

BORDER ISSUE

**THE BORDERS BETWEEN AZERBAIJAN,
GEORGIA, AND RUSSIA:
SOVIET HERITAGE**

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The administrative-territorial reforms carried out under Soviet power in the Caucasus to delimitate Russia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia have always been and remain a bone of contention. So far their governments have not yet come to terms on several problems on certain border stretches. For fourteen years now, delimitation has been going on with varying intensity. Russia and Azerbaijan have come the closest to settling these disputes with respect to the Daghestanian stretch of their common border. The last talks about the debatable territories in the Khachmaz, Gusar, and Balakian districts of Azerbaijan were held in April 2005.¹

Delimitation of the Russian-Georgian border is burdened with the uneasy relations between

Tbilisi and the break-away republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The budding advance toward a settlement was cut short by the military actions undertaken by Mikhail Saakashvili's cabinet. Continued delimitation of 13 percent of the Russian-Georgian border is rigidly associated with the restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity.

So far, there is no clearly delimited border between Georgia and Azerbaijan. Chairman of the Border Guard Department of Georgia Lieutenant-General B. Bitsadze offered the following comment on the closed meeting with the Azeri delegation held on 7 July, 2005: "We have an administrative border, but we still do not know where the state border runs."²

¹ See: "Azerbaidzhansko-rossiiskoy komissii po delimitatsii ne udalos priyti k soglasheniu," IA REGNUM [www.regnum.ru/news/435712.html], 9 April, 2005.

² "Gruzia-Azerbaidzhan: pogranichnye nedorazumenia," IA REGNUM [www.regnum.ru/news/482332.html], 23 September, 2005.

The area where the state borders of the three countries meet gives rise to many debates; the same can be said about the Krasniy Most checkpoint. A glance at the ethnic map reveals the causes of these problems. The borders of the three countries have made the local homogenous population a divided nation: any positive development requires close cooperation among all of the states involved. In the case of the Krasniy Most checkpoint, the countries are confronted with discrepancies between the state and ethnic borders which appeared several centuries ago. After 1801, the

Russian Empire was busy dividing the Caucasus into administrative units with the aim of strengthening its influence there. The borders which appeared between the three states during the short period of independence in 1917-1921 are mainly responsible for the current disagreements.

According to the Alma-Ata Declaration and the CIS Charter of 1991 the administrative borders of Soviet times should serve as the starting-point of border delimitation in the post-Soviet era. Under Soviet power border delimitation principles went through several stages.

First Stage: For the Sake of Influence

In the 1920s, when the Gorskaia and Daghestanian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics were set up, there was a lot of talk about the priority of ethnic borders over all other considerations.³ In fact, however, the administrative borders were drawn with an eye to preserving the republics as economically integral units.⁴

Many Soviet researchers have already written that the Gorskaia Republic was set up in direct proximity to Menshevik Georgia, which offered asylum to the former “governments” of the North Caucasian republics. The Bolsheviks wanted to unite the mountain (*gorskie*) peoples as a counterbalance to the activity of the leaders of the “independent Gorskaia Republic.”⁵ In other words, the Soviet government did try to level out the economic and cultural levels of various republics. It seemed advisable to take into account not only the geographical factor created by the Main Caucasian Range but also, in individual cases, the ethnic factor (the border between Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachaevo-Cherkessia).

This was done to keep in mind the administrative borders inherited from the Russian Empire and the borders agreed upon under the Russian-Georgian Treaty of 1920, under which Georgia could claim the territories along the River Psou and the Zakataly Okrug.⁶ The government of the Azerbaijanian S.S.R. contested the treaty in the part related to the Zakataly Okrug and kept it within Azerbaijan on the strength of the local people’s cultural affinity with the Azeris. In 1920, an appendix to the Russian-Georgian Treaty was signed in Moscow.⁷ The Zakataly issue was related to the parity Georgian-Azerbaijani commission chaired by an R.S.F.S.R. representative. N. Diakova and M. Chepelkin have

³ See: “Doklad I.V. Stalina na s’ezde narodov Terskoy oblasti ‘O Sovetskoy Avtonomii Terskoy oblasti’ (17 noiabria 1920 g.),” *Obrazovanie SSSR: Sb. Dokumentov 1917-1924*, ed. by E.B. Genkina, Moscow, 1949, p. 188.

