhum newspaper *Novoe Slovo*): “... [T]he working population of Abkhazia has definitely determined to take power into their own hands, for which they sent their representatives . The existing order cannot continue. Talk about Turkophilia is nonsense and deceit: if it continues like this, then indeed the people will take any orientation, not only Turkish, even devilish, if only to get rid of the invaders, and therefore it is necessary to re-elect the Presidium. People who have neither the trust nor the respect of the people cannot rule the country.”

It was this Semjon Ashkhatsava, formerly one of the leaders of the anti-Georgian struggle in the Soviet, who conveyed in his memoirs interesting details of its actual liquidation: “The Mensheviks, having suffered a complete collapse on their favourite parliamentary front, decided to resort to military force, especially since they had it available. On the next day, the 10th, the Menshevik government decreed the dissolution of the Abkhazian People's Council with its then-membership and the appointment of new elections for the third time. On that day, in the morning, S. Ashkhatsava and I. Margania were arrested, kept at the headquarters of the regiment until the evening in order to be sent to Tiflis at night by steamer [via Batumi? – Trans.] (so as not to be taken across Abkhazian territory, where they could be beaten off by local residents – author) and detained for this purpose from the morning. Also, Abkhazia was placed under martial law, and an extraordinary commissar V. Chkhikishvili was appointed, and guards were placed on the roads to the city so that there would be no raids from the population. At about 1 o'clock on the same day a meeting

gathered on the boulevard, at which G. Tumanov spoke with a sharp accusatory speech against the Menshevik outrages. The rally was dispersed and Tumanov arrested. In the following days, D. Alania, G. Adzhamov, V. Chachba, M. Schlatter and others (up to 16 people) were arrested for anti-Menshevik agitation and speeches. Thus, for Tiflis, the situation in the ANS in October 1918 turned very unpleasant, and therefore the most severe decision was taken: the ANS lost control and was immediately liquidated by the local Georgian administration.

Now Tiflis staked everything on a serious transformation of the Soviet via new elections on a proportional basis (across the entire territory of the district). Obviously, in the case of applying this election-formula, persons of non-Abkhazian origin ended up in the Council, and Georgian representation there increased (both directly and indirectly, thanks to protégés of the Georgian administration). Consequently, the Abkhazians would lose their majority in the ANS. Thus, Tiflis wanted finally to close the issue of Abkhazian independence by creating a representative body under its control, which would focus on issues of local self-government and would not peddle the idea of self-determination for Abkhazia.

In March 1919, new elections were held to the People's Council (which were kept under total control by the Georgian administration), with the result that most of the seats were taken by representatives of the political parties of Georgia (primarily, of course, the Mensheviks). The new cycle was opened by the oldest member of the Council, a well-known Menshevik in Abkhazia, Isidore Ramishvili, who, in addition, was the official representative of Georgia in the ANS. At the very first meeting of the new composition of the ANS, the 'Act on the Autonomy of Abkhazia' was adopted, which allowed the Georgian government legally to consolidate its presence in Abkhazia. Soon, alongside the Soviet there arose the Commissariat of Abkhazia, which was conceived as an executive authority, standing next to the legislative, i.e. the ANS. However, the commissariat turned out to be largely a decorative body that did not have real levers of influence on the situation.

Thus, in the period from October 1918 to March 1919, the entire administration of the former Sukhum District was conducted with the direct support of the Georgian military units.

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So, the third council was renamed the People's Council of Abkhazia (NSA), and formed under the total control of Tiflis in March 1919, which allowed it to exist until the end of the democratic republic, i.e. almost two years, until March 1921. It was this Council, under pressure from the Georgian administration, that on 20 March 1919 adopted the 'Act on the Autonomy of Abkhazia', where Tiflis finally managed to carry through the provision it needed, to wit: "Abkhazia is part of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, as an autonomous unit of it." The second paragraph of this act served as a kind of straw to soften the blow, insofar as it announced the start of work on a constitution for Abkhazia, the main provisions of which would later be included in the Georgian constitution – (+ to coordinate the powers and relations between Tiflis and Sukhum, the creation of a mixed commission was announced to be made up from the Constituent Assembly of Georgia and the People's

Council of Abkhazia in equal measures). The modern Abkhazian historian Stanislav Lakoba rightly emphasises that "in essence, it remained on paper, and three different drafts of the Constitution of Abkhazia were not approved due to disagreements between the ANS, on the one hand, and the Georgian government and Constituent Assembly, on the other". In fact, this document legitimised the Georgian military-political presence in Abkhazia, establishing the supremacy of the legislation of the GDR and its power there.

