

SOVIET TRANSCAUCASUS 1917-1945: NATIONS IN TRANSITION

A Master's Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

SOVIET TRANSCAUCASUS 1917-1945: NATIONS IN TRANSITION

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This thesis analyzes the nationalities policy of the Soviet Union with a special emphasis on three major Transcaucasian nationalities, i.e. Georgians, Azerbaijanis and Armenians. The thesis focuses on the Soviet nationalities policy and attempts to shed light on the history of these three Transcaucasian nationalities within the context of this policy. Soviet nationalities policy, even if disparately applied for any nationality under the Soviet rule, resulted in significant consequences for all the nationalities of the Union. Within this framework, this study aims to explain both idiosyncratic and alike evolutions of Georgians, Azerbaijanis and Armenians, at the same time, under the Soviet rule. Finally, it argues that Soviet policies, specifically the nationalities policy, played the major role in the transformation of Transcaucasian nationalities and determined the current dynamics of the region.

Key Words: Soviet Union, Soviet nationalities policy, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia

ÖZET

SOVYET TRANSKAFKASYASI 1917-1945: ULUSLARIN DÖNÜŞÜMÜ

Aksoy, Didem
Yüksek Lisans, Uluslararası İlişkiler
Tez Danışmanı: Dr. Hasan Ali KARASAR
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Bu tez, başlıca üç Transkafkasya milleti olan Gürcü, Azeri ve Ermenilere özellikle vurgu yaparak Sovyet milliyetler politikasını incelemektedir. Tez, Sovyet milliyetler politikasına odaklanarak üç Transkafkasya milletin tarihine bu politika kapsamında ışık tutmayı amaçlamaktadır. Milletlere farklı şekillerde uygulanmış olsa dahi, Sovyet milliyetler politikası Sovyet yönetimi altındaki her millet için önemli sonuçlar doğurmuştur. Bu çerçevede, çalışma Sovyet yönetimi altındaki Gürcü, Azeri ve Ermenilerin aynı anda hem kendilerine özgü hem de birbirine benzer olan gelişimlerini açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır. Sonuç olarak, tez, Sovyet politikalarının, özellikle de milliyetler politikasının Transkafkasya milletlerinin dönüşümünde temel rol oynadığını ve bölgenin bugünkü dinamiklerini belirlediğini savunmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Sovyetler Birliği, Sovyet milliyetler politikası, Gürcistan, Azerbaycan, Ermenistan

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Soviet nationalities policy has long been debated after the breakup of the Soviet Union. Nationalities policy, specifically conducted under Stalin's rule, has been mostly criticized for what it resulted in. It is negotiable whether the Soviet ethnic, political, social, economic, linguistic and demographic engineering on the nationalities of the multi-ethnic Soviet state which was aimed at creating of a "Soviet man" is a sheer success story. However, it is indisputable that the Soviet nationalities policy has distinct reflections on the non-Russian nationalities of the Union.

First and foremost, it should be emphasized that there was not a unique and coherent nationalities policy under the Soviet rule. Setting aside that the main principles changed over time, the degree and the application of the practices differentiated from nation to nation. Therefore, the inconsistency in the application of the practices which on the one hand encouraged national development, and forced the creation of a culturally and ideologically unified centralized state on the other caused inevitable instabilities in the post-Soviet geography.

Transcaucasus, as a homeland for considerable amount of different nationalities and a region which was shaped by invasions and migrations throughout the history, presents a good example to observe the reflections of the Soviet nationalities policy. Seventy years of Soviet rule and nationalities policy forced an irreversible radical change upon both the minority and majority nationalities of the region. The outcomes of socio-economic practices were coupled with the outcomes of the political preferences of the Soviet power, which re-drew the borders in the region, and determined the nation and state formations of the nationalities of the region. In this study, the major nationalities of the region, which every of them had their own idiosyncratic experience under the Soviet rule, is under scrutiny.

This thesis strives to analyze the transformation of the major Transcaucasian nationalities, i.e. Georgians, Azerbaijanis and Armenians, first under the rule of the Russian Empire, secondly and essentially under the rule of the Soviet Union. Although there are plenty of studies in the literature examining the Soviet legacy in Transcaucasus, especially after the breakup of the Soviet Union, most of them focus on the certain aspects of this legacy. In an attempt to present a comprehensive understanding of the history along with the contemporary situation of the region, this thesis concentrates on social, economic and political aspects of the Soviet legacy, in wider sense. Therefore, a literature review of the sources written in English, Russian and Turkish languages on the history of the Transcaucasian nationalities have been used.