⁴ State Archives of the Russian Federation (SARF), Record group 5677, Inventory 1, File 3415, sheets 01-9.

⁵ *Istoria natsional’no-gosudarstvennogo stroitel’stva v SSSR: natsional’no-gosudarstvennoe stroitel’stvo v SSSR v perekhodnyy period ot kapitalizma k sotsializmu (1917-1936)*, Moscow, 1968, p. 254; S.V. Kharmandarian, *Lenin i stanovlenie Zakavkazskoy Federatsii (1921-1923)*, Erevan, 1969; idem, *Splochenie narodov v stroitel’stve sotsializma (opyt ZSFSR)*, Moscow, 1982.

⁶ See: *Sbornik deystvuiushchikh dogovorov, soglashenii i konventsiy, zakliuchennykh RSFSR s inostrannymi gosudarstvami*, Issue 1, Petrograd, 1922, p. 27.

⁷ See: “Dopolnitel’noe soglasenie k mirnomu dogovoru mezhdru Rossiiy i Gruziiy ot 7 maia 1920 g.,” *Sbornik deystvuiushchikh dogovorov...*, p. 33.

pointed out: "Later the Zakataly Okrug was returned to Azerbaijan."⁸ This raises the question: When was the okrug (area) transferred to Georgia, if ever? Indeed, by 28 June, 1920 the administrative boundaries inside Azerbaijan had been already drawn up according to the Decree on the Regional Soviets of National Economy (with the Nukhinskiy uезд and Zakataly Okrug registered as part of the Nukhinskiy District of Azerbaijan).⁹ Judging by these documents, in June 1920 the Zakataly Okrug still belonged to Azerbaijan.

Significantly, the Soviet-Georgian treaty related to the territory of a third republic, even though the Azerbaijanian S.S.R. and the R.S.F.S.R. had not yet been joined by the treaty on a military and financial-economic alliance (signed on 30 September, 1920).¹⁰ It seems that the transfer of the Zakataly Okrug ("along its eastern border"¹¹) to Georgia was a temporary concession on the part of Soviet power prompted by strategic considerations; Moscow probably merely limited itself to a statement of intentions to establish better relations with Tbilisi.

In February-March 1921, when Soviet power struck root in Georgia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, the Georgian S.S.R. and Soviet Russia entered into a treaty on a military and economic alliance.¹² It should be said that the document, as well as the treaty between R.S.F.S.R. and the Az.S.S.R., never mentioned border issues. On the basis of the treaty signed on 7 May, 1920 with independent Georgia, however, the borders were delimited, therefore the territory up to the borders mentioned in the treaty should have belonged to Georgia.

The question of whether Abkhazia and South Ossetia should be joined to Georgia was discussed separately. According to the official version, Abkhazia was joined to Georgia because "the economic destiny of the Abkhaz nation is intimately connected with that of Georgia."¹³ Abkhazia's request to be included in the R.S.F.S.R. was declined because of the "economic and cultural ties between the Georgian and Abkhazian peoples."¹⁴ This was how Abkhazia became part of Georgia with "special conditions" on which it managed to insist. Tiflis and Sukhumi signed a corresponding treaty on 16 December, 1921.

The joint sitting of the revolutionary committee of South Ossetia and its party committee held on 6-8 September, 1921 decided to enter into "federative relations with the S.S.R. of Georgia." The sides signed a document under which "ethnographic, geographical, and economic conditions"¹⁵ should be taken into consideration for the purpose of border delimitation. In the mountains, the ethnic and economic borders could coincide; however, this formula opened up the possibility of uniting the northern and southern Ossets. It was obviously necessary to specify the borders. On 31 October, the Caucasian Bureau made South Ossetia an autonomous region,¹⁶ thus firmly attaching it to Georgia. Point 2 of the Decree which created this autonomous region said: "The Autonomous Region of South Ossetia should include the territory on which the South Ossetian people live within the following borders: (a) in the north, the border runs along the Main Caucasian Range and the southern state border of the A.S.S.

⁸ N.A. Diakova, M.A. Chepelkin, *Granitsy Rossii v XVII-XX vv. Istoricheskiy ocherk; prilozhenie k "Istorii Rossii,"* Moscow, 1995, p. 181.

⁹ See: "Dekret o rayonnykh sovetakh narodnogo khoziaistva, 28 iunia 1920 g.," *AzSSR. Dekrety Azrevkoma (1920-1921 gg.): Sb. dokumentov*, Baku, 1988, pp. 87-88.