Abkhazians, dissatisfied with the actions of the Georgian government and the military command in Abkhazia, left the Social Democratic faction of the People's Council, and there arose there a separate group of Social Democrats - Internationalists, consisting exclusively of Abkhazian representatives. It was during this period that they proposed three draft constitutions for Abkhazia, the adoption of which was much discussed from the rostrum of the Council. However, everything ended with their discussion in Sukhum, because the further process turned out to be blocked in Tiflis, since the peddling of this issue logically resulting in the form of an agreement and approval of one of the options would actually have undermined the reality of Georgian power in Abkhazia.

It should be noted that the autonomous status of Abkhazia within Georgia could not be legally formalised for a long time by its then leadership, and this happened only on the eve of the Sovietisation of 1921. Only in the last days of the existence of the Georgian Democratic Republic, did its Constituent Assembly, the elections of which, by the way, were boycotted by the majority of the Abkhazian population, adopt a Constitution of Georgia, which spoke of the autonomous governance of Abkhazia.

The Georgian government needed a document stating that Abkhazia was part of the republic (it is clear that it was an autonomy), and when it received it in 1919, the activity of its representatives abruptly dwindled. At that time, the drafting of the Constitution of Georgia was in full swing, in which Abkhazia was allotted a very small place.

The politicians from Tiflis were not interested in working out the specific powers and functionality of the People's Council itself, so the matter did not go further than this document. The desire of the Abkhazian leaders to receive legislative functions for the Council remained an unfulfilled dream. The Georgian administration was able to keep the Abkhazian Council within the framework of an ordinary representative and advisory body. The formal declaration of autonomous status without a specific legal elaboration of the relationship between Sukhum and Tiflis created uncertainty and contributed to the escalation of the conflict.

After March 1919, only the dispute over the status of Abkhazia within Georgia remained relevant. By and large, the Georgian authorities, who felt themselves masters of the situation, managed to localise this dispute within the framework of the Council. Ethnic Abkhazians, united in an opposition-group, demanded the status of "broad political autonomy", referring to the equality of subjecthood for Georgia and Abkhazia and to the Agreements signed in 1918. Tiflis, in turn, supported the local Social Democrats, as well as the Social-Revolutionaries and Social-Federalists, who lobbied for the idea of "administrative autonomy" for Abkhazia.

Therefore, no Abkhazian constitution was ever considered or supported by Tiflis. Members of the People's Council were deprived of the right independently to adopt a constitution. Otherwise, a format of equality would have arisen between the Abkhazian and Georgian sides, something which the latter feared and did not want.

The adoption of the constitution of the GDR and the "Temporary regulation on the management of the autonomy of Abkhazia" in February 1921 was clearly belated, given that the Republic was already rolling towards collapse ...

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The misunderstanding between Tiflis and Sukhum that arose in 1918 quickly turned into an escalating conflict.

So, the ANS was dissolved by Mazniev on 9 October 1918, some of its members being arrested and sent to Tiflis. By order of the general, a number of punitive expeditions were carried out on the territory of the district, some of them even ended with the burning of the houses of local residents. In October of the same year, the Minister for Abkhazian Affairs R. Chkhotua was removed from office and, together with the district commissioner I. Marshania, was accused of conspiracy against Georgia (after which there followed the arrest of the aforementioned).

