

**A Fateful Moment:
Ethnic Autonomy and Revolutionary Violence in the Democratic Republic of Georgia
(1918-1921)**

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Abstract: The roots of today's Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-South Ossetian conflicts can be traced to the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the civil war that followed. Locating these origins in revolutionary times is not just a temporal exercise. These conflicts had their roots in social and ideological differences both between and within ethnic categories. While most politically active Abkhazians and South Ossetians harbored ethnic aspirations, expressions of Abkhazian and Ossetian ethnonationalism were heterogeneous and not all dedicated to complete territorial independence. The tragedy for Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-South Ossetian relations is that primarily political disputes became overwhelmed by chaos and violent revolutionary events.

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Georgians, Abkhazians, and Ossetians have lived together south of the Caucasus mountain range for centuries. However, the roots of today's Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-South Ossetian conflicts can be traced to a more recent past: the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the years of civil war that followed. This period of short-lived Georgian independence (1918-1921) lay the foundations for the subsequent Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic's ethnofederal architecture, including "autonomous" units of governance for Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Such Soviet-era ethnofederal institutions—more specifically, the identities, interests, expectations, and capacities they helped sustain or generate—have frequently been identified as drivers of secessionist mobilization in the late Soviet period. However, the autonomous ethnofederal institutions of the Abkhazians and South Ossetians did not emerge from an ahistorical context of Soviet state-building but from the prior pursuit by Abkhazians and South Ossetians of ethnoterritorial decentralization, a principle independent Georgia's ruling Social Democrats accepted. The question of Abkhazian and South Ossetian autonomy was an existing item on the agenda when the Sovietization of Georgia took place in 1921. If it had not been, it's unlikely the Bolsheviks would have granted Soviet Georgia its "decentralized" ethnoterritorial structure, which helped stimulate ethnic conflict in the republic in the late Soviet period.

In this chapter, I make four arguments concerning the Russian revolutionary origins of the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-South Ossetian conflicts. Firstly, locating these origins in revolutionary times is not just a temporal exercise. These conflicts had their roots in social and ideological differences both between and within ethnic categories. *Violent conflict*, in particular, was a product of class and revolutionary opposition, as Abkhazian and South Ossetian Bolsheviks and their supporters (peasant highlanders and demobilized soldiers) fought for the sovietization of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, resisting not only the Georgian political leadership, but also their own less radical (generally landowning and lowland) kin.

Secondly, although Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-South Ossetian conflicts have revolutionary origins, most politically active Abkhazians and South Ossetians – regardless of their ideological leanings – harbored ethnic aspirations prior to the establishment of Soviet-era autonomous institutions and before the establishment of the Georgian state. These aspirations were not responsible for armed struggle, but within the tiny Abkhazian and South Ossetian communities (each with a population of tens of thousands), the idea of "self-determination" was politically dominant before May 1918, and before any suspicion of the newly independent Georgian state was widespread.

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Thirdly, expressions of Abkhazian and Ossetian ethnonationalism were heterogeneous and not all dedicated to complete territorial independence. Abkhazian and South Ossetian nationalists who did not support the Bolsheviks were prepared to accept a middle ground. They did not welcome Georgian independence, or separation from Russia. Faced with the alternative of Bolshevik rule, however, they were pragmatic enough to seek Tbilisi's support. In these circumstances, they rejected conflict and accepted unification with independent Georgia.

The final point is that in 1918-1921 multiple ethnoterritorial conflicts surrounded Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and those not directly related to the struggle with the Bolsheviks centered around political solutions rather than military ones. The immediate challenge for anti-Bolshevik Abkhazian and South Ossetian nationalists was how to achieve maximum powers of regional self-government within the fledgling Georgian state. That state was an insecure one, facing multiple threats to its sovereignty from Red, White, and Ottoman forces. A readiness to accept the principle of regional autonomy was attenuated by the demands of state consolidation in conditions of external and internal threats to national security.

The tragedy for Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-South Ossetian relations is that these primarily *political* considerations were overwhelmed by chaos and violent revolutionary events. In Abkhazia, protracted constitutional negotiations collapsed over a dispute as to whether Abkhazian autonomy would be delegated by the Georgian government, or implemented as part of a treaty-based union of separate state entities. Independent Georgia, after crucial delays, devolved autonomy to Abkhazia, but it did so without the participation of the majority of Abkhazians, and only a few days before Georgia's own sovietization. In South Ossetia, parties were unable to agree on even the geographic scope or name of the autonomous unit, let alone its substance, before recurring Bolshevik insurgencies put an end to the negotiation process. A May 1920 rebellion provoked the wrath of Georgian forces, determined to protect the state from the same fate as recently sovietized Azerbaijan. Unlike the Abkhazian case, South Ossetia was "solved" by military pacification, the expulsion of many residents, and the destruction of their homes. For many Abkhazians and almost all South Ossetians, the Red Army entered Georgia as a savior that promised them the ethnoterritorial institutions they sought. For Abkhazia, that meant a "treaty-based" quasi-confederal relationship with Tbilisi that lasted, at least formally, until 1931; for South Ossetia, it was an eponymous autonomous region with generous borders and the hub town of Tskhinvali as its capital. Without Abkhazian and South Ossetian ethnoterritorial consciousness and mobilization before the revolution, however, these outcomes are difficult to imagine.

In the rest of this chapter, I will identify the revolutionary sources of violent conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 1917-1919, both before and during independent Georgian statehood. I discuss the rise of ethnoterritorial mobilization among Abkhazians and South Ossetians, directed initially toward unification with the Russian North Caucasus, but pursued politically rather than through force of arms. I will show that Abkhazian and South Ossetian ethnoterritorial mobilization was reluctantly directed toward accommodation with independent Georgia, as hopes of achieving ethnoterritorial autonomy outside either a Bolshevik-controlled or Georgian state dwindled. The last section of this essay examines the extension of Georgian state power in Abkhazia and South Ossetia after 1918, in the context of state insecurity, civil war, and growing Georgian nationalism. I conclude with some observations on the lessons of this period for the resolution of Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-South Ossetian conflictual relations today.

I. Revolutionary Conflict, not Ethnic Conflict

In the first Georgian republic, *violent conflict* in Abkhazia and South Ossetia was largely the outcome of a power struggle between, on the one hand, local Bolsheviks and revolutionary peasants and, on the other, state authorities representing the Russian Provisional Government in Transcaucasia, the short lived independent Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic (TDFR - April-May 1918), and, eventually, the independent Democratic Republic of Georgia (DRG).¹ While all three of these governments intended to implement land reform, their authority depended in part on the support of landowners. They moved more cautiously than many land hungry and heavily taxed peasants desired or expected. By contrast, the Bolsheviks promised immediate relief from taxation and rapid redistribution of land.² In Abkhazia and South Ossetia, this pattern was replicated, albeit with an ethnic tinge, as Georgian migrants (in Abkhazia) and Georgian landowners (in South Ossetia) represented significant – though not exclusive – competitors in local struggles over land. Violent “ethnic” conflict at this time was more about land struggle, revolutionary parties, and peasant power than about regional borders and ethnically defined demands.³

In Abkhazia, in particular, Bolshevism was a potent force. The Bolsheviks had a base of support in Abkhazia’s northwestern region of Gudauta, where the local peasantry was receptive to the Bolsheviks’ calls for radical land reform; it allowed Bolsheviks to dominate local administrative bodies, and local peasants lent them armed support.⁴ Capitalizing on a fatal clash between Russian sailors in Sukhumi and a local nobleman, and with the backing of Russian warships in Sukhumi port, Gudauta-based Bolsheviks seized Sukhumi in February 1918. They held power in the city for several days (16-21 February). With the departure of the warships, city authorities reasserted control and the Bolsheviks retreated to Gudauta.⁵ At the end of March, the Gudauta forces launched a second more successful operation. Apart from the coastal Kodori district, east of Sukhumi, which remained under the authority of local noblemen, Sukhumi and most surrounding districts acknowledged the Bolshevik victory. Even Georgian-populated Samurzaqano, known today as Gali region (and part of the Ochamchire region), accepted the new Soviet authority.⁶

When the TDFR declared its independence on 9 (22) April 1918, its authority in Abkhazia was tenuous. To drive the Bolsheviks from Abkhazia, local noblemen in Kodori requested the assistance of Transcaucasian (*de facto* Georgian) authorities, who dispatched National Guard troops to the region. After a week of skirmishes, Georgian troops defeated the Bolsheviks and headed toward Sukhumi. The Bolsheviks abandoned the city, as well as their base in Gudauta, and retreated to Gagra, further north.⁷ Remarking on this operation the next year, Abkhazian politicians critical of Georgian rule, nonetheless praised the Georgian troops in Abkhazia for their “impartiality and correct attitude [toward] the entire population of Abkhazia.”⁸

Despite the Bolshevik evacuation, the local peasantry in Gudauta remained supportive of Bolshevism and resistant to the Transcaucasian authorities. A few weeks after Georgia declared independence at the end of May, rebels in Gudauta launched a full-scale rebellion, which ended in a complete rout of Georgian authority. Bolstered by a host of volunteers from the North Caucasus – a tradition that continued into the conflicts of the 1990s – the rebels prepared to march on Sukhumi. Georgian General Giorgi Mazniashvili (Mazniev) arrived in Sukhumi with reinforcements. After several days of fighting Bolshevik partisans and their armed peasant supporters, Georgian troops reoccupied Gudauta and moved on toward Gagra. Mazniashvili later

turned his attention to Samurzaqano, still under the control of local Bolsheviks, finally subduing the region in September, 1918.⁹