The second chapter begins with a short history of Transcaucasus which was a scene of rivalry among three empires during the 19th century. For this purpose, the

establishment of the Tsarist rule over the region, the administrative structure of the era, and the further developments are analyzed. Moreover, since the nationalities question is of utmost importance as a focal point of this thesis, the nationalities issue in the Russian Empire is also examined.

The third chapter aims to scrutinize the earlier developments within Transcaucasia under the Soviet rule. Along with the administrative and political compositions of the Transcaucasian nationalities, the completion of the Bolshevik takeover of Transcaucasus is analyzed in this section.

The fourth chapter is the heart of this thesis. It focuses on the transition of the Soviet Transcaucasus until the end of the Second World War. Here, the roles played by the sociological realities of the region; namely the nationalities policy and the territorial arrangements are analyzed. The famous purges of the 1930s were also valid in the Transcaucasian republics, which also played a role in the final shaping of the region. This chapter ends with a brief analysis of the impacts of the Second World War on Transcaucasus. At the end of which the region has taken its final shape reflected itself after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. Needless to say, this final shape has also contained several problems concerning national identities and borders which are centers of conflict resolution efforts in our age.

CHAPTER 2

GEORGIA, ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN UNDER THE TSARIST RULE (1905-1917)

In the eighteenth century, the Russian Empire continuously had expanded its possessions between the Caspian and the Black Seas, and in some regions its frontiers had reached to the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains.¹ By the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Transcaucasus region was to become a buffer zone between the three competing empires: the Russian Empire, the Ottoman Empire and the Qajar Empire. When Empress Catherine the Great (r.1762-1796) expanded the territories of the Russian Empire to the northern shores of the Black Sea during her reign, the Empire also had an aim of expanding its territories to the Transcaucasus region. At the end of the 18th century, the Qajar Empire, supported by Great Britain and France, tried to seize Georgia in an invasion by the Emperor Aga Muhammad Khan (r.1794-1797).² Committed with the 1783 Treaty of Georgievsk,³ which had

¹Theodore R. Weeks, "Managing Empire: Tsarist Nationalities Policy," In Dominic Lieven, ed., *The Cambridge History of Russia: Imperial Russia, 1689-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 36.

² "Persidskiy Pokhod 1796," In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 19, 1305 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1975), p. 1305.; "Russko-Iranskii Voyni 19 v.," In Evgenii Mikhailovich Zhukov, ed., *Sovetskaia istoricheskaia entsiklopediia*, Vol 12, 360-365 (Moskva: Otdelenie istorii akademii nauk sssr, 1961), p. 361.

put Georgian Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti under the Russian protectorate,⁴ Empress Catherine the Great initiated the Persian Campaign and sent Russian troops to the assistance of King Erekle II of Georgia against the Qajars in April 1796. In November, Russian troops reached confluence of Kura and Aras rivers. However, when Empress Catherine the Great died, the new Emperor Paul I (r. 1796-1801) recalled the expedition before achieving any decisive results. Finally, in December 1796, Russian troops were totally withdrawn from Transcaucasus.⁵

Due to the continuing pressures from the Qajar Empire on Georgia, the new King George XII decided to incorporate Georgia into the Russian Empire after King Erekle II's death in 1798. In return, he wanted to be sure that the Russian Emperor would grant his dynasty the right to rule Georgia. Paul I agreed during the 1799 negotiations in St. Petersburg. However, the deaths of Paul I and George XII intermitted the process. The new Emperor Alexander I (r. 1801-1825) issued a manifesto on confirming the annexation of Georgia into the Russian Empire on 12 December 1801.⁶ After this annexation, Alexander I sought to expand Russian influence to Dagestan and Azerbaijan.⁷ In 1803 Samegrelo, in 1804 Imereti and Guria were annexed by the Russian Empire. In 1804, the Russian armies under the

³ According to this treaty, the Georgian King Erekle II recognized the Russian Empire as his protector and relinquished any independent foreign policy. He also obligated his troops to serve the Russian empress. For her part, Catherine II pledged to preserve the integrity of Erekle's possessions. Georgia was given complete internal autonomy. The treaty also granted rights to the privileged Georgian monarchy and upheld its authority. See: "Georgievskiy Traktat 1783," In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 6, 941-942 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1971); For the full text of the Treaty in Russian see: "*Dogovor O Priznanii Carem Kartalinskim I Kahetinskim Irakliem Ii Pokrovitel'stva I Verhovnoj Vlasti Rossii (Georgievskiy Traktat)*." <http://www.istoria.ge/Documents/1783%20georgievskis%20traqtati.htm>.