The actions of the Georgian authorities and the military contingent caused massive discontent among the local population. This trend is recorded in the intelligence of the Volunteer Army. In particular, in the report of the head of the Intelligence Department of the Headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief of the Volunteer Army, Colonel S.N. Rjasnjanskij, of 22 October 1918 it was noted that "all Abkhazians are extremely hostile towards the Georgians and the Georgian Government. The following circumstances served as the reason for the dissatisfaction: some part of the population of Abkhazia, back in ancient times, moved to Turkey, but at present they decided to return to their compatriots in Abkhazia, especially since the population of the latter agreed to accept them. For this purpose, a delegation of 200 people was sent to the Georgian Government in order to obtain permission from it to resettle in Abkhazia. The Georgian Government refused the request of the Abkhazian deputies, which was the first reason for the dissatisfaction of the Abkhazian population towards the Government of the Georgians. The second reason, which finally sowed irreconcilable enmity between the Abkhazians and Georgians, was that the latter, in view of the large grain harvest in Abkhazia, requisitioned almost all food-supplies for the population for Georgia. In addition to bread, the Georgian Government also requisitioned from the Abkhazians cattle, horses, saddles, and in general everything needed by Georgia. The latter circumstance finally brought the Abkhazians to the end of their tether, and in some places of Abkhazia they raised an armed uprising against their oppressors".

According to the head of Denikin's intelligence-service, such demonstrations, "having an unorganised character, were quickly suppressed by the Georgian troops, and the Government of Georgia officially styled them a Bolshevik movement among the Abkhazians. Weapons amounting to 4,000 rifles and 40,000 cartridges for them were brought to the

Abkhazians from Turkey by the delegates. At present, some detachments of the rebellious Abkhazians are hiding in the mountains, and the Georgian Government is in no position to do anything with them”.

Dissatisfaction with the Georgian government and the presence of its troops grew and resulted in the appeal of the Abkhazians to Denikin, who then commanded the Volunteer Army. As S. Danilov stresses: “Finally, the Abkhazians could not stand it and sent their representatives to the command of the Volunteer Army with a request to help them free themselves from the new conquerors. Many Abkhazians, officers and horsemen, secretly left Abkhazia and joined the ranks of the Volunteer Army of Gen. Denikin, which was successfully operating in the North Caucasus and in the south of Russia.”

Having received such an appeal (“Appeal of representatives of the Abkhazian people to General Denikin” dated 1 February 1919), Denikin immediately wrote a special appeal to the two most influential British generals, J. Forestier-Walker and J. Milne, wherein, in particular, he noted, that “the hatred of the Abkhazians towards the Georgians is so great that no cohabitation of these two peoples is possible, but all the same, through bloody struggle the Abkhazians will achieve their freedom ...”. In connection with such an understandable trend, he asked the Allied command “for the immediate withdrawal of Georgian troops from Abkhazia in order to save the Abkhazuan people from violence ...”.

The outrages of the Georgian units both in the Abkhazian and Armenian villages of the district caused open discontent. For example, on 22 June 1918, Georgian soldiers robbed the cash-desk of the Lykhny Credit Association. An investigative commission was created, which confirmed the fact of the robbery and bringing the fireproof cash-desk “into a state of complete disrepair” – the cost of the damage was estimated at 2 thousand roubles.

This commission was specifically engaged in identifying victims of the robbery and compiling a general statement of losses to the population of Abkhazia caused by Georgian troops in the summer of 1918. In particular, the population of the Gudauta province alone, according to the register drawn up on 17 August, suffered losses totalling 85,718 roubles. In addition to money, a large number of horses (as well as saddles, bridles, whips), gold rings and bracelets, watches, daggers, carpets, and household-utensils were stolen. All the necessary food-supplies and alcohol were taken from the local residents (many complained about the theft of several buckets of wine or vodka, and about the disappearance of flour and sugar). Moreover, the Georgian soldiers were not averse to stealing small and low-value items – in other words, everything that just lay about - clothes, bedding, even handkerchiefs. Serious damage was also caused to the inhabitants of the Kodor district as a result of robberies and arson committed by soldiers.