In South Ossetia, violent conflict was linked to class and revolutionary struggles focused primarily on issues of taxation and land distribution. But unlike Abkhazia, Bolshevism was absent from South Ossetia in the first months after the February Revolution. Ossetian Bolsheviks based in Tbilisi admitted themselves that they exerted no influence on the South Ossetian peasantry throughout 1917.¹⁰ Nonetheless, Bolsheviks could appeal to a radicalized peasantry keen for land reform. Demobilized soldiers returning from the front added to the local volatility. Before the October Revolution, a predominantly Ossetian Union of Revolutionary Peasantry was formed in South Ossetia to fight local landowning gentry, which included Georgians and Ossetians, and inevitably clashed with the “counterrevolutionary power” of the Transcaucasian government which was trying to regulate reform.¹¹ Armed bands, many associated with the Union, resisted efforts at tax collection and attacked - or on occasion killed - members of the local gentry and seized their property. To establish order, in February 1918, Transcaucasian officials appointed a Tskhinvali commissar for the region and dispatched the Georgian National Guard to arrest local peasants, wanted for the murder of a landowner and who had previously killed some of their comrades in a tax dispute.¹²

By this time, the revolutionary movement in South Ossetia attracted a number of Bolshevik activists, and in March 1918 the movement became an armed uprising against Tbilisi’s authority. Its leaders insisted that the Transcaucasian authorities had betrayed the peasantry by allowing landowners to retain their lands. They demanded peasant payment of rents and taxes to landowners should stop, and a rapid redistribution of land should begin along with the eviction of noble families and a number of local officials, including commissar (and ethnic Ossetian) Kosta Kazishvili. At a public meeting in March, the Transcaucasian authorities, including Giorgi Machabeli (a member of a powerful local Georgian noble family), and prominent Social Democrat Sandro Ketskhoveli, agreed to all the rebels’ demands except the eviction of the nobility. Further negotiations broke down, and the rebels killed Kazishvili, Machabeli, and Ketskhoveli. Several hundred National Guardsmen were taken hostage.¹³ Tskhinvali was plundered, the “district was cleared of Menshevik troops, and revolutionary order fully established.”¹⁴ But after five days, the National Guard retook Tskhinvali, arrested the leader of the peasant union, and forced the rebels into hiding.

When the TDFR declared its independence, South Ossetian Bolsheviks did not have an effective local organization, like their counterparts in Abkhazia, but the new Transcaucasian government, stymied by incompatible demands from among its coalition members, set the stage for resistance because of its own inactivity and moderation. Ossetian Social Democrats, who had supported crushing the revolt, “no longer enjoyed the trust” of the South Ossetian peasantry.¹⁵ The Bolsheviks, who labeled the local Social Democrats rich peasants (*kulaks*), petty nobility, and wayward intellectuals, saw an opening. Intensifying their activities in the region, the Bolsheviks dominated the political scene for much of 1918.¹⁶

In 1919, Ossetian Bolsheviks prepared for armed insurrection. A nationwide uprising in Georgia was planned for October 1919, but Georgian authorities uncovered the plan. The Bolshevik Caucasian Regional Committee operating in the North Caucasus under Moscow’s direction, canceled the operation, but party members in South Ossetia (as well as other regions in Georgia) did not receive the order in time. Disarming a local militia post, South Ossetian Bolsheviks declared Soviet power in two northern villages. In the subsequent crackdown by the

Georgian government, Georgian authorities shot nine rebels and reportedly arrested three hundred. The South Ossetian Bolsheviks' entire leadership fled to the North Caucasus.¹⁷ The Georgian National Guard declared its intention to stay and establish an administration in the region, but soon departed, as the government feared renewed conflict in the south, where Georgian and Armenian forces had already clashed over disputed territory in 1918.¹⁸

II. Abkhazian and South Ossetian Ethnoterritorialism

Violent conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia was a microcosm of the revolutionary conflict consuming all parts of the former Russian empire. Yet, as with all revolutionary conflicts in the imperial periphery, ethnic disputes were part of the mix. Ethnic disputes predated Soviet authority and Georgian statehood, but it was hard to disentangle them from issues of land distribution and class. In 1917-1918, ethnoterritorial issues reemerged as conflict over resources intensified, and were at the heart of discussions in the 1920s on all-Russian federal reform.

At the start of the twentieth century, the Abkhazians were widely recognized as indigenous inhabitants of Sukhumi region (*okrug*), a successor to the former Black Sea principality of Abkhazia and part of the western Georgian province (*gubernia*) of Kutaisi.¹⁹ By 1917, the Abkhazians had become a numerical minority in the region, thanks to three factors: the migration and ethnic cleansing of at least half their population by Russian forces in the aftermath of an 1866 rebellion and the 1877-78 Russo-Turkish war;²⁰ an in-migration of Georgians, Armenians, Russians, and Greeks; and, finally, a census decision to count the residents of Abkhazia's heavily-populated southernmost district of Samurzaqano (Gali) as ethnically Georgian (Mingrelian).²¹ While a definitive determination of Abkhazia's ethnic breakdown in 1917 is impossible, largely because of the confusion surrounding the identity of "Samurzaqanoans," Abkhazians are estimated to have made up at the time 25-30% of Abkhazia's approximately 150,000 residents, while Georgians (including Mingrelians) counted for nearly 40%.²²

With its diverse composition, Abkhazia ended up with two representative institutions after the February Revolution. Following imperial collapse, the local noble class joined citizens of multiethnic Sukhumi ("Sukhum" in Abkhazian) to organize a Committee for Public Safety to govern the region. The Committee, like the authorities in Tbilisi, declared full support for Russia's Provisional Government in Petrograd. Its head was Alexander Shervashidze, an Abkhazian nobleman from the Abzhwa (Kodori) region east of Sukhumi.²³ After the Bolshevik Revolution, the Abkhazians, like Georgians and most other nations in the Caucasus, established an ethnically based representative body, the Abkhazian People's (*Narodnyi*) Council. This Council was to engage in "preparatory work" for the attainment of Abkhazian self-determination. The People's Council accepted the authority of the Public Safety Committee "insofar as [it observed] the principles of democracy and self-determination of nations."²⁴

Initially, the Abkhazian People's Council did not intend Abkhazia to be part of a larger Transcaucasian unit, let alone a more narrowly Georgian one. It saw Abkhazia's political future tied to the North Caucasus, in particular to districts occupied by Circassians, perceived by the Abkhazians as their ethnic cousins.²⁵ In May 1917, Shervashidze traveled to the North Caucasus to represent the Abkhazians as members of a newly organized Union of Mountainous Peoples of the North Caucasus, which sought to present a unified front on matters of all-Russian political-administrative reform. Abkhazian representatives signed the Union's founding treaty in October

1917, and the first Abkhazian People's Congress confirmed its membership.²⁶ While a representative from the Abkhazian People's Council congratulated Georgian delegates at the inaugural session of their own National Council, he underlined that the Abkhazians had "formed an alliance with their northern brethren."²⁷ Around the same time, a Georgian representative to the Abkhazian People's Council's inaugural meeting observed that the Abkhazians had met his delegation "not only coldly, but practically speaking, with hostility." Only one of Abkhazia's leading noblemen outside of Samurzaqano, Giorgi Shervashidze, had a pro-Georgian orientation while "the rest [sought to] avoid Georgians and Georgia."²⁸

The Abkhazian desire to join the North Caucasus was attenuated by the rise of Bolshevik power in Guduata and the onset of the Russian civil war. Staunchly opposed to Bolshevism, the Abkhazian leadership acknowledged that Abkhazia was also linked to Transcaucasia, a safer harbor at the time than an incipient confederation in the North Caucasus. In this context, representatives from the Abkhazian People's Council and the Georgian National Council met on 9 February 1918 to discuss the question of the "future relations between Georgia and Abkhazia." The Abkhazians made clear that they viewed Abkhazia as "an independent political entity" that had "only neighborly relations" with Georgia. The Georgians wanted Abkhazia to be part of the emerging Georgian territorial unit, albeit with "full internal independence." Unable to reconcile their differences, both sides signed a preliminary agreement that left the form of "Abkhazia's future political construction" unspecified until after the election of a Constituent Assembly in Abkhazia that would represent its entire population (the Abkhazian People's Council represented only ethnic Abkhazians). In return, the Georgian National Council agreed to recognize "a united, undivided Abkhazia" that included Samurzaqano (whose residents had declared they would separate from Abkhazia if it did not join Georgia).²⁹ Abkhazian Bolsheviks launched their ill-fated first attempt to take Sukhumi a few days later, in an attempt, perhaps, to void these promising beginnings.

A new opportunity for the Abkhazians to move politically closer to the North Caucasus arose in May 1918. The TDFR had reluctantly declared its independence the month before. The advancing Turkish army had made this a condition for engaging the Transcaucasian authorities in separate peace talks. While the Federative Republic included Abkhazia, the new state's founders did not specify its precise federal structure. The Abkhazian People's Council argued that Abkhazia had joined the TDFR as an independent unit, separate from Georgia, and dispatched a delegation to the Batumi Conference, the site of peace treaty negotiations between the Transcaucasian republic and Turkey. In Batumi, the delegation encountered a new Republic of the Mountainous Peoples of the North Caucasus, which had declared its independence under Turkey's protection.³⁰ While the Abkhazian People's Council participated in official negotiations alongside the Transcaucasian republic's delegation, Alexander Shervashidze and another leading local nobleman, Tatash Marshania, held separate talks with Turkish military officers of Abkhazian descent. They asked for Turkish troops in Abkhazia to secure its unification with the new North Caucasian state. Four of the nine members of the People's Council delegation reportedly supported this position.³¹

The TDFR dissolved within days of these discussions, leaving the relationship between Abkhazia and Georgia uncertain. The Georgian government, which sought to establish the borders of independent Georgia mainly on the basis of Russia's Tiflis (i.e., Tbilisi) and Kutaisi provinces (*gubernias*), insisted that Abkhazia should be part of the new state. The Abkhazian People's Council, however, considered Abkhazia independent and protested "against orders of the government of the Georgian republic issued on the territory of Abkhazia."³²

South Ossetians also organized themselves on an ethnoterritorial basis after the Russian Revolution. The first post-revolutionary “Transcaucasian Ossetian” organization, the Ossetian Revolutionary Committee, was founded in Tbilisi and declared its loyalty to the Russian Provisional Government and Transcaucasian authorities.³³ Many of those whom it claimed to represent lived in South Ossetia, a loosely defined and unofficial term that was used in the late nineteenth century to describe the mountainous regions south of the Caucasus range within the Gori district (*uezd*) of Tiflis province. These regions were home to communities of Ossetians, seventy to eighty thousand in all, whose ancestors had migrated across the Greater Caucasus mountain range from the 17th century on.³⁴ The territory referred to as South Ossetia was much smaller than the subsequent Soviet autonomous region of the same name, and was a geographical term with no political or administrative significance (in contrast to the Sukhumi region, which was the administrative successor to the principality of Abkhazia). Still, by 1917, the notion of South Ossetia had existed for decades; even the Georgian political leadership recognized the region as such (appointing, for example, a Social Democratic representative of the “South Ossetian People’s Council” to the first Georgian National Council).³⁵ Communities of Ossetians were widely dispersed outside South Ossetia proper in southern Georgian regions and in Tbilisi itself.