¹⁰ See: "Dogovor mezhdru RSFSR i Azerbaidzhanskoy Sovetskoy Sotsialisticheskoy Respublikoy o voenno-ekonomicheskom soiuze obeikh respublik, 30 sentiabria 1920 g.," *Obrazovanie SSSR...*, p. 247.

¹¹ *Sbornik deystvuiushchikh dogovorov...*, p. 27.

¹² See: "Dogovor mezhdru Gruzinskoy SSR i RSFSR o voennom i khoziaistvennom soiuze, 12 maia 1921," *Obrazovanie SSSR...*, p. 257.

¹³ Quoted from: *Istoria Abkhazskoy ASSR (1917-1937)*, ed. by G.A. Dzidzaria, Sukhumi, 1983, p. 103.

¹⁴ Iu.M. Kacharava et al., *Istoria Gruzii*, Part 3, Tbilisi, 1968, p. 89; *S'ezdy Sovetov sovetskikh sotsialisticheskikh respublik. Sb. dokumentov. 1917-1922*, Vol. 2, Moscow, 1960, p. 457.

¹⁵ Quoted from: *Iz istorii vzaimootnosheniy gruzinskogo i osetinskogo narodov (Zakliuchenie komissii po izuchenii statusa Iugo-Osetinskoy oblasti*, Tbilisi, 1991, p. 457.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

Gorskaia Republic...¹⁷ It should be added that the northern border was described in fewer details than the southern border, which means that either the Main Caucasian Range was seen as a natural geographic boundary connected to the economic boundaries of the time or that by that time the border issue had not yet been settled.

It was a logical decision: even though the northern and southern Ossets belonged to the same ethnic group, their unification at that time would have destroyed the already accepted borders and would have caused Georgia's strong opposition. The Bolsheviks, who were not yet sure of their grip on power, could not afford this risk.

In the process of border delimitation between the Georgian and Azerbaijanian republics it was decided to leave the administrative border between the Elizavetpol and Tiflis gubernias intact because of complicated land ownership relations along this border.

The republics could not agree on border issues even after Soviet power had been established in the Transcaucasus. Land, pastures especially, were scarce in the areas of developed cattle-breeding. On 9-12 June, 1923, speaking at a meeting of the C.C. R.C.P. (Bolsheviks) with officials of the national republics and regions held in Moscow, the Azerbaijanian executive representatives pointed out: "In summer Azeri peasants have to drive their cattle up to the mountain pastures, one part of which belongs to Armenia and the other to Georgia. Even before that, before Soviet power, the disputes over pastures caused a lot of bloodshed and ethnic strife in the Transcaucasus. We should say that the problem has not been resolved under Soviet power either."¹⁸ "Some progress was achieved"¹⁹ when the Transcaucasian Federation was set up on 29 November, 1921. The second territorial party meeting of the Transcaucasus pointed out that "the unification of the Transcaucasian republics into a federation put an end to a lengthy and hard period of ethnic strife."²⁰ The documents paid special attention to the need to establish a "close economic alliance."²¹

It seems that the Soviet leaders did not limit themselves to political and economic tasks, but addressed territorial disputes as well: the boundaries between the sovereign republics no longer divided the states, but were merely administrative borders. They were open, therefore the peasants of the united republic could more or less freely move across its territory. Conditions were created under which part of territories could be temporarily used by a neighboring republic, which considerably relieved tension in the adjacent territories.

In 1922, the Transcaucasian Federation (Z.S.F.S.R.), as well as Soviet Russia went through administrative-territorial reforms based on the ethnic principle. The Georgian Bolsheviks declared: "The present administrative borders of the uyezds should not prevent us from creating regions with an ethnically homogeneous population wherever this can be done."²² The Gardabani-Akstafa stretch of the Georgian-Azerbaijani border did not follow this principle. After 1948, this territory was turned into a training ground of the Transcaucasian Military District and thus belonged to the state rather than a nation.

The administrative-territorial changes in the Caucasus fit the pattern of the administrative-territorial reforms in the R.S.F.S.R. carried out with the aim of setting up integrated economic regions. The reform was prompted by a "discrepancy between the present administrative-territorial division

¹⁷ *Osetia: istoriko-etnograficheskiy spravochnik*, Compiled by V.A. Torchikov, M.Sh. Kisiev, St. Petersburg, Vladikavkaz, 1998, pp. 159-161.