Periodically, indignant residents sent letters to Tiflis demanding the removal of the presumptuous “defenders” from Abkhazia. For example, a similar goal was pursued in a memorandum of the chairman of the Sukhum Armenian Council Kh. Avdalkbekjan (March 1919) to the Chairman of the Government in Tiflis, where, in particular, it was said that “the recent speeches of the Georgian regular military units have created in the Armenian population a feeling of deep resentment from the unlawful manifestations of cruelty on the

part of these units. Murders, robberies, illegal removal of horses from peasants and rape of women accompanied the path of the military units, mainly the cavalry division". The document lists a number of villages that had suffered at the hands of Georgian units: "In the village of Atara, a flying detachment carried off 11 horses and the population was robbed of the amount of 62,500 roubles, according to the calculation of the district commissariat. The losses of the peasants of the village Lechkop were, by their account, 32 thousand roubles. The losses of the peasants of the villages of Gumista and Eshera were, by their account, 196 thousand roubles. The losses of the peasants of the village Kavakluk were, by their account, more than 200 thousand roubles. ...".

Discontent ripened and resulted in an appeal by a delegation of 14 deputies of the People's Council addressed to the head of government, Noë Zhordania, (dated 29 September 1919), where there was a demand to deal with "the arbitrariness and violence of the authorities". This message, also brought to the Georgian capital, listed the excesses and facts of the arbitrariness of the representatives of the Georgian administration, the military command and individual detachments.

In particular, General Mazniev and his chief of staff, Colonel Tukhareli, organised an expeditionary detachment to carry out punitive operations. He, according to the statement of the deputies of the People's Council, broke into "peaceful Abkhazian villages [in the Kodor District – commentary in footnote], taking everything of even the slightest value, and committing violence against women. The other part of this detachment, under the direct supervision of Mr. Tukhareli, was engaged in bombing the houses of those persons who had been denounced. Similar violence was carried out in the Gudauta Region. The head of the Georgian detachment, Lieutenant Kupunia, a former bailiff of the city of Poti, beat up a gathering of the entire village in Atsy, forcing everyone to lie down under machine-gun fire, and walked on their backs, striking with the flat surface of a sabre; then he ordered the gathering to group together in a mass and rode at full gallop into the crowd, inflicting beatings with the whip. Members of the former Abkhazian People's Council, Abukhba and Dzukua, who turned to him in protest against such atrocity and violence, were arrested and locked up in a barn.

Widespread discontent among the local population was also caused by the actions of the Georgian detachment in the Gumista District. There, "in the Dranda region, the head of a separate detachment, officer Chargishvili, systematically is provoking the population on ethnic grounds, resorting to blatant measures for this purpose. So, for example, for 11 days Abkhazians travelling from the Kodor and Samurzakan Districts were not allowed to pass over the Kodor bridge; Mr. Chargishvili referred to the order of Colonel Tukhareli. Neither of them cancelled their order even after instruction from the Commissar of Internal Affairs of Abkhazia, Mr. Lordkipanidze".

Extraordinary Commissar Chkhikvishvili, who was appointed Head of the Georgian administration of Abkhazia by Tiflis after the dissolving of the People's Council, repeatedly "distinguished himself" in Abkhazia. "Like General Mazniev, he organised a detachment from the dregs of Samurzakan, which, being sent to the village of Dzhgerda (Kodor District) in order to catch the killers of Mamatsov (instructor for elections to the People's Council of

Abkhazia), limited himself to robbing literally the entire civilian population of Dzhgerda. On the way back, this detachment robbed the Armenian village located between Dzhgerda and the village of Atara. The losses caused by this detachment were expressed in millions," the Abkhazian deputies said in a statement.

The authors of the appeal write bitterly that: "The peoples of Abkhazia have not yet seen anything but punitive expeditions, arson, flogging and violence against women ... Thus, in a short time, in all respects, representatives of the Georgian government have not only failed to establish friendly relations between the peoples of Abkhazia and the Georgian government, but, on the contrary, have alienated those who sincerely supported the Republic of Georgia in its democratic aspirations."