South Ossetians who shared Tbilisi’s political orientation did not necessarily wish for incorporation into a specifically *Georgian* state. Once Transcaucasia was reunified with a non-Bolshevik Russia, many politically active South Ossetians envisaged unity with their co-ethnics on the northern side of the Caucasus as the best option. Local members of the Socialist Revolutionary party (SRs), significantly more influential than the Social Democrats in South Ossetia, called for the unification of North and South Ossetia in their own separate national unit.³⁶

In the meantime, the South Ossetian People’s Council sought a South Ossetian national administration within Transcaucasia. In April 1917, an Ossetian representative informed the Tbilisi authorities that he was authorized “in the name of the entire Ossetian population of the mountainous region of Transcaucasia” to request the creation of a “single administrative unit” in regions populated by Ossetians. The request was confirmed in December 1917 by the second South Ossetian People’s Congress, which “consider[ed] it necessary to bring into being the nationalization of schools, administration, courts, and troops and to separate South Ossetia into a single...administrative unit.” This, the congress asserted, would “largely solve the national question.”³⁷ In January 1918 the People’s Council, claiming to represent “the clear and expressly defined will of the South Ossetian people,” proposed the establishment of a “mountainous district or region with a national administration” to ensure the proper cultural and economic conditions for the South Ossetian population, and to “exclude any possibility of political experiments forced on the people by outsiders.”³⁸ The Council stipulated which areas of the Tiflis Province would make up South Ossetia and insisted that the local administration would be in Tskhinvali, the only conceivable central hub for the region both geographically and economically, though few Ossetians lived there at the time.³⁹

After the March 1918 conflict with South Ossetia’s peasantry, antagonism toward the Georgian authorities increased. At the third South Ossetian People’s Congress, held just a few days after Georgia became independent, the Georgian Social Democrats tried to get delegates to recognize Georgia’s independence, and agree to self-government on a sub-regional level. They warned that creating a South Ossetian unit outside Georgia was not going to be as easy as its

supporters imagined.⁴⁰ The delegates rejected the Georgian government's demand to disarm and declined to recognize its authority in South Ossetia. According to one report, the "mood was so negative" at the third congress that it had to be postponed for several days. Discussion of Georgian independence was postponed until the next congress.⁴¹ Ultimately, not one Social Democrat was elected to the leadership of the South Ossetian People's Council by delegates from the third congress.⁴²

At the fourth South Ossetian People's Congress in mid-June, 1918, the Georgian government made only minor inroads. The social democratic organ *ertoba*, noted that the "mood of the meeting was very negative toward [Georgia] from the start." A Georgian delegation to the congress (led by leading Social Democrats Noe Ramishvili and Irakli Tsereteli) sought to appease the delegates with a promise of autonomy, insisting that South Ossetians would "be independent in their internal affairs." Upon the Georgians' insistence, the congress removed from its proclamations any reference to unification with North Ossetia and agreed that it should "call on the people to be fully loyal to the Georgian government" until South Ossetia's status was resolved. Regardless, the Georgian delegation was forced to leave the congress without the pledge of allegiance it sought; only three delegates voted for a declaration recognizing Georgian authority.⁴³ A delegation of Ossetian SRs went to North Ossetia to seek support for the unification of the two regions.⁴⁴

The attitude of Abkhazians and South Ossetians to Georgian independence in 1918 bears more than a passing resemblance to their attitude to Georgian independence from the Soviet Union seven decades later. At that time, Abkhazians and South Ossetians sought to preserve the Soviet Union and avoid having to join Georgia on its path to independent statehood. But it was not the first time Abkhazians and South Ossetians confronted such a decision.

III. Nationalism That Knows Its Limits? Autonomy in Independent Georgia

Despite their determination to establish an ethnoterritorial form of governance, the Abkhazian and South Ossetian People's Councils quickly realized that, without outside support, their pursuit of territorial self-determination would have to take place within an independent Georgia. At first, the Abkhazian People's Council believed the new social democratic Georgian government would endorse an independent Abkhazia. In June, it dispatched a delegation to Tbilisi to seek Georgia's support. Outlining the Council's intentions, the head of the delegation, Razhden Kakuba, affirmed the "shared interests of the peoples of Abkhazia and Georgia" and expressed hope that the two would continue to maintain a strong connection, and that the Georgian government "would provide friendly assistance in the organization of state power in Abkhazia." Kakuba asserted that the People's Council and the Georgian government faced common foes. In Abkhazia, there was an "independent landowning class" that relied on Turkey to restore its rights and a "small element [*techenie*]" of Bolshevik support. Others "sympathize[d] with the mountaineers of the North Caucasus." To fight all these strands, the Abkhazian People's Council called for the National Guard under Georgian control to remain in Sukhumi, and requested the Georgian government provide additional military and economic support.⁴⁵

It soon became clear, however, that such "state-to-state" assistance would not be forthcoming. The Georgian government was sympathetic to the People's Council's concerns, but not to independence, and declined any support while this goal stood. After holding discussions with his Georgian counterparts, Kakuba informed the People's Council that Georgia would not

provide military and economic support if Abkhazia were to insist on full independence.⁴⁶ The People's Council, desperate for protection and security, accepted the need for unification with Georgia. The Council authorized the delegation to conclude an agreement on 11 June with the Georgian government, considered as an "extension and supplement" of the 9 February accord. The new agreement declared that a Minister of Abkhazian Affairs would be appointed to serve in the Georgian government; the People's Council would be responsible for "internal administration and self-administration" in the region. The Georgian government would provide it with financial assistance, and a multiethnic armed division would be established. At the same time, additional Georgian troops were to be sent immediately to Abkhazia "for the rapid establishment of revolutionary order and the organization of [state] power."⁴⁷

Like the February agreement, the June agreement avoided any explicit mention of Abkhazia's final political status, pending the election of a representative regional assembly. However, the text of the agreement suggested that a political union was taking place. It noted that the People's Council would implement "social reforms" in Abkhazia "on the basis of the general laws of Georgia," while taking local conditions into consideration. One article proposed by the Abkhazian side, which Georgia rejected, presumably because it gave Abkhazia a higher juridical status than desired, indicated that Georgia would be the "official representative of both" Abkhazia and Georgia on matters of foreign affairs.⁴⁸

The Abkhazian People's Council later admitted that this agreement implied Abkhazia would be an autonomous unit within Georgia. In September, Minister of Abkhazian Affairs Robert Chkhotua, himself an Abkhazian, informed Varlam Shervashidze, the People's Council chairman: "[i]f the Abkhazian people linked their fate with the Georgian people on an autonomous basis then... we must have conditions that are clear and unambiguous." He complained to the Georgian authorities that "departments and officials of certain institutions continue to look on Abkhazia, not as an autonomous unit of the Georgian republic, but as one of its provinces."⁴⁹ Another member of the People's Council wrote in his memoirs that the Council at this time was divided, with many members privately inclined toward either Turkey or Soviet Russia. Given the political context, however, they were "forced to echo the demands and desires" of the Georgian government and agreed to send a delegation to negotiate with Georgia "[based] on the principles for the incorporation of Abkhazia within the Georgian Menshevik state."⁵⁰ While the precise conditions of unification were not spelled out, the basic principles were established: Georgia secured recognition of Abkhazia's unification to Georgia, while the Abkhazians preserved their right to autonomy.

The South Ossetians, whether Bolsheviks or Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs), were similarly unable to count on unification with the North Caucasus. At the fifth Ossetian People's Congress in August 1918, they were, grudgingly, prepared to accept Georgian authority. *Erto*ba explained the Ossetian change of heart as a realistic assessment. It was no longer possible to resist Georgian authority, given the defeat of Bolshevik-backed rebellions elsewhere in the Georgian countryside. The delegates from North Ossetia had "not [brought] any good news."⁵¹ Delegates reported that "there was chaos in the north" and that South Ossetians "should not hope for any aid but need to organize our own lives." Ossetian SR, Petre Tedeev, declared that since South Ossetia "cannot separate from Georgia" and that the Georgian government was socialist, and "a protector of democratic ideas," Ossetians could defend their "national-cultural rights within [Georgia's] borders."⁵² A deal was struck: Social Democrats, SRs, Bolsheviks, and "unaffiliated" delegates each received six seats on the People's Council, and an additional eight seats were filled by majoritarian vote (of which the Social Democrats received five; the

Bolsheviks, two; and the SRs, one).⁵³ *Ertoba* concluded that the Congress had selected “senior members” of the community who “would not be scared of the Bolsheviks and would put the Ossetian people on the right path.”⁵⁴

The fifth congress agreed to send a delegation to the Georgian government to negotiate South Ossetia’s unification with Georgia, the terms of which reflected South Ossetians’ aspirations to regional self-governance. In a vote of 55 to 2, delegates insisted upon “broad territorial autonomy” for South Ossetia, together with “cultural autonomy for [Ossetians] who live in different regions of Georgia.”⁵⁵ Partly in response to the Georgian government’s own political opposition, who were insisting that South Ossetians were secessionist and military action was needed, *ertoba* insisted that at the fifth congress “nobody said a word about leaving Georgia....The [Ossetian] nationalists have lost their enthusiasm [and] claim they did not even think of separating from Georgia but only demanded wide self-government.”⁵⁶ The congress requested that the government refrain from seeking to disarm the population and, in general, leave the question of disarmament open.⁵⁷ Like the Abkhazians, however, South Ossetians agreed to unification with Georgia on the basis of regional autonomy.