¹⁸ *Tainy natsional'noy politiki TsK RKP (B)*, Moscow, 1992, p. 159.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ "Iz rezoliutsii Vtorogo kraevogo zakavkazskogo partiynogo soveshchania o federatsii respublik Zakavkaz'ia, 7 noiabria 1921 g.," *Obrazovanie SSSR...*, p. 281.

²¹ "Iz resolutsii Kavkazskogo biuro TsK RKP (B) o federatsii Zakavkazskikh respublik, 3 noiabria 1921 g.," *Obrazovanie SSSR...*, p. 280.

²² *Kommunisticheskaia partia Gruzii v rezoliutsiakh i resheniakh s'ezdov, konferentsiy i plenumov TsK, 1920-1976*, Vol. 1, Tbilisi, 1976, p. 28.

and the new political and economic requirements.”²³ The following principles of administrative-territorial division were applied: “on the basis of

- (1) concentration of industry;
- (2) concentration of culture;
- (3) the local people’s gravitation toward the industrial and distribution centers;
- (4) the directions and nature of the communication routes—railways, water routes, highways, etc.;
- (5) population size; and (6) the local people’s ethnic composition.”²⁴

The economic interests were obviously treated as a priority, while ethnic considerations were put on the back burner. Moreover, official propaganda did its best to convince the public that national (ethnic) interests were treated as a priority and that by acting in this way the state was demonstrating its concern for the economic wellbeing of “fraternal peoples.”

While drawing the borders, the Bolsheviks, who had not yet consolidated their power, preferred to follow the 1913 frontiers. The new leaders, who had virtually no control over the country’s fringes, had to follow the old patterns and be guided by what the old-timers had to say. For obvious reasons both sources were not completely reliable.²⁵ Not infrequently, local administrators, well-versed in the situation, used their influence to achieve desirable results.

A lengthy process of more exact delineation in the ethnically mixed areas started in the mid-1920s. The northwestern border of Abkhazia was changed several times: after the civil war it was pushed to the south of the River Psou, as a result of which the R.S.F.S.R. acquired the Pilenkovskaia volost. In 1922, the Central Executive Committee and the Soviet of People’s Commissars of Abkhazia asked the R.S.F.S.R. government to restore the old border. Under a decision of 31 October, 1924, the volost was made part of the Gagra uezd.²⁶ On 19 March, 1926, it was restored as part of the Chernomorskiy Okrug of the R.S.F.S.R.; and on 31 December, 1928, the territory of the Pilenkovskiy rural soviet of the Sochi District (Chernomorskiy Okrug, Severokavkazskiy Territory) was returned to Abkhazia by a decision of the All-Union Central Executive Committee.²⁷ In this way, the present border with Russia took on its final shape, with the area of Gantiadi and Yermolovka (Lesilidze) becoming part of Abkhazia. It is interesting to note that the border follows the line agreed upon by the Russian-Georgian Treaty of 7 May, 1920; any other configuration of the same border would have created problems: the local terrain left no choice for the delimitation commission—65-70 km of the River Psou goes up into the mountains; further on the Aigba and Gagra ranges intersect. The border obviously followed the local geographic features.

Since it was officially declared that the new administrative division was based on ethnic principles, the mixed commission had, from time to time, taken the ethnic factor into account. For example, the Chechen villages of Melkhesty and Tsekaroi were transferred temporarily from the Georgian S.S.R. to the Chechen Autonomous Region.²⁸ In the event of unsettled territories, the commission was guided by economic considerations: the territorial dispute between the Georgians and the Chechens about the Allako area was resolved in favor of the Chechen Autonomous Region

²³ *Administrativno-territorial’noe delenie Soiuza SSR i spisok vazhneyshikh naseennykh punktov s khronologicheskim perechnem postanovleniy ob izmenenii granits guberniy, oblastey i respublik s 1917 po 1929 gg.*, Moscow, 1929, p. 7.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁵ See: *Administrativno-territorial’nyy sostav SSSR na 1 iulia 1926 g. v sopostavlenii s dovoennym deleniem Rossii*, Moscow, 1926.

²⁶ See: *Administrativno-territorial’noe delenie Soiuza ... 1929*, p. 313.

²⁷ See: *Ibidem; Administrativno-territorial’nyy sostav SSSR...*, p. 206.