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The negative consequences of the shameless intervention of Tiflis in the life of Abkhazia (dictatorship, if you like) were felt by the population and its various circles rather quickly. For example, the decision of the Georgian government to ban the export of tobacco from Abkhazian territory led to a sharp drop in prices for it and actually brought down the previously flourishing industry. As early as July 1918, tobacco-prices fell by almost 40%. This was in direct violation of the June Agreement, which left all matters of internal administration in the hands of the ANS⁶.

The attempt to introduce the Georgian language as an official language did not find understanding either: Tiflis demanded the translation into Georgian of all office-work in state-institutions, as well as at the post office and telegraph. In particular, the government of the GDR, based on clear nationalist ideology, demanded that within 3 months the activities of all government-agencies and, of course, postal and telegraph services, be completely translated into Georgian. This directly affected the issue of personnel, since people of non-Georgian origin, specifically those with no knowledge of the Georgian language, had to leave the service within the same three months. The ANS was categorically against such an unacceptable innovation, considering it important to preserve linguistic freedom in Abkhazia; therefore, on 3 August 1918: "In view of the multi-tribal population of Abkhazia and the impossibility of nationalising government institutions, the Abkhazian People's Council decided temporarily to keep the Russian language as the common language of government institutions on the territory of Abkhazia", and, in addition to this, to announce "for general information that in the territory of Abkhazia the dismissal of employees on a national basis cannot be allowed". Therefore, already on 2 August, the ANS had suggested that "the heads of the institutions of Abkhazia freely accept telegrams and written correspondence in all languages only with the Roman or Russian script".

⁶ In response to this, on 4 August 1918, the Council adopted a resolution with a protest "Against the prohibition by the Georgian government of the removal of tobacco or other products of industry from the borders of Abkhazia" and emphasised Tiflis' lack of the right to "interfere in the economic life of Abkhazia". The said proceedings just prompted the Abkhazian Council to split, and soon it was dissolved for the first time by Georgian administration (see above).

A sharp protest was also caused by the announcement of a state-monopoly on the export of tobacco, which had previously been one of the main sources of income for Abkhazia (this led to a conflict between Tiflis and Sukhum, which, referring to the Agreement, demanded that this industry be left in its jurisdiction). The introduction of additional taxes and payments (many were of an emergency-nature), as well as various prohibitive decrees by the Georgian administration, had an extremely negative impact on the socio-economic life in Abkhazia, and on the already rather low level of trust in Tiflis. In particular, the “one-time emergency land-tax” introduced in the autumn of 1919 caused unrest and grumbling among the Abkhazian population.

The sanitary tax had similar consequences. For example, the newspaper *Nashe Slovo* describes the current situation in Gudauta in November 1919 as follows: “The city is now, more than ever, experiencing a food-crisis: there is no meat, which is explained by speculation on the part of butchers, taking advantage of the lack of a butcher’s shop in the city, doing their dark deeds like slaughtering stolen cattle and selling them to some restaurateurs, etc. The sanitary tax caused a lot of talk among merchants, who called it ‘an invention of the mayor’. The sanitary tax is not going particularly well because of distrust in the City Duma on the part of the irresponsible part of the merchants ... With the announcement of the sanitary tax, prices for all consumer-goods have increased significantly ... In connection with this increase in food-prices, the poor and service people are doomed to starvation: the only way out is to supply their products at a reasonable price.”

S. Danilov notes that: “Since the country has come to be ruled by the Georgian authorities, the economic situation in Abkhazia has begun noticeably to worsen. There was no influx of the public (from Russia) to the resorts; the main branch of the country's economy, tobacco growing, was experiencing an acute sales-crisis due to the closure of borders. The main consumer for Abkhazian tobacco was the Russian tobacco-industry. Now, when this main buyer was no more, tobacco-prices have fallen sharply: local small factories (for example, in Tiflis) could absorb no more than 5% of the finished tobacco-crop. All this hit the well-being of the population of Abkhazia hard. The closure of markets with Russia caused yet other, extremely negative consequences: the supply of flour and foodstuffs ceased. Prior to this, the bulk of food-products had come to Abkhazia from the Ukraine (flour, butter, livestock, etc.), down to bran and hay, not to mention industrial goods.”