IV. Negotiating Autonomy in a Time of Insecurity

The Subordination of Abkhazia

After concluding the June 1918 agreement, *de facto* establishing Abkhazia’s unification with Georgia, all that remained was to hammer out the terms. However, with Abkhazia now part of a precariously independent Georgia, debates over local power became focused on state security. This led to a rise in tensions almost immediately, beginning with a Bolshevik rebellion launched five days after the agreement was signed. The Georgian government dispatched General Mazniashvili to Abkhazia to fight the Bolsheviks and, contrary to the terms of the June agreement, declared him governor-general with direct control over Abkhazia.

After Mazniashvili defeated the Bolsheviks, a second challenge to Georgian authority in Abkhazia led to further assertion of central control. As Georgian forces were putting the Bolsheviks to flight in western Abkhazia, a Turkish Army detachment, as agreed at the Batumi conference, landed in Kodori.⁵⁸ The authorities peacefully disarmed the detachment and escorted it out of Georgia, but many of its soldiers made their way into nearby villages, where they clashed with Georgian forces. During these skirmishes, Georgian authorities destroyed the houses of “unreliable” villagers and made several arrests (they later acknowledged some “misconduct,” ordering compensation in three cases).⁵⁹

Protest from the Abkhazian People’s Council followed. It wanted to “remind” the Georgian government that it had agreed to grant Mazniashvili wide authority in military operations, but had never agreed to his appointment as governor-general, or his right to demand that the local population “unquestionably submit” to all the laws of the Georgian state.⁶⁰ The Council asked the Georgian government to provide its representatives with “clear and well-defined instructions” for engaging with Abkhazia on the basis of the 11 June agreement, and demanded a civil representative in Abkhazia to ensure these arrangements.⁶¹ In response, the Georgian government ordered the Council to extend its mandate to include representatives of non-Abkhazian ethnicity, and, most unexpectedly, directed it to offer “full support” to the new civil representative and to “fulfill his orders.”⁶²

At the end of 1918, Georgia faced a third threat in Abkhazia, the Volunteer Army in southern Russia. When General Mazniashvili drove the Bolsheviks out of Abkhazia in the summer of 1918, he pushed further west, taking the Sochi district as well as Tuapse on the Black Sea coast.⁶³ In September, Georgian officials met with Volunteer Army officers to negotiate the future of these territories but were unable to reach agreement. With the failure of negotiations, the threat of war loomed. In January-February 1919, the Volunteer Army occupied Georgian-controlled territories as far as Gagra.

The Abkhazian noblemen who had previously turned to Turkey for support now looked to the Volunteer Army to separate Abkhazia from Georgia. In October 1918, as the threat of a Volunteer Army attack loomed, this pro-Turkish noble faction demanded the resignation of the Abkhazian People's Council. Mounted militiamen surrounded the Council headquarters but were dispersed by government forces. Equating this "attempted coup" with the presence of the Volunteer Army, the Georgian government (with the support of chairman Varlam Shervashidze and several others) dissolved the People's Council. The government arrested several members, announced elections for a fully representative regional council, and appointed former Sukhumi city mayor Benjamin Chkhikvishvili as temporary administrator. The government also removed the Minister of Abkhazian Affairs, Robert Chkhotua, who had taken part in the affair, and assigned his duties to the Georgian Minister of Internal Affairs.⁶⁴ Abkhazian noble advances toward the Volunteer Army continued after this, but to no avail.⁶⁵

Re-Negotiating Abkhazia's Autonomy

In the new Abkhazian People's Council, elected alongside Georgia's own Constituent Assembly in February 1919, the ruling Social Democrats won with more than two-thirds (27) of the forty seats. The Social Democrats were careful, however, to avoid establishing hegemonic Georgian rule in the region; at least half the Social Democratic deputies appear to have been Abkhazians.⁶⁶ Another seven independent delegates (six Abkhazians and one Russian) formed their own bloc in support of maximum autonomy.⁶⁷

After the election, the Georgian government returned to the issue of Abkhazia's self-government. Head of the Georgian government, Noe Jordania, told the new Georgian Constituent Assembly that "we can accept all [Abkhazian] demands concerning autonomy, no matter how wide. There is only one thing we cannot accept: separation and unification with [Denikin's Volunteer Army]."⁶⁸ Jordania decreed that at the opening session of the new Abkhazian People's Council, a government representative would confirm that Abkhazia "has full autonomy in its internal affairs" and that a division of powers between the region and the central government would be worked out in the Georgian Constitution.⁶⁹ The new council passed legislation endorsing Abkhazia's right to self-government, titled the "Act on the Autonomy of Abkhazia." A bilateral commission made up of members of the Georgian parliament and the Abkhazian People's Council began to design a constitution for "Autonomous Abkhazia."⁷⁰

Over the next year, however, regional autonomy stalled. This was in large part because an ethnically divided People's Council of Abkhazia (its new name from May 1919) was unable to reach a consensus on the substance of its autonomy. Of the 14 or more Abkhazians in the social democratic faction, seven defected to the independent camp, which meant that most Abkhazian representatives in the People's Council supported greater decentralization than the center was willing to give.⁷¹ Ultimately, the Council's constitutional committee split into two, reflecting majority and independent views, while a new regional executive organ drafted a

compromise. None of these drafts secured a two-thirds vote, necessary for approval.⁷² The People's Council and its independent faction dispatched separate delegations to Tbilisi to determine how to proceed (and, in the case of the latter, to protest against delays). The Georgian government counseled patience until the completion of Georgia's own constitution but agreed to have the bilateral commission work out a draft agreement on the fundamentals of Abkhazian self-government, which would provide interim guidance regarding Abkhazia's autonomous powers.⁷³

In 1920, the People's Council of Abkhazia managed to overcome its differences to present a common front. In June, a six-man delegation, including a representative of the independent faction, departed for Tbilisi to work with members of the Georgian Constituent Assembly. The delegation warned of the negative impact of delay on Abkhazian attitudes toward Georgia, and urged that the current session of parliament resolve the issue in order to "calm minds." The government preached patience but assured the delegation that "the principle of autonomy is recognized by the Constitution of the Republic and its inviolability is fully secured."⁷⁴ It introduced a new twist, however, and explained that the final constitutional provisions would be the responsibility of parliament, not the bilateral commission, as the Act on Autonomy had mandated. Abkhazian members of the delegation were dismayed, but the delegation agreed to continue its work with the bilateral commission. Two new draft constitutions reflecting varying autonomous rights and responsibilities were presented. In Sukhumi, the People's Council of Abkhazia reconciled these two drafts in the fall and sent a delegation to Tbilisi in November 1920 to finalize the constitutional project.⁷⁵ This draft constitution was a victory for compromise accommodating various Abkhazian positions in the People's Council. It paved the way for a final Georgian-Abkhazian agreement on autonomy.

Unfortunately, further delays and the government's insistence on delegating autonomy (rather than basing it on a bilateral treaty) ended Abkhazian cooperation. The delegation dispatched to Tbilisi in November demanded that the Constituent Assembly only be able to formally approve the constitution presented by the bilateral commission without the ability to modify it further.⁷⁶ The government assured the delegation that the adoption of Abkhazia's constitution would be accelerated, but insisted that the Constituent Assembly have the ultimate right of approval. It proposed that a temporary law on Abkhazian autonomy be developed pending the constitutional approval of autonomy. It invited delegates to participate in this work within the framework of the Constituent Assembly's constitutional commission, not through the bilateral commission. Four of the delegation members refused to take part and, after being instructed to return to Sukhumi, informed the government that the delegation was withdrawing from talks "given such a deep divergence of views between the People's Council of Abkhazia and the central government."⁷⁷

Despite this breakdown in negotiations, the Georgian government moved forward with legislation on Abkhazia's autonomy. In late December, a "small constitutional commission," i.e., the rump bilateral commission, submitted a draft "Act on the administration of autonomous Abkhazia" to the presidium of the Constituent Assembly based on the draft constitution of the delegation from Abkhazia. The presidium took note of the draft, observing that it had to be reviewed by the full constitutional commission.⁷⁸

This, however, was too little, too late. On 11 February, the Bolshevik leadership engineered an uprising in Lori, a disputed Armenian-populated territory in southern Georgia as a prelude to invasion by the Red Army. Two days later, a member of the Bolsheviks' Caucasian Bureau (*Kavburo*) wrote to the "independent" Abkhazian members of the People's Council:

“Considering the upcoming fall of Menshevik power in Georgia,” they (the Bolsheviks) would take urgent measures to “liberate the working masses of Abkhazia and raise the red flag of revolution.” Abkhazian Bolsheviks in Russia readied themselves for control and, as the Red Army prepared its march on Tbilisi, they moved on Abkhazia.⁷⁹ On 21 February, in conditions of siege, Georgia’s Constituent Assembly approved Georgia’s new constitution, which included autonomy for Abkhazia, as well as autonomy for the regions of Muslim-populated Batumi (Achara) and Zakatala (the latter later became part of Soviet Azerbaijan).⁸⁰ Abkhazia was granted autonomy from independent Georgia, but four days later independent Georgia was no more.