²⁸ SARF, Record Group 1235, Inventory 141, File 248, p. 18.

since it was tilled by Chechens.²⁹ In other cases communication lines were considered: the territory along the River Kistinka was given to Georgia because the Ingush settlements were separated from it by a mountain range.³⁰

The Georgian-Daghestanian and the Azerbaijanian-Daghestanian border stretches, as well as the Azerbaijanian-Georgian border, were also contested: the Daghestanian cattle-breeders “mainly move to Azerbaijan and Georgia for nine months, while the local administrators of the two republics impose special taxes on them.”³¹ Georgian sheep-breeders, in turn, used Daghestanian pastures. To avoid conflicts and to redistribute the land, the All-Union Central Executive Committee passed a decision that allowed the local sheep-breeders to use pastures and routes in the neighboring territories.³² Judging by the documents related to the administrative-territorial changes in the U.S.S.R., the border in these places remained the same³³: it was inadvisable to apply the ethnic principle of delimitation because the local mixed population had been living for a long time within historically established borders. The borders were preserved, while the neighboring populations acquired a chance to establish close economic ties.

The problem of unification of North and South Ossetia stands apart from the other border issues. It was revived in 1925 because of land scarcity in South Ossetia and the common culture of the Ossets living on both sides of the Caucasian Range. Those who insisted on uniting South Ossetia with the Northern Caucasus argued: “If there were a good road across the mountains, South Ossetia would undoubtedly prefer to buy cheaper bread in North Ossetia and in general would prefer to trade on the North Caucasian side of the range...”³⁴ Two variants were suggested: either united Ossetia should be joined the Georgian S.S.R. (that created the problem of changing its northern borders) or united Ossetia should be attached to the R.S.F.S.R. (according to G. Orjonikidze, this gave “food for all sorts of idle talk about Russia wishing to take Tskhinval from Georgia”).³⁵ After realizing that the unification plans were fraught with ethnic tension in the region, the Soviet government first suspended and then cut short the process. The border following the terrain was preserved.

In this way, when drawing the borders between the R.S.F.S.R., Georgian S.S.R., and the Azerbaijanian S.S.R., Soviet power was guided by economic considerations and the need to protect its authority. Still, before the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945, the Bolsheviks tried to take into account the interests of the people living along the border.

Second Stage: Divide and Give Away!

When the Northern Caucasus was liberated from the short-lived fascist occupation, some of the North Caucasian peoples were accused of high treason. According to some academics, the deporta-

²⁹ See: I.B. Didigova, *Chechnia i Ingushetia: territoria, granitsy, upravlenie*, Moscow, 2003, p. 84.

³⁰ SARF, Record group 1235, Inventory 121, File 521, p. 4.

³¹ *Tayny natsional'noy politiki TsK RKP...*, p. 196.

³² See: “Vypiska iz protokola No. 70 ‘O predostavlenii ovtsevodam Gruzii pastbishch v Daghestanskoj ASSR,’ 14 sentyabrya 1928 g.,” SARF, Record group 1235, Inventory 140, File 1075, pp. 1-2.

³³ See: *Administrativno-territorial'nyy sostav SSSR... 1926*, pp. 53-60.

³⁴ M. Bezegov (executive secretary of the Communist Party of Georgia (Bolsheviks) Tskhinval Committee), “K vo-prosu ob'edineniia Severnoy i Iuzhnoy Ossetii,” SARF, Record group 1235, Inventory 140, File 175, sheet 3.

³⁵ G.K. Orjonikidze, *Stat'i i rechi*, in two volumes, Vol. 2, Moscow, 1957, p. 63.

tion and consequent administrative-territorial changes were planned long before the war. They were part of Stalin's plan to extend the territory of Georgia. It should be borne in mind that not only Georgia, but also some of the North Caucasian autonomous republics received territories. Here I shall concentrate on the border changes between the R.S.F.S.R. and the Georgian S.S.R.

In 1944, the Uchkulanskiy and part of the Mikoianovskiy districts of the Karachai Autonomous Region were transformed into the Klukhorskiiy District within the Georgian S.S.R.³⁶ The southern border of the former Kabardino-Balkarian A.S.S.R. was also changed. Lavrentiy Beria supported the plan for territorial changes by saying that Kabarda would be unable to develop the mountainous areas, while "Georgia should have a defense line along the northern slopes of the Caucasian Range: during the occupation, Kabarda ceded the area to the Germans."³⁷ Georgia received the southwestern part of the Elbrus and Nagorny districts.³⁸ On top of this, the Dusheti and Kazbegi districts of the Georgian S.S.R. (within the limits of the Itum-Kali district, the western lands of the Sharoy district, and the southern territories of the Galanchoj, Galashki and Prigorodniy districts) were extended by means of the southern part of the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic.³⁹ I have already written that some of the peoples who lived along the borders were deported, in particular, the Balkars, Ingushes, Karachais, and Chechens.