It should be noted that by the autumn of 1919 the socio-economic situation in Abkhazia had become serious. As recorded in the order of the ANS delegation sent to Tiflis for negotiations (dated 28 November 1919): “The financial and economic crisis of Abkhazia has reached catastrophic proportions; private initiative has become predatory – industry, especially tobacco, as well as any organic work under In the current order of things, is excluded – as a consequence of which the population and local democracy are in the most difficult position. As a result of this, local democratic institutions – the People's Council of Abkhazia and its executive body - the Commissariat, as well as local organs of government and economy - *zemstvos* and city-administrations are on the verge of extinction and, in view

of threatening indications, no creative work or development of the productive forces of the region is conceivable unless urgent action is taken."

The ANS demanded that Tiflis leave the foreign trade in tobacco (at least 50 thousand *poods* of tobacco-leaf!), nuts (hazelnuts) and wine (since tobacco-growing, wine-making and collecting nuts were traditional Abkhazian industries) under their jurisdiction, to provide a monopoly on logging activities (i.e. harvesting timber and exporting it abroad for sale), as well as harvesting corn, beans, hay and pork. In addition, in order to intensify trade and economic activity in Abkhazia, the Council asked the Georgian government for a loan of 10 million roubles.

Tiflis paid attention to Abkhazia and provided it with financial support only on a residual basis, obviously not meeting the wishes and requests of the ANS. In extreme cases, when it was completely indecent or insulting for the Georgian government to refuse, a half-hearted decision was made. Sukhum's demands were never fully supported, despite their moderation.

In particular, the financial and economic delegation sent to Tiflis at the end of 1919 was able to obtain official permission only for the export of 20 thousand *poods* of small nuts abroad. Independent export of tobacco abroad was prohibited (the ban was announced personally by the Minister of Supply of Georgia, G.P. Eradze, in connection with the announcement of the state's monopoly on tobacco-leaf).

However, after the meetings of the delegation with members of the government, it was possible to change the position of the Georgian side. As recorded in the report of the delegation: "On the first issue of granting the right to export 50,000 *poods* of tobacco-leaf abroad, the delegation was not fully satisfied, either in terms of quantity or in terms of export. It is allowed to prepare only 25,000 *poods* of tobacco and export it in conjunction with the central government for sale abroad. Moreover, sharing in the net income from the sale are both the Commissariat and the central Government, which assumes responsibility for insurance and the costs of moving the delivered tobacco from the place of loading to the destination, where the sale is to be completed. Their sharing in this income is determined by the percentage-balance, namely: the Commissariat receives 40%, and the remaining 60% goes to the central Government."

Success can be considered to be the conclusion by the said delegation of two agreements in the Ministry of Supply of Georgia: "On the purchase and preparation of a monopoly for tobacco, corn and *lobio* [beans – Trans] within Abkhazia. Under these agreements, in addition to all expenses for the purchase and procurement of tobacco and corn, the Commissariat of Abkhazia receives in the form of net income for the production of operations 5% of the purchase-price from tobacco, 10% from corn, and 20 roubles for the procurement of *lobio* per *pood*.

* * *

However, during the years of Georgian dictatorship, the situation in the socio-economic field did not change for the better. An assembly of the Abkhazian intelligentsia, which met

at the end of February 1920 in Sukhum, stated "that among the Abkhazian masses, as well as among the peasants of other nationalities inhabiting Abkhazia, there is complete poverty and an extreme need for factory-made items; that locally produced products are devalued due to abnormal marketing; that public education, medical and agronomic assistance to the population are at a low level or completely absent; that the observed negative attitude towards the existing political order is mainly due to the unsecured material situation of the population".