South Ossetia: No Agreement on Fundamentals

Similarly, with South Ossetians’ acceptance of autonomy in August 1918, the Georgian government had an opportunity to forge a constitutional compromise. However, its principled acceptance of regional autonomy in Abkhazia did not extend to South Ossetia, despite its promises of “self-government.” The government welcomed the South Ossetian decision to recognize Georgian authority, but it rejected regional autonomy. It dismissed “the form in which Ossetian nationalists demand the realization of self-government.” The government was willing to grant smaller districts limited powers of self-rule, and advised the People’s Council to accept these “cantons” of self-government, and focus on the development of national culture.⁸¹

The Georgian government’s lack of support for South Ossetian autonomy was largely based on the looming security threat. The March 1918 peasant rebellion in South Ossetia was viewed as a nationalist movement backed by the Bolsheviks. The rebels had made unwarranted irredentist claims on Georgian territory and threatened to serve as a beachhead for either Bolshevik or Volunteer Army expansion into Georgia.⁸² But reluctance also stemmed from a suspicion of ethnic-based regional autonomy. In August 1918, the official government newspaper, *sakartvelos respublika*, justified the refusal to grant South Ossetians regional autonomy. Introducing an argument Georgian nationalists revived in the late 1980s, the paper explained that “national-territorial autonomy belongs only to an independent nation which still possesses its land and lives in its historical homeland. A national minority which abandons its land and shelters behind another nation, loses this right. . . .” By this definition, neither Ossetians, nor other ethnic minorities with external homelands like Armenians, Tatars (Azerbaijanis), Greeks, or Russians had a right to autonomy—only Abkhazians. Georgia, the official paper declared, “does not belong to the Russian Empire anymore. Any minority group which . . . cannot agree to such conditions, and cannot obey, has a full right to leave and settle down anywhere, or return to its historical homeland. When you stay with another family, you must obey its rules.”⁸³

The first test for Georgian authority arose when the government decided to move forward with the disarmament of the local South Ossetian population. Encountering resistance, the local centrally appointed commissar sought support from the People’s Council, but the latter requested all confiscated arms be returned to their owners with the names of any lawbreakers reported to the Council for further action. While acknowledging that the local population considered disarmament “a humiliation” and “political assault,” *ertoba* took issue with this attempt by the People’s Council to exert political authority: “Does the Ossetian People’s Council have the right to use administrative functions against our commissars or not? We do not think it has such rights.”⁸⁴

South Ossetian political leaders stuck to their guns, however. In October, the People's Council asked the government to grant South Ossetia regional autonomy.⁸⁵ The head of the People's Council, Alexandre Tibilov, insisted that South Ossetia was loyal to Georgia but asked the local commissar to "please discuss all our necessities with the government, most importantly, the establishment of a separate district in order to start our cultural work." According to *ertoba*, Tibilov "repeated this last request many times."⁸⁶

Losing patience, South Ossetians declared the unilateral establishment of regional autonomy at their sixth congress in December 1918. The People's Council elected by the congress was dominated by Bolsheviks, and began to take on the responsibilities of self-government, including management of local finances, the creation of a people's court, and the replacement of central appointees. It announced that South Ossetia would not participate in upcoming elections to the regional council of Gori, and scheduled its own.⁸⁷ The Ossetians' condition for participating in centrally organized elections was firm: "Let them give us a district first and then we will agree to the regional council and anything else." Most troubling to the authorities, the congress raised anew the question of unification with North Ossetia.⁸⁸

Rebuffing the challenge to its sovereignty, the Georgian government insisted that autonomy was the tool of external forces seeking to gain a foothold in Georgia in preparation for seizure of the entire state. In April 1919, the government sent troops into South Ossetia to disband the People's Council.⁸⁹ Seeking to discredit the new council, the government insisted that the People's Council did "not represent a national idea. It is a counterrevolutionary organization governed by former bureaucrats and gendarmes [*strazhniki*]," and it was "openly pro-Denikin."⁹⁰ They insisted that the army and National Guard would "fight fiercely" to protect Georgian sovereignty, and issued orders to arrest members of the People's Council who resisted dismissal. Most members went into hiding.⁹¹

After the dissolution of the People's Council, Georgian authorities announced the convocation of a new South Ossetian People's Congress, the seventh. At the Congress, the local commissar informed delegates that with the establishment of Georgian statehood, local People's Councils would be irrelevant unless they restricted themselves to cultural concerns. "Several councils," he lectured, "for example, the South Ossetian, did not understand this and continued their work, creating [an intolerable] system of dual power."⁹² Nonetheless, the government promised to consider a form of regional autonomy. This procured a commitment by the Congress to South Ossetia's unification with Georgia on the basis of "national-territorial self-governance." Based on this compromise, the congress declared the Ossetian issue "fully resolved."⁹³

In truth, however, Ossetian delegates met the government's newly proclaimed adherence to South Ossetian self-governance with skepticism. Twenty-seven Congress representatives voted for a pro-Georgian resolution that rejected the decisions of past People's Councils (under pressure, according to one Ossetian historian), but more – thirty-one – abstained from voting altogether.⁹⁴ Such hesitation was probably warranted; the month before *ertoba* had observed that "[e]ven if we agree for a second to provide autonomy, we would consider [maybe] three villages of the Java gorge [the northernmost part of South Ossetia] for such an [autonomous] territory."⁹⁵ Yet the head of the new People's Council took the government at its word, and asked the state authorities not to continue delaying a resolution on South Ossetian autonomy. If they did, he warned, the local population would begin a new revolutionary struggle.⁹⁶

The Georgian government prevaricated. It criticized a project that the People's Council put forward in June 1919 for giving too much self-governing authority. A second project was met with a counter-offer for a region composed of only four of the ten or so Ossetian-populated

areas that the People's Council sought to incorporate within South Ossetia, proposing to call it the Java district rather than "South Ossetia" proper. The People's Council appeared to have accepted even this, though it demanded that the region be called the "Ossetian district" and that Tskhinvali be its administrative center. The government rejected these demands and demanded as a condition for the establishment of the Java district the surrender of "deserters," something which the South Ossetian side rejected.⁹⁷ Seeing no further movement on the matter, the People's Council in October asked the government to speed up the process, but while the Social Democrats "surrounded themselves with promises, projects, and discussions in all kinds of committees and the press," they did not finalize South Ossetia's autonomy.⁹⁸

The Return of Revolutionary Conflict and the End of South Ossetia

If in Abkhazia, Bolshevik revolts were timed as responses to Abkhazian-Georgian agreements on political cooperation and, eventually, unification, in South Ossetia they occurred in the vacuum created by the failure to strike such agreements. The October 1919 rebellion took place amid the failure of the Georgian government and the South Ossetian People's Council to agree on even the geographic scope of autonomy, let alone its substance. Bolsheviks again tried to seize control of South Ossetia in May 1920. Like the first, this rebellion was to be the start of a general uprising in Georgia, but "in fact, [the uprising] was launched only in one region—South Ossetia."⁹⁹ In anticipation of a Soviet Russian-Georgian treaty recognizing Georgia's independence in exchange for, among other things, legalization of the Communist party, on 4 May Lenin and Stalin ordered Orjonikidze "to withdraw [all] divisions from within Georgia...and abstain from attack."¹⁰⁰ The South Ossetian Bolsheviks did not receive this order in time or ignored it. They launched the rebellion two days later in the northern village of Roki, where, after clearing the region of Georgian troops, they declared Soviet power and Roki's unification with Soviet Russia.¹⁰¹ The next day, the Russian government concluded its treaty with Georgia.

Despite the treaty, South Ossetian Bolsheviks refused to withdraw. On 20 May, a leading Ossetian Bolshevik in Vladikavkaz wrote to a companion in Roki, informing him of the peace treaty with Georgia and the order to halt the rebellion, but acknowledged that the rebels should maintain Soviet power where it had already been declared.¹⁰² Bravely rejecting central orders, the entire South Ossetian Bolshevik leadership (seventy in all) responded that they could not "be silent" concerning the "strange position of many leading Transcaucasian communists" who were reluctant to impose Soviet power in Transcaucasia. They accused the Bolshevik leaders of "betrayal" during the aborted 1919 revolt and hotly rejected the Caucasian Regional Committee's order "to extinguish the fire of revolution which has begun."¹⁰³ The South Ossetian Bolsheviks in Vladikavkaz declared it their duty to assist their comrades and, on 31 May, crossed the Greater Caucasus range to assist in South Ossetia's Sovietization. With these reinforcements, the rebels won a major victory in Java, purportedly killing nearly 80 Georgian National Guardsmen and taking 550 prisoner. They occupied Tskhinvali and declared the establishment of Soviet power throughout the region.¹⁰⁴

In November 1919, the Georgian government responded to the rebellion with comprehensive and brutal suppression. The Georgian social democratic newspaper *ertoba* declared Georgia's patience was exhausted: "today the republic must say 'enough'."¹⁰⁵ An Ossetian historian writes that at the time Georgia "[directed] its forces to liquidate South Ossetia as a national, ethnographic unity."¹⁰⁶ Georgian forces engaged in full-scale reprisal in all areas

tainted by rebellion: thirteen of the leading rebels were executed and scores of villages burned to the ground.¹⁰⁷ Up to twenty thousand fled across the Greater Caucasus mountain range into North Ossetia and thousands more were said to have taken refuge in the forests. Five thousand perished in the conflict, mostly refugees dying from starvation and illness. This constituted 6-7% of the total South Ossetian population.¹⁰⁸

In the aftermath of this suppression, the Georgian government began a process of what can only be considered selective ethnic cleansing. Days after the counterattack, a delegation of South Ossetian workers from Tbilisi beseeched the government to state whether it intended to “liquidate the Ossetian question...once and for all” through the mass resettlement of South Ossetians, as was rumored.¹⁰⁹ To a degree, this was indeed the plan. Shortly after the suppression of the revolt, the Georgian government established a “resettlement commission” to organize the relocation of Ossetians and the transfer of Georgian villagers. The commission ordered the total evacuation of the areas around the northern village of Java, the stronghold of “anti-Georgian” Ossetians. It also “temporarily” revoked the universal right of residency for all Ossetians except those working in government service or who could otherwise prove they were “faithful citizens of the republic.”¹¹⁰ The widespread retaliation against segments of the South Ossetian population was the *coup de grace* to any voluntary acceptance of Georgian authority; even Ossetian Social Democrats, who had staunchly supported the government, now deserted it.¹¹¹ As for the refugees themselves, there appeared little hope for return.