As a result, Georgia enlarged its territory by extending to the northern slopes of the Caucasian Range; the territorial changes completely ignored economic ties, ethnic boundaries, and the need to connect the newly acquired territories to the rest of the republic, which was separated by hardly negotiable mountains. In May 1944, an effort was made to address the latter problem: the Soviet of People's Commissars and the C.C. C.P. (B.) of Georgia adopted a resolution On Creating the Elbrus Rural Soviet within the Zemo-Svanetia District and on the Measures to Settle the Rural Soviet. The document paid particular attention to telephone lines between the newly created administrative unit and Tbilisi through Nalchik and Dzaujikau.⁴⁰ Nothing was said about the need to create an economically integrated territory.

According to the results achieved by a special commission, the border was drawn in the following way: "along the River Kyrtk and further to the east of the Verkhniy Baksan settlement (Uchkumumel) and to the south along the River Adyr-Su to the Mestia pass. As a result, the Verkhniy Baksan (Uchkumumel) settlement was included in the Georgian S.S.R. and settled with Svans."⁴¹ The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Kabardinian A.S.S.R. sent a letter to the Presidium of the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet with a request to restore the old border according to the 8 April, 1944 Decree, but received no answer.

Some Daghestanian ethnic groups and some of the peoples who lived in Georgia were also deported. In 1944, the Kvarelia Avars, who before the Great Patriotic War were living in the Geor-

³⁶ See: "Ukaz Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR o likvidatsii Karachaevskoy avtonomnoy oblasti i ob administrativnom ustroystve ee territorii, 12 oktiabria 1943 g.," *Tak eto bylo: Natsional'nye repressii v SSSR*, in three volumes, Vol. 1, Moscow, 1993, p. 259.

³⁷ "Iz vospominaniy byvshego pervogo sekretaria Kabardino-Balkarskogo obkoma VKP (b) predsedatelia Nalchikskogo komiteta oborony Z.D. Kumekhova," *Liki voyny: sb. dokumentov po istorii Kabardino-Balkarii v gody Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny (1941-1945 gg.)*, Compiled by R.M. Ashkhotova, Nalchik, 1996, pp. 314-315.