By the autumn of 1920 the situation in Abkhazia was still serious. The Council of Civil Servants repeatedly appealed to the People's Council of Abkhazia with a demand to improve their financial situation, which had put them on the brink of survival and poverty. In one of the Council's statements, dated 7 September, it is emphasised that "the extreme cost and lack of basic necessities, coupled with completely insufficient maintenance, barely enough to last 10 days, create extremely difficult living conditions for employees, leading to gradual physical exhaustion".

It should be noted that dissatisfaction with the local administration and anti-Georgian sentiments in Abkhazian society only grew in the period 1919-1921. The characteristic of the situation in Abkhazia in the autumn of 1920, which is given by intelligence of the 9th Kuban Red Army, based on data from agents, is indicative: "All power in Abkhazia is concentrated in the hands of the Commissar of Internal Affairs of Abkhazia Ubiria, who appoints the entire administration (commissars of towns, districts and etc.). He himself is a mere tool, an agent of the Georgian government... Ubiria enjoys absolutely no authority among the masses. At the Com[mittee] of Ext[ernal] Affairs of Abkhazia, a Special Detachment (Georgian counterintelligence) is working, headed by Eshba; agents of this organisation are scattered in all corners of Abkhazia. It is enough to arouse the slightest suspicion in the eyes of a special constable to end up spending 2-3 months in prison when entirely guilt-free. The Sukhum prison is constantly overcrowded (up to 400 people are imprisoned), mostly by legally innocent Abkhazians. Bribery among the administration has reached its climax – people are often arrested in order to squeeze out a bribe. Therefore, the entire population is full of dissatisfaction with the administration ... The Abkhazian people are certainly not in a position to oppose Georgia, but they are waiting for the right moment, an external onslaught, to reveal their inner bitterness ...

"A small part of the Abkhazians cleave to Turkish orientation – princes (nobility) and Mohammedan Abkhazians, whilst the rest of the Abkhazians, who reside in the Samurzakano, Gudauta and Gagra regions, are on the side of Soviet Russia."

A similar negative attitude towards the Georgian authorities was also recorded by Mustafa Butbaj (who made an extended trip to the Caucasus in 1920 and visited Georgia and Abkhazia); he left behind interesting travel-notebooks, collectively known as "Memories of the Caucasus". For example, in the entry dated 21 August, there are the following lines: "An old man came to visit me today. He talked a lot about Georgians for a very long time. About how they took tobacco from the peasants without paying anything, and things like that, about how the Abkhazians are very embittered with regard to the Georgians; he spoke of it with great bitterness and pain."

* * *

After the adoption by the People's Council of the document so desired by the Georgian leadership (the "Act on the Autonomy of Abkhazia" March 1919), more than a year passed, and the situation regarding the official formalisation of relations between Sukhum and Tiflis, as well as the creation of a legislative framework for Abkhazia itself, essentially did not change. The Georgian leadership in every possible way delayed the process of adopting the constitution of Abkhazia, and the legislative delimitation of powers between Tiflis and Sukhum. In total for the period 1919-1920 three delegations of the NSA visited Tiflis, bringing with them three different drafts of an Abkhazian constitution, but none of them was considered on its merits, and, moreover, was not adopted. The deputies of the Constituent Assembly of Georgia considered simple fixation in law of the autonomous status of Abkhazia within the GDR sufficient.

In the note of the Abkhazian delegation, submitted to N. Zhordania in November 1920, it was emphasised that "the People's Council of Abkhazia, based on aforementioned Agreements, Acts and government-assurances, repeatedly sent delegations to the Constituent Assembly to finalise relations between Georgia and Abkhazia – indeed an Extraordinary Commissioner of the Republic of Georgia took part in the preparatory work in the People's Council. However, these delegations did not achieve the desired result. ... Relations between Georgia and Abkhazia have not yet been formalised and therefore are not legally binding on either side".