Two months later, power relations in South Ossetia were turned on their head. On 25 February, the day the Red Army occupied Tbilisi, the South Ossetian Soviet Regional Committee in Vladikavkaz prepared to take power in South Ossetia, which was to be “an autonomous unit” with Tskhinvali as its capital.¹¹² Shortly thereafter, a South Ossetian division made up of “rebels and refugees” crossed the Greater Caucasus mountain range to occupy Roki, Java, and, eventually, Tskhinvali.¹¹³

Conclusion

The failure of social democratic Georgia to reach agreements with Abkhazians and South Ossetians on ethnoterritorial decentralization is often cast as a direct outcome of Georgian nationalism. But the reality of the time was vastly more complex. Georgia’s ruling Social Democrats supported the principle of decentralization and, for Abkhazia, autonomy outright. However, conflicts over decentralization were intertwined with a struggle against Bolshevism, and it was this struggle that produced the greatest violence. At the same time, Abkhazian and South Ossetian nationalist aspirations existed, and were not just a cover for Bolshevism; virtually all Abkhazian and South Ossetian political leaders, even those who originally sided with the Social Democrats, sought to carve out distinct ethnoterritorial administrations. But with no viable alternatives in sight, local leaders who opposed Bolshevism accepted unification with Georgia, on condition of decentralization. This, along with the armed conflicts that arose out of the struggle with Bolshevism, led to substantive political conflicts concerning the scope of decentralization. The results of these conflicts differed. Abkhazia was granted autonomy, if not the treaty-based federal statehood they sought. South Ossetia, by contrast, came firmly under Tbilisi’s control, and was engulfed by violence as Georgian authorities responded to Bolshevik rebellions with mass reprisals. Like Georgian statehood itself, both these models of authority were exceedingly brief experiments, cut short by Georgia’s sovietization.

The experience of 1918-1921 contains a number of implications for today's Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts. Firstly, it helps make sense of the strong linkage expressed by most Georgians between Abkhazian and South Ossetian separatist movements and threats to Georgian statehood. In the late Soviet period, Georgians identified Abkhazian and South Ossetian movements as "fifth columns" working with the Soviet center to hinder the restoration of Georgia's independence. But this association has far deeper roots. In 1918-1920, the most blatant efforts to keep Abkhazia and South Ossetia separate from Georgia were those of the Bolsheviks, who anticipated the two regions would serve as staging grounds for Georgia's sovietization. In the end, the Red Army first entered Georgia from the south, but an historical association between Abkhazian and South Ossetian separatism and the loss of Georgian sovereignty to Soviet (or Russian) power was established.

At the same time, the 1918-21 experience helps one appreciate the astonishing depth of Abkhazian and South Ossetian ethnoterritorial aspirations. These small ethnic groups – numbering just tens of thousands – have a record of ethnoterritorial mobilization rooted in indigenous movements predating the Soviet Union. Such mobilization cannot be understood as only a fig leaf for Soviet Russian expansion. Local Bolsheviks often acted on their own, even expressly against orders, and they were not the only ones who sought separate national units for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Such aspirations were shared by virtually all Abkhazian and South Ossetian political representatives. This suggests caution against dismissing Abkhazian and South Ossetian aspirations for self-government today as a Russian-engineered contrivance.

Thirdly, 1918-21 showed that compromise which respects Georgian territorial integrity and local self-government, is viable. But so long as Russia or any other external actor provides Abkhazians and South Ossetians with a viable alternative to unification with Georgia, they are unlikely to accept the compromise. And so long as Georgians fear that Russia – or another actor – will use the self-government of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to weaken Georgia's statehood, they are not likely to accept significant and lasting devolution either. For better or for worse, a compromise solution to the conflicts requires a Russian willingness to steer Abkhazians and South Ossetians toward integration with Georgia, and Georgian confidence that Russia will not use self-government in Abkhazia and South Ossetia to undermine the country's independence.

Finally, the DRG highlights the danger of reaching a principled agreement on unification on the basis of Abkhazian and South Ossetian self-government, without reaching any agreement on the practical details. As processes of conflict resolution in Israel/Palestine, Cyprus, Moldova/Transnistria, and Azerbaijan/Nagorno-Karabakh have demonstrated, protracted negotiations that reveal fundamental divides in the visions sides have of implementation provide space to spoilers wishing to derail resolution. So as difficult as it may be to secure even principled agreement to re-unification, this will be far from sufficient to guarantee successful re-unification.

The fact that Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts date back almost a century should not be taken as justification for inaction or maintenance of the status quo. On the contrary, this historical examination offered a tantalizing vision of a *realpolitik* compromise, based on Georgian territorial integrity and Abkhazian and South Ossetian self-government. The opportunity for reconciliation, while tragically missed in 1918-21, was there, and it should be reopened and reexamined. Just its consideration will require political will, courage, and the full investment of the international community – including Russia – in the conflicts' resolution. Let's hope we do not have to wait another generation.

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¹ “Transcaucasia” is a translation of the Russian term “Zakavkaz’e,” denoting the Russian empire’s Caucasian territories south of the Greater Caucasus mountain range.

² See Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Second Edition, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994, 195-200.

³ On the limited ethnic character of “nationalist struggles” during the Russian Revolution more generally, see S. Jones, “The Non-Russian Nationalities,” in Robert Service (ed.), *Society and Politics in the Russian Revolution*, London, New York: MacMillan/St. Martin’s Press, 1992, 35-63.

⁴ G. Dzidzariia, *Ocherki istorii Abkhazii, 1910-1921* (Sketches on the history of Abkhazia, 1910-1921), Tbilisi: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo sabchota sakartvelo, 1963, 62-6, 108-9.

⁵ Ibid., 121-7; Dzh. Gamakhariia and B. Gogiiia, eds, *Abkhaziia—istoricheskaia oblast' Gruzii: istoriografiia, dokumenty i materialy, kommentarii (s drevneishykh vremen do 30-kh godov XX veka)* (Abkhazia—a historical region of Georgia: Historiography, documents and materials, commentary [from ancient times until the 1930s]), Tbilisi: Aghdgoma, 1997, 402-4.

⁶ Dzidzariia, op. cit., *Ocherki istorii*, 138-143, 166-7; G. Dzidzariia, (ed.), *Bor'ba za Oktiabr' v Abkhazii: Sbornik dokumentov i materialov, 1917-1921* (The struggle for October in Abkhazia: A collection of documents and materials, 1917-1921), new and rev. (ed.), Sukhumi: Izdatel'stvo Alashara, 1967, 43-71.

⁷ Dzidzariia, op. cit., *Ocherki istorii*, 169-76; Dzidzaria, op. cit., *Bor'ba za Oktiabr'*, 72-82.

⁸ S. Lakoba, *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii Abkhazii* (Sketches on the political history of Abkhazia), Sukhumi: Alashara, 1990, 65; Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 747.

⁹ Dzidzariia, op. cit., *Ocherki istorii*, 181-196; Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 74-7; A. Menteshashvili, *Istoricheskie predposilki sovremennogo separatizma v Gruzii* (Historical roots of modern separatism in Georgia), Tbilisi: Tipografiia Tbilisskogo universiteta, 1998, 24-5.

¹⁰ I. Tskhovrebov, (ed.), *Bor'ba trudiashchikhsia Iugo-Osetii za Sovetskuiu vlast' (Dokumenty i materialy)* (The struggle of the working masses of South Ossetia for Soviet power [Documents and materials]), 2nd edition, Stalinir (Tskhinvali): Gosizdat Iugo-Osetii, 1960, 224; B. Pliev, *Bor'ba trudiashchikhsia Iuzhnoi Osetii za Sovetskuiu vlast' v 1917-1921 gg.* (The struggle of the working masses of South Ossetia for Soviet power, 1917-1921), Tskhinvali: Izdatel'stvo Iryston, 1977, 59-61; *Iz istorii vzaimootnoshenii gruzinskogo i osetinskogo narodov (Zaklučenje komissii po izucheniiu statusa Iugo-Osetinskoj oblasti)* (From the history of the interrelations of the Georgian and Ossetian peoples [Conclusions of the commission on the study of the status of the South Ossetian region]), Tbilisi: Tipografiia Gruzinskogo zhurnal'no-gazetnogo izdatel'stvo samshoblo, 1991, 47.

¹¹ Pliev, op. cit., 49.

¹² On the Union of Revolutionary Peasantry, see *ibid.*, D. Nikonov, *Krest'ianskie vosstaniia v Iugo-Osetii v 1917-1920 gg.* (The peasant uprisings in South Ossetia, 1917-1920), Stalinir (Tskhinvali): Stalinirskaiia tipografiia Gruzglavizdata, 1956, 22, 25-6; S. Gabaraev and Z. Vaneev, (eds.), *Vospominaniia uchastnikov grazhdanskoi voiny v Iugo-Osetii (1917-1921 gg.)* (Recollections of participants of the civil war in South Ossetia, 1917-1921), Stalinir (Tskhinvali): Gosizdat Iugo-Osetii, 1957, 8; V. Tskhovrebov and M. Sanakoev, *Iuzhnaia Osetiia v period trëkh revoliutsii (1900-1921 gg.)* (South Ossetia in the period of three revolutions [1900-1921]), Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 1981, 182-4, 191; *Iz istorii* 1991: 19-21.

¹³ On the March 1918 uprising, see Nikonov, op. cit., 27-34; Tskhovrebov, op. cit., 18-27; Pliev, op. cit., 78-88; Tskhovrebov and Sanakoev, op. cit., 192-6. *Iz istorii*, 21-5; L. Toidze, *rogor sheikmna samkhret osetis avtonomiuri olki* (How the South Ossetian autonomous region was created), Tbilisi: metsniereba, 1991, 111-18; Menteshashvili, op. cit., *Istoricheskie predposilki*, 120-1.

¹⁴ Nikonov, op. cit., 34; Pliev, op. cit., 85-6. Soviet historical works – following the Bolshevik rhetoric of the time – refer to the Georgian Social Democrats in power as “Mensheviks,” i.e., part of an opposing faction in the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party. By 1917, however, Georgia's Social Democrats had charted their own path. See S. F. Jones, *Socialism in Georgian Colors: The European Road to Social Democracy (1883-1917)*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005, 198, 217-18, 286.

¹⁵ Pliev, op. cit., 142.