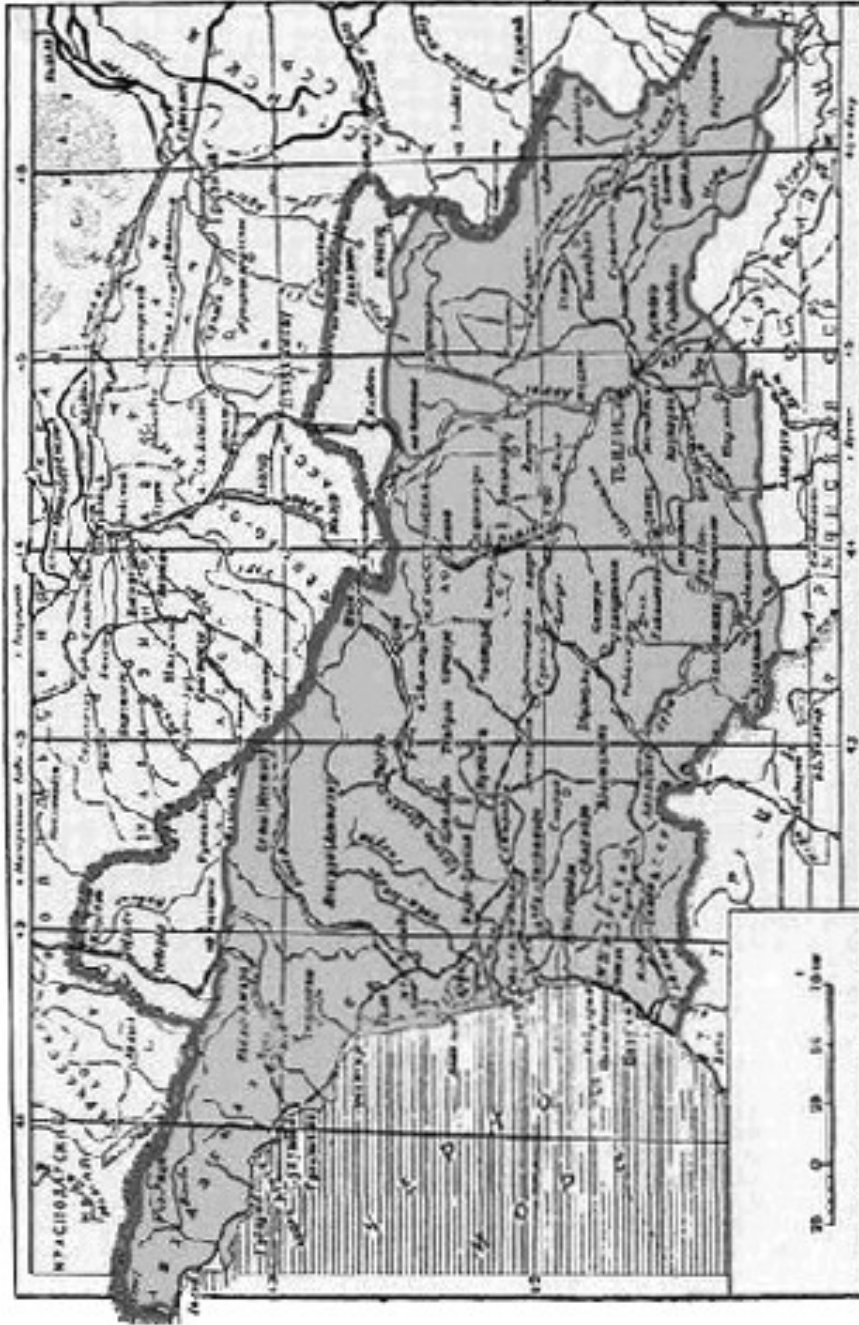
³⁸ See: "Ukaz Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta Kabardinskoy ASSR o chastichnom izmenenii granits mezhdru Kabardinskoy ASSR i Gruzinskoy SSR, 7 apreliya 1944 g.," *Liki voyny...*, p. 329.

³⁹ Established by: "Izmenenie granits," *Vedomosti VS SSR 1957 g.*, Moscow, 1957, p. 399; D. Masalgov, "Annek-sia: kak eto bylo," *Tak eto bylo: Natsional'nye repressii v SSSR*, in three volumes, Vol. 2, Moscow, 1993, pp. 144-145.

⁴⁰ See: "Iz postanovlenia Sovnarkoma Gruzinskoy SSR i TsK KP (b) Gruzii 'Ob obrazovanii Elbrusskogo sel'soveta v sostave Zemo-Svanetskogo rayona i o meropriiatiakh po zaseleniu etogo sel'soveta,' 3 maia 1944," *Liki voyny...*, p. 345.

⁴¹ "Pis'mo Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta KASSR Predsedateliu Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR o vozvrashchenii sel. Verkhniy Baksan (Uchkumumel), zaniatogo Gruzinskoy SSR, 24 maia 1944 g.," *Liki voyny...*, pp. 350-351.

The R.S.F.S.R. Borders in the Northern Caucasus between 1944 and the Mid-1950s



Source: N.A. Diakova, M.A. Chepelkin, *Granitsy Rossii v XVII-XX vv.* (Russia's Borders in the 17th-20th Centuries), Moscow, 1995.

gian villages of Tivi, Teberjokhi, and Areshi, were deported to Chechnia where they remained till 1957 when they were allowed to come back providing that the former Tivi inhabitants could return to their old places of residence, while the others had to settle in the marshes of Chantliskuri, Saruso, and Tkhilistskaro.

The academic community so far has failed to agree on the real causes of territorial changes in the Caucasus; there is an agreement, however, that Georgia failed to develop the larger part of the newly acquired lands. The absence of roads made communication between Georgia and these areas complicated; this is another confirmation that the Soviet leaders ignored the region's historical, geographic, and economic conditions.

Third Stage: Restoration?