The delegation publicly accused the Georgian side of regular violations of the signed Agreements: "All the Government's assurances about the inviolability of autonomy were in practice far from reality. In essence, since 1918, the Government of Georgia has been increasingly expanding the scope of its intervention in all spheres of life in Abkhazia, quite often violating even those of its rights about which there was no dispute in the commissions that developed the Draft Constitution of Autonomous Abkhazia. This contradiction, expressed, on the one hand, in the repeated assurances of the organs of the Republic about the inviolability of autonomy, and on the other hand, in the interference in the internal affairs of Abkhazia, created in Abkhazia distrust not only in the national authorities, but also in the local legislative body – the People's Council of Abkhazia which believed, by a large majority, its immediate tasks lay in organising power in Abkhazia and in achieving the people's peace of mind, which had been disturbed by the aforementioned contradictions.

The delegation headed by I.N. Margania arrived in the Georgian capital in the autumn of 1920 (as recorded in a note) "with a certain expressed desire to receive clearly and precisely documented answers on the merits of the Act of 20 March 1919, and also insists on the need for the immediate formation of a mixed commission made up in equal numbers from the People's Council and the Constituent Assembly to consider the Draft Constitution of Abkhazia, which draft should be hastily approved by the Constituent Assembly. The goal of the delegation was not achieved this time either. The Constituent Assembly of Georgia was not going to consider a separate Abkhazian constitution, let alone approve it. It was during this period that the work on the republican constitution was being completed, where Abkhazia (also called the "Sukhum Region" = *oblast'* – Trans.) was allotted a very modest

place. Along with other outlying areas, it received the right to "autonomous government in local affairs" (according to the 107th article). The Georgian political élite simply did not want to treat the Abkhazians as equals and bother with their demands for broad autonomy⁷.

* * *

Officially unscheduled relations between Tiflis and Sukhum were in a essentially broken state. The gulf between the aspirations of the Abkhazian and Georgian élites had only widened since 1918. In real life, anti-Georgian sentiments in Abkhazian society had grown stronger and stronger. Tiflis could not do anything to smooth out these sharp contradictions. And soon after the departure of the last Abkhazian delegation, Tiflis welcomed the year 1921 followed by new guests wearing Red Army uniforms.

It is important to emphasise that the mass-dissatisfaction with the Georgian policy, both by Abkhazian society and its élite, naturally led to an increase in the feelings of protest in society and sympathy for the Bolsheviks (Soviet Russia). As the Soviet military attaché in Georgia Pavel Sytin reported (in a report dated 25 January 1921): "Since the return of the delegation of the Abkhazian People's Council from Tiflis, the Council has not yet met, despite the fact that the majority of members insist on convening the Council, but the Georgian government is afraid that the Abkhazian People's Council at the very first meeting will renounce Georgia due to Georgia's violation of the Act of 20 March 1919, which states that Abkhazia is part of Georgia as an autonomous unit. All this causes revulsion in the masses of Abkhazia and creates a fertile ground for us. Robberies are going on in Abkhazia and anarchy is intensifying. The population is waiting for a call to revolt."

Such sentiments greatly facilitated the military operation of the Red Army on the territory of Abkhazia in 1921, when the Georgian troops found themselves without any support from the population and were forced to retreat rapidly beyond the River Ingur. Moreover, such a clear victory was largely the result of the direct actions of the Abkhazian rebel-detachments. Modern scholar of the Caucasus A.B. Krylov rightly notes that "the establishment of Soviet power in Abkhazia in March 1921 was perceived by the population primarily as deliverance from national oppression and Georgian occupation". Let us emphasise that the Abkhazians most actively participated in the operation of the Red Army against the Republic of Georgia and made a significant contribution to the defeat of its armed forces and the final victory, which led to the Sovietisation of Georgia.

⁷ As B. Mailjan rightly emphasises, "Abkhazian politicians could not provide for their country more favourable conditions in relations with Georgia than those dictated by Tiflis. Actions of individual members of the ANS involuntarily contributed to the desire of the Georgian side to bring Abkhazia to the state of administrative subordination to Georgia. The Government of Georgia, using various levers of pressure, including diplomatic ones but, at the decisive moment, without promising not to use armed forces, was able to take control of the territory of Abkhazia."

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