¹⁶ See *ibid.*, 146-52; Nikonov, op. cit., 38-41; Gabaraev and Vaneev, op. cit., 70, 90, 95; Tskhovrebov, op. cit., 41, 44-5; *Iz istorii*, 47.

¹⁷ On the October 1919 uprising, see Nikonov, op. cit., 51-2; Tskhovrebov, op. cit., 65-7, 71; Pliev, op. cit., 204; Tskhovrebov and Sanakoev, op. cit., 206-7; *Iz istorii*, 29-30.

¹⁸ Pliev, op. cit., 203.

¹⁹ The principality of Abkhazia was one of several states that emerged in 1490 from the collapse of medieval Georgia (it also predated this unified Georgian kingdom). The principality became a subject of the Russian Empire in 1810. Upon its formal annexation in 1864, Abkhazia was first incorporated as the Sukhumi Military Department (*otdel*). In 1883, it was refashioned as the Sukhumi *okrug* (region), subordinate to the Kutaisi governor-general (except from 1903 to 1906). See G. Hewitt, “Abkhazia: a problem of identity and ownership,” *Central Asian Survey*, 1993, vol. 12, 271; T. Diasamidze, (ed.), *Status of Autonomous Regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia within Georgia (1917-1988). Collection of Political-Legal Acts*, trans. N. Japaridze-Chkoidze, Tbilisi: Publishing House GCI Ltd, 2005, 7.

²⁰ See G. Dzidzariia, *Makhadzhirstvo i problemy istorii Abkhazii XIX stoletia. 2^{oe} Izd.* (The “Mahajirstvo” and problems of 19th-century Abkhazian history. 2nd edition), Sukhumi: Izdatel’stvo Alashara, 1982; T. Achugba, (ed.), *Etnicheskaia “revoliutsiia” v Abkhazii (po sledam gruzinskoi periodiki XIX v.)* (The ethnic “revolution” in Abkhazia [according to the Georgian press of the 19th century]), Sukhum (Sukhumi): Izdatel’stvo Alashara, 1995; and D. Müller, “Demography: ethno-demographic history, 1886-1989,” in G. Hewitt (ed.), *The Abkhazians: A Handbook*, New York: St. Martins Press, 1993, 220, 222.

²¹ The demography and even identity of Samurzaqano residents is sufficiently fluid to render determination of its ethnic composition virtually impossible. The region was part of the principality of Mingrelia until the 1670s, when the region was invaded and annexed by Abkhazia and experienced an influx of Abkhazian settlers. Georgian chroniclers report that the region had already been heavily depopulated as a result of prior Abkhazian and Turkish invasions. How many Mingrelians, if any, remained in the region or returned after the Abkhazian occupation is unknown. In the 19th century, the ethnic identity of “Samurzaqanoans” became a matter of some debate. Russian (and later Soviet) censuses generally alternated in labeling them Abkhazians or Georgians (Mingrelians), with the census closest to the Russian Revolution recording them as the latter. See Iu. Anchabadze, *Iz istorii srednevekovoi Abkhazii (VI-XVII vv.)* (From the history of medieval Abkhazia [6th-17th centuries]), Sukhumi: Abkhazskoe gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo, 1959, 269-71, 297; Hewitt, op. cit., 275-6, 319 (n. 54); Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 59, 292-3, 724-5.

²² The only reasonably reliable statistic available from this period is a 1917 agricultural census. Excluding ethnically confusing Samurzaqano (and the north-westernmost Gagra region, which was removed from the Sukhumi region in 1904), the rural population of the rest of Abkhazia was some 44 % Abkhazian and 16 % Georgian. Including Samurzaqano, which the 1917 census recorded as almost exclusively Georgian, Abkhazia’s rural population (approx. 131,000 total) was 42% Georgian and 30% Abkhazian. The only data available on Abkhazia’s urban population (mainly in Sukhumi) near this time comes from an urban census from 1922. According to this census, which excludes the small urban population of Gagra, the urban population of Abkhazia (approx. 23,000) was 26% Georgian and less than 5% Abkhazian. Data calculated from Müller, op. cit., 228-30.

²³ Dzidzariia, op. cit., 61; Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 67-8.

²⁴ Dzidzariia, op. cit., *Ocherki istorii*, 91-2; Lakoba, op. cit., *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii*, 63; Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 389-91.

²⁵ The Abkhazian language is part of the Northwest Caucasian language family that includes Adyghe and Kabardian, which are considered dialects of a common Circassian language spoken by members of three groups formally classified by ethnicity in Russia today as Cherkess, Adyghe, and Kabardians. See G. Hewitt, “Language,” in G. Hewitt, op. cit., 167.

²⁶ See Dzidzariia, op. cit., *Ocherki istorii*, 87-9, 92-3; Lakoba, op. cit., *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii*, 62-4; R. Clogg, “Documents from the KGB archive in Sukhum. Abkhazia in the Stalin years,” *Central Asian Survey*, 1995, vol. 14, 181; Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 389, 397-8; Diasamidze, op. cit., 11.

²⁷ S. Lakoba, “Abkhazia, Georgia, and the Caucasus Confederation,” *Caucasian Regional Studies*, 1998, vol. 3, <http://poli.vub.ac.be/publi/Georgians/chp0701.html>.

²⁸ Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 392, 394.

²⁹ While Georgian historian Avtandil Menteshashvili claims that the Abkhazian delegation eventually accepted the Georgians' condition that Abkhazia join Georgia, none of the four archival versions of the agreement that have been published support this contention. On the agreement, see Dzidzariia, op. cit., *Ocherki istorii*, 113; B. Sagariia, *Natsional'noe gosudarstvennoe stroitel'stvo v Abkhazii (1921-1931 gg.)* (National-state construction in Abkhazia, 1921-1931), Sukhumi: Izdatel'stvo Alashara, 1970, 13; A. Menteshashvili, *Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia i natsional'no-osvoboditel'noe dvizhenie v Gruzii, 1917-1921* (The October revolution and the national-liberation movement in Georgia), Tbilisi: Izdatel'stvo ganatleba, 1987, 115-17; Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 391-2, 744-5; Menteshashvili, op. cit., *Istoricheskie predposilki*, 15-17. For different versions of the agreements, see Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 402; Menteshashvili, op. cit., *Istoricheskie predposilki*, 75; Diasamidze, op. cit., 14-16.

³⁰ Diasamidze, op. cit., 16-17.

³¹ See Dzidzariia, op. cit., *Ocherki istorii*, 205-6; Clogg, op. cit., 182; Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 73, 77-8, 763-5; Lakoba, op. cit., "Abkhazia, Georgia, and the Caucasus Confederation."

³² Menteshashvili, op. cit., *Istoricheskie predposilki*, 20; Diasamidze, op. cit., 18.

³³ Tskhovrebov and Sanakoev, op. cit., 177.

³⁴ The term "South Ossetia" was used only infrequently in the nineteenth century. The first written usage appears to have been in 1830 in the newspaper *Tiflisskie vedomosti*, with more frequent mentions from the 1860s on. See L. Chibirov, *Periodicheskaiia pechat' Kavkaza ob Osetii i Osetinakh, nauchno-populiarnyi sbornik I* (The Caucasian press about Ossetia and Ossetians, a popular-scientific collection, v. 1), Tskhinvali: Izdatel'stvo Iryston, 1981, 24; and S. Lekishvili, "Kogda vznik termin 'Iuzhnaia Osetiia'? (When did the term 'South Ossetia' arise?)," in A. Bakradze and O. Chubinidze (eds.), *Osetinskii vopros* (The Ossetian question), Tbilisi: kera-XXI, 1994. For estimates of the Ossetian population of South Ossetia in the early twentieth century, see *ertoba*, 24 December 1917; V. D. Abaev, *Ekonomicheskoe razvitie Iugo-Osetii v period kapitalizma (1864-1917-1921 gg.), chast' vtoraiia* (The economic development of South Ossetia in the period of capitalism [1864-1917-1921], Part II), Tbilisi: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk GSSR, 1956, 102; Nikonov, op. cit., 102; Tskhovrebov, op. cit., 39; and Pliev, op. cit., 230. For studies of early modern Ossetian migration into the South Caucasus, see Z. Vaneev, "K voprosu o vremeni zaseleniia Iugo-Osetii (Towards the question about the time of settlement of South Ossetia)" and "O vremeni pereseleniia Iuzhnykh Osetin (Regarding the time of South Ossetian settlement)," in *Izbrannye raboty po istorii osetinskogo naroda. Tom I* (Collected works on the history of the Ossetian people. Vol. 1), Tskhinvali: Izdatel'stvo Iryston, 1989 (1936, 1962), 333-75, 390-9; B. Gamkrelidze, "K voprosu o rasselenii Osetin v Gruzii (On the question of the settlement of Ossetians in Georgia)," in A. Bakradze and O. Chubinidze (eds.), *Osetinskii vopros* (The Ossetian question), Tbilisi: kera-XXI, 1994; and J. Gvasalia, "Shida Kartli i Osetinskaia problema (Inner Kartli and the Ossetian Problem)," in A. Bakradze and O. Chubinidze (eds.), *Osetinskii vopros* (The Ossetian question), Tbilisi: kera-XXI, 1994.

³⁵ A. Silatadze and V. Guruli, *sakartvelos sakhelmtsipoebrivi damoukideblobis aghdgena 1917-1918* (The establishment of the state independence of Georgia, 1917-1918), Tbilisi: intellect, 1998, p. 88.

³⁶ *ertoba*, 24 December 1917; Nikonov, op. cit., 36.

³⁷ *ertoba*, 24 December 1917; Pliev, op. cit., 130-2; Toidze, op. cit., 13-15.

³⁸ Toidze, op. cit., 16-18.