When Stalin died, the deported people acquired the hope of being allowed to return to their homeland. In November 1956 and January 1957, the C.C. C.P.S.U. passed a resolution on the rehabilitation of the Kalmyks, Karachais, Balkars, Chechens, and Ingushes and the restoration of their national autonomies, as well as of the border between the R.S.F.S.R. and the Georgian S.S.R. (as it had existed on 7 March, 1944). Before the 20th C.P.S.U. Congress, the Presidium of the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet published the decree On the Transfer of the Klukhorskiy District of the Georgian S.S.R. to the R.S.F.S.R. Simultaneously the border between the R.S.F.S.R. and the Georgian S.S.R. was changed.⁴² According to the Decree of the Presidium of the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet of 26 May, 1955, "the territory of the Ialbuskiy Agricultural District of the Klukhorskiy District, Stavropol Territory, was transferred to the Elbrus District of the Kabardinian A.S.S.R."⁴³ The fact that many regions became depopulated while communication remained problematic confirmed that Stalin's reforms had been a mistake. The old borders should be restored: this became possible when the Soviet Union entered a new stage of its political history.

Restoration of the old borders, however, was not complete: some of the North Caucasian borders remained unchanged; the borders between the Northern Caucasus and the Transcaucasus, suggested by the terrain, were restored: a high price had to be paid for ignoring geographical barriers. The changed ethnic borders created tension and the danger of a "decline in national culture."⁴⁴ The steps taken by the new generation of Soviet leaders demonstrated that they wanted to relieve the country of Stalin's heritage and its excesses.

It proved to be hard to move people who had already put down roots in the lands vacated by the deported nations. Some of the territories of Kabardino-Balkaria, Checheno-Ingushetia, and the mountainous regions of Karachai were occupied by Georgians and some of the Daghestanian peoples. The administrations of these areas had to provide those who returned with new homes since their old houses had either been abandoned and fallen in disrepair, or were occupied by others. In the latter case, conflicts between new and old owners flared up.

People had been moved by force to the vacated places, yet later their presence created a volatile atmosphere of ethnic tension. This was the result of Stalin's repressions of 1944. For this reason, the borders between the Georgian S.S.R., the Azerbaijanian S.S.R., and the R.S.F.S.R. were not revised

⁴² See: "Ukaz Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta SSR 'O peredache Klukhorskogo rayona Gruzinskoy SSR v sostav RSFSR, 14 marta 1955,'" *Sobranie deystvuyushchego zakonodatel'stva SSSR*, Section I, Book 1, Moscow, 1973, p. 51.

⁴³ *Vedomosti VS SSSR 1955 g.*, Moscow, 1955, p. 287.

⁴⁴ Russian State Archives of Recent History (RGANI), Record group 89, Inventory 61, File 13, sheet 1.

later, while the problems of land use were settled at the republican level. Later, administrative borders were changed elsewhere in the Soviet Union; whereas in the Caucasus, territories were transferred for temporary use and people living along the borders were resettled. For example, in the 1960s, the Zeikhur-oba village of the Mageramkentskiy District of Daghestan was included in the Khachmasskiy District of the Az.S.S.R. to improve its cooperation with the Mageramkentskiy District. In the post-Soviet years, it must be decided whether to move the local people back to Daghestan or change their status.⁴⁵

It should be said in conclusion that during the years of Soviet power, the Caucasus received administrative borders. Not perfect, they were nevertheless accepted by several generations of Soviet peoples: there was no phenomenon of “divided nations” in the Soviet Union. When independent states replaced the former Soviet republics, the border regions could still communicate; contacts among local people living in the adjacent territories could have created a basis for economic cooperation between the regions far removed from the center. The governments of the new independent states, however, preferred to set up national (mono-national) states and destroyed the economic ties between border regions. This created problems with drawing the borders of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Chechnia (the Pichvny village), along the Daghestanian stretch of Russia’s border, along the border between Georgia and Azerbaijan, at the monument to David Gareji, and at the place where the borders of the three countries meet.

The borders between Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Russia depend on the landscape, which might either prevent cooperation or promote it. This is especially true of the border areas. These borders are rather old, therefore any attempts to change them cause a lot of discontent on both sides. The old administrative borders should obviously remain unchanged, yet the protracted delimitation process testifies to the sides’ unwillingness to facilitate cooperation between the now divided peoples.

⁴⁵ See: G. Inandj, “Sostoianic granitsy Daghestana s Azerbaidzhanom” (an interview by M.M. Gusaev, Minister of Ethnic Policies, Information, and Foreign Relations of the Republic of Daghestan) [<http://www.azeri.com>].