⁴ "Georgievskiy Traktat 1783," In Prokhorov, p. 942; Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire: 1801-1917* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 61.; Paul Crego, "Georgia and Georgians," In J.R. Millar, ed., *Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan, 2004), p. 550.

⁵ "Persidskiy Pokhod 1796," In Prokhorov, p. 1305.; Seton-Watson, p. 61.

⁶ Seton-Watson, pp. 61-62.

⁷ "Russko-Iranskie Voyny 19 v.," In Zhukov, p. 361.

command of General Tsitsianov captured Gence Khanate.⁸ This occupation was the major cause of the Russo-Qajar War of 1804-1813.⁹

Russian expansion in Transcaucasus caused great concern in the Qajar Empire. In May 1804, the Qajar Empire demanded the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops from the Caucasus in the form of an ultimatum. However, since the Russian Empire did not accept the ultimatum, clashes between the two empires began in June 1804. Although there were several times more Qajar soldiers on the ground than Russian soldiers, they were in poor condition in terms of training and organization. The main fighting took place on the both sides of Lake Sevan in two directions: Erivan and Gence.¹⁰ In November 1805, Tsitsianov advanced to Baku, but in February 1806 he was assassinated during negotiations with the Khan of Baku at the Baku fortress. General I. V. Gudovich was appointed as the commander in chief.¹¹ In the summer of 1806 the army of Shah Abbas-Mirza (r. 1797-1833), the successor of Aga Muhammad Khan, was defeated at Karabakh, and Russian troops occupied Nukha, Derbent, Baku, and Kuba.¹²

With the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish War of 1806–1812, the Russians concluded a temporary truce with the Qajars in the winter of 1806. However, the peace negotiations were unsuccessful, and military actions re-started in September 1808.¹³ Simultaneously, the Russo-Turkish War of 1806-1812 resulted with the victory of the Russians, and the Ottoman Empire had renounced its claims on most of

⁸ "Russko-Iranskii Voyni 19 v.," In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 22, 1232-1234 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1975), p. 1233.

⁹ Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 308.

¹⁰ "Russko-Iranskii Voyni 19 v.," In Prokhorov, p. 1233.

¹¹ "Russko-Iranskii Voyni 19 v.," In Zhukov, p. 362.

¹² "Russko-Iranskii Voyni 19 v.," In Prokhorov, p. 1233.

¹³ "Russko-Iranskii Voyni 19 v.," In Zhukov, pp. 362-363.

the western Georgia with the Treaty of Bucharest in 1812.¹⁴ The Qajars were also defeated by the Russians, and were forced to sign the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813.¹⁵ With this treaty, the Qajar Empire recognized the annexation of Dagestan and parts of Azerbaijan by the Russian Empire.¹⁶ Also, the local khans were reduced to the status of vassals by this treaty.¹⁷

Although the Russian supremacy over the region was galvanized by these two treaties, Russo-Qajar hostility in Transcaucasus continued. In 1825, the Russians desired to widen their territories to the region of Gokcha which was refused by Shah Abbas Mirza, who “still cherished the hope of recovering Georgia and Azerbaijan.”¹⁸ The troops of the Shah crossed the Aras River¹⁹ and launched a new war in Transcaucasus in the summer of 1826. At first, the Qajar troops were successful since General Yermolov was slow to response. The Russians lost Gence and were able to save only Tiflis. However, in the autumn of 1826, Russian troops under the command of General I.F. Paskevich launched a counter-attack and carried the war into the Qajar territory. Within few months, the Russians captured Erivan and Tebriz.²⁰ The Qajar Empire was forced to sign the Treaty of Turkmenchai in 1828.²¹

¹⁴ "Bukharestskiy Mirnyy Dogovor 1812," In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 4, 480 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1971), p. 480.; For a detailed account of the Treaty of Bucharest see: F. Ismail, "The Making of the Treaty of Bucharest, 1811-1812," *Middle Eastern Studies* (Vol. 15, No. 2, 1979).

¹⁵ For a detailed account of Treaty of Gulistan see: Muriel Atkin, *Russia and Iran 1780-1828* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1980). Also, for the full text of the treaty in Russian see: "Mirnyy Traktat Zaklyuchenny Mezhdurussiiy I Persiyei". <http://www.hrono.ru/dokum/ruper1813.html>.