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- ³⁹ In 1886, there were no Ossetians recorded living in Tskhinvali. As late as 1922, only 613 Ossetians lived in Tskhinvali, or 14% of the town's population (compared to 1,436 Georgians, 1,651 Georgian Jews, and 765 Armenians) A. Totadze, *Naselenie Abkhazii/Osetini v Gruzii* (The Population of Abkhazia/Ossetians in Georgia), Tbilisi: samshoblo, 1994, 53.
- ⁴⁰ *ertoba*, 8, 11 June 1918; Nikonov, op. cit., 39-40; Pliev, op. cit., 140-4.
- ⁴¹ *ertoba*, 6 June, 1918. (any no.?)
- ⁴² Tskhovrebov, op. cit., 39.
- ⁴³ *ertoba*, 23 June, 1918; Nikonov, op. cit., 41-2; Pliev, op. cit., 145.
- ⁴⁴ Pliev, op. cit., 148.
- ⁴⁵ Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 413, 748-50; Menteshashvili, op. cit., *Istoricheskie predposilki*, 20-1; Diasamidze, op. cit., 18-20.
- ⁴⁶ Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 750.
- ⁴⁷ On the June 1918 agreement, see *ibid.*, 414, 750-2; Dzidzariia, op. cit., *Ocherki istorii*, 183; Lakoba, op. cit., *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii*, 66-7; Menteshashvili, op. cit., *Istoricheskie predposilki*, 21-2, 75-8; Diasamidze, op. cit., 20-2.
- ⁴⁸ Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 751; Menteshashvili, op. cit., *Istoricheskie predposilki*, 77; Diasamidze, op. cit., 21.
- ⁴⁹ Sagariia, op. cit., 16-17; Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 753.
- ⁵⁰ Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 748-9.
- ⁵¹ *ertoba*, 11, 21 August, 1918; Pliev, op. cit., 148.
- ⁵² *ertoba*, 22 August, 1918.
- ⁵³ *ertoba*, 27 August, 1918; Pliev, op. cit., 149.
- ⁵⁴ *ertoba*, 21 August, 1918.
- ⁵⁵ *ertoba*, 22 August, 1918; *sakartvelos respublika*, 1 September, 1918; Pliev, op. cit., 148.
- ⁵⁶ *ertoba*, 11 August, 1918.
- ⁵⁷ *ertoba*, 22 August, 1918.
- ⁵⁸ On the Turkish "affair," see Dzidzariia, op. cit., *Ocherki istorii*, 205-9; Lakoba, op. cit., "Abkhazia, Georgia, and the Caucasus Confederation"; Clogg, op. cit., 182; and Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 73-4, 77-82, 416-17, 420-4, 748, 759-60, 764-6.
- ⁵⁹ Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 766-8; Menteshashvili, op. cit., *Istoricheskie predposilki*, 32-3; Diasamidze, op. cit., 41.
- ⁶⁰ Gamakharia and Gogia admit three times that the Georgians did not abide by the terms of the agreement. Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 75, 77, 82.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 415-17, 760; Dzidzariia, op. cit., *Ocherki istorii*, 209.
- ⁶² Gamakharia and Gogia maintain that the changes to the People's Council at this time constituted a "reorganization" taken on by the council itself and that Lakoba's claim (likely based on an earlier one by Dzidzariia) that the Georgian government disbanded the Abkhazian People's Council "by force of arms" is incorrect. See Dzidzariia, op. cit., *Ocherki istorii*, 211, 216; Lakoba, op. cit., *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii*, 67-8; Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 83-4, 768.
- ⁶³ Dzidzariia, op. cit., *Ocherki istorii*, 190-2, Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 415, 754-5.
- ⁶⁴ On the October 1918 events, see Dzidzariia, op. cit., *Ocherki istorii*, 217; Lakoba, op. cit., *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii*, pp. 69-70; Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 84-6, 424-5; and Menteshashvili, op. cit., *Istoricheskie predposilki*, 30-1.

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- ⁶⁵ Lakoba, op. cit., *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii*, 70-1; Dzidzariia, op. cit., *Ocherki istorii*, 250-1; Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 88-90, 436-7.
- ⁶⁶ The uncertainty stems from the ambiguity of some deputies' surnames, which could either be Abkhazian or Mingrelian. I compiled a list of deputies from Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 105, 772-3, 777; Lakoba, op. cit., *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii*, 74; and Dzidzariia, op. cit., *Bor'ba za Oktiabr'*, 105-7.
- ⁶⁷ Lakoba, op. cit., *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii*, 74; Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 773.
- ⁶⁸ Menteshashvili, op. cit., *Istoricheskie predposilki*, 52.
- ⁶⁹ Diasamidze, op. cit., 39.
- ⁷⁰ Dzidzariia, op. cit., *Ocherki istorii*, 232-3; Lakoba, op. cit., *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii*, 74-5; Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 429-35.
- ⁷¹ See Dzidzariia, op. cit., *Ocherki istorii*, 233; Dzidzariia, op. cit., *Bor'ba za Oktiabr'*, 105-7; Lakoba, op. cit., *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii*, 74; Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 773.
- ⁷² Dzidzariia, op. cit., *Ocherki istorii*, 232-4; Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 97-8. The three draft versions of the constitution are reprinted in Menteshashvili, op. cit., *Istoricheskie predposilki*, 80-94.
- ⁷³ Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 98-101, 451-3; Diasamidze, op. cit., 50-1.
- ⁷⁴ Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 105, 460; Menteshashvili, op. cit., *Istoricheskie predposilki*, 53, 79; Diasamidze, op. cit., 62-4.
- ⁷⁵ Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 105-8, 461-5; Menteshashvili, op. cit., *Istoricheskie predposilki*, 53-5; Diasamidze, op. cit., 64-9.
- ⁷⁶ Lakoba, op. cit., *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii*, 76; Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 108.
- ⁷⁷ As the note was signed only by the three independent delegates, it is not clear if the rest of the delegation stayed in Tbilisi to continue their work or also returned to Sukhumi. Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 109-10; Menteshashvili, op. cit., *Istoricheskie predposilki*, 55; Diasamidze, op. cit., 69.
- ⁷⁸ Menteshashvili, op. cit., *Istoricheskie predposilki*, 56; Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 466-9, 787; Diasamidze, op. cit., 69-71.
- ⁷⁹ Dzidzariia, op. cit., *Ocherki istorii*, 342-3; Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 114-15.
- ⁸⁰ Lakoba, op. cit., *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii*, 78; Menteshashvili, op. cit., *Istoricheskie predposilki*, 56; Gamakharia and Gogia, op. cit., 110.
- ⁸¹ *ertoba*, 11 August, 1918; Pliev, op. cit., 147-51.
- ⁸² *ertoba*, 11 August, 1918; Toidze, op. cit., 111-12, 117-18.
- ⁸³ *sakartvelos respublika*, 30, 31 August, 1918.
- ⁸⁴ *ertoba*, 30 August, 1918.
- ⁸⁵ Pliev, op. cit., 150.
- ⁸⁶ *ertoba*, 19 October, 1918.
- ⁸⁷ See Nikonov, op. cit., 47-8; Tskhovrebov, op. cit., 49-51; Pliev, op. cit., 151-5; *Iz istorii*, 27.
- ⁸⁸ *ertoba*, 7 December, 1918, Nikonov, op. cit., 47.
- ⁸⁹ Nikonov, op. cit., 48-9; Tskhovrebov, op. cit., 56-7; Pliev, op. cit., 156.
- ⁹⁰ *ertoba*, 17 May, 1919; Pliev, op. cit., 153.
- ⁹¹ Pliev, op. cit., 158.
- ⁹² *Ibid.*, 158-9.
- ⁹³ *ertoba*, 5 June, 1919; *ibid.*, 160.
- ⁹⁴ Pliev, op. cit., 160.

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- ⁹⁵ *ertoba*, 15 May, 1919.
- ⁹⁶ Pliev, op. cit., 159.
- ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 163-4; Tskhovrebov, op. cit., 63; *Iz istorii*, 28-9.
- ⁹⁸ Pliev, op. cit., 164-5.
- ⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 223; Nikonov, op. cit., 53.
- ¹⁰⁰ Pliev, op. cit., 225; Menteshashvili, op. cit., *Istoricheskie predposilki*, 107.
- ¹⁰¹ Nikonov, op. cit., 53; Pliev, op. cit., 222-3; Tskhovrebov and Sanakoev, op. cit., 208.
- ¹⁰² Tskhovrebov, op. cit., 82-4; Pliev, op. cit., 228.
- ¹⁰³ Tskhovrebov, op. cit., 90-7; Pliev, op. cit., 231; Menteshashvili, op. cit., *Istoricheskie predposilki*, 112-15, 120-30.
- ¹⁰⁴ Nikonov, op. cit., 54-5; Tskhovrebov, op. cit., 99-102; Pliev, op. cit., 234-6.
- ¹⁰⁵ Toidze, op. cit., 122.
- ¹⁰⁶ Pliev, op. cit., 238.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 240-2; Nikonov, op. cit., 60-1. An official Georgian report from 1991 cited South Ossetian Bolsheviks' contemporary assessments of the scale of violence, including the targeted destruction of villages and innocent inhabitants, as factually correct and acknowledged that the Georgian army - it's patience exhausted - had acted with "extreme cruelty." *Iz istorii*, 34-5, 40-1.
- ¹⁰⁸ See Nikonov, op. cit., 62, 65; Tskhovrebov, op. cit., 142, 144, 261; Pliev, op. cit., 247, 251; Tskhovrebov and Sanakoev, op. cit., 210; Abaev, op. cit., 114. Georgian accounts do not dispute these numbers. See *Iz istorii*, 86; Menteshashvili, op. cit., *Istoricheskie predposilki*, 117; and G. Zhorzholiani, et al., *Istoricheskie i politiko-pravovye aspekty Gruzino-Osetinskogo konflikta (Historical and legal-political Aspects of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict)*, Tbilisi: samshoblo, 1995, 8-9.
- ¹⁰⁹ Tskhovrebov, op. cit., 120.
- ¹¹⁰ Nikonov, op. cit., 63, 67; Tskhovrebov, op. cit., 145-7; Pliev, op. cit., 245-6, 249.
- ¹¹¹ Pliev, op. cit., 252.
- ¹¹² Tskhovrebov, op. cit., p. 213.
- ¹¹³ Nikonov, op. cit., p. 84; Pliev, op. cit., pp. 280-1.