¹⁶ "Russko-Iranskoe Voyni 19 v.," In Prokhorov, p. 1233.; "Russko-Iranskoe Voyni 19 v.," In Zhukov, p. 363.; Riasanovsky, p. 308.

¹⁷ Robert F. Baumann, "Russo-Persian Wars," In J.R. Millar, ed., *Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan, 2004), p. 1336.

¹⁸ Seton-Watson, p. 289.

¹⁹ "Russko-Iranskoe Voyni 19 v.," In Prokhorov, p. 1234.

²⁰ Seton-Watson, p. 289.

²¹ For the full text of the treaty in Russian see: "O mire mezhdurussiiy i Persiyei ili Turkmanchayskiy mirnyy dogovor". <http://www.hrono.ru/dokum/ruper1828.html>.

By this treaty, the Russian Empire acquired Nakhichevan and Erivan Khanates.²² Also, the border between the Qajar and the Russian Empires was demarcated by the Treaty of Turkmenchai as the Aras River.²³

The last treaty that enabled the Russian Empire to gain the control of whole Transcaucasus was the 1829 Treaty of Adrianople, signed with the Ottoman Empire after the 1828-1829 Russo-Turkish War.²⁴ With this treaty, the Ottoman Empire recognized the Russian annexation of Georgia, Imereti, Samegrelo and Guria, as well as the Khanates of Erivan and Nakhichevan.²⁵ Finally, Transcaucasus became an integral part of the Russian Empire.

2.1 Transcaucasus Coming under the Tsarist Rule

Transcaucasus region, which previously had been a matter of competition between the three empires, became a geographical entity under one single rule by the beginning of the nineteenth century. After the integration of Transcaucasus into the Russian Empire, the colonization process of the region began.²⁶ The Empire deemed its role in the region as a civilizing mission. Therefore, throughout the nineteenth

²² "Turkmanchayskiy Dogovor 1828," In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 26, 1009 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1977), p. 1009.

²³ Seton-Watson, p. 290.

²⁴ For a detailed account of the treaty see: Şerafettin Turan, "1829 Edirne Antlaşması," *A.Ü. DTCTF Dergisi* (Vol. 9, No. 1-2, 1951).

²⁵ "Adrianopol'skiy Mirnyy Dogovor 1829," In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 1, 687 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1970), p. 687.

²⁶ For a detailed account of the Russian Empire's colonialism see: Michael Rywkin, ed., *Russian Colonial Expansion to 1917* (London: Mansell Publishing, 1988) and James Gibson, "Russian Imperial Expansion in Context and by Contrast," *Journal of Historical Geography* (Vol. 2, No. 28, 2002).

century, while taking the advantage of the vast resources of the region, the Empire played an important role in the evolution and development of Transcaucasus.

The Tsarist administration brought industry and education facilities to Transcaucasian nations. A large lumber industry was established in Georgian regions in order to make efficient use of its forests. After the discovery of oil in Baku, the Russians were quick to benefit from this source. By the end of the nineteenth century, Baku was the fastest-growing industrial city of the Empire, which witnessed the emergence of new classes: trading, working, and intellectual. The Empire educated the Armenian people with a Russo-European culture. In the final analysis, the integration of the region into the Russian Empire determined the social, economic, and political future of Transcaucasus.

2.1.1 Tsarist Administration in Transcaucasus

As a result of successive victorious wars with the Qajar and the Ottoman Empires, the Russian Empire widened its external borders to the Ararat Valley and Turkey (*Akhaltzikhe Pashalik*) in the years 1828 and 1829. The territorial reorganization of Transcaucasus region was later determined by the periodic changes in the general administrative policies. The Polish Uprising of 1831 resulted with the centralization of administration since it showed the vulnerability of Tsarist rule in the potentially autonomous peripheral provinces. Therefore, the territorial organization of the region was settled in accordance with the government's centralist policies.

Towards 1840, the territory of Transcaucasus was divided into two administrative units: Georgian-Imereti *guberniya*²⁷ and the Caspian *oblast*^{28 29}.

In 1844 the Viceroyalty of Caucasus was established in the North Caucasus and in Transcaucasus with its center in Tiflis. The viceroy was directly reporting to the Russian Emperor.³⁰ With the ongoing changes in territorial organizations, seven administrative divisions were established in Transcaucasus during the second half of the nineteenth century under the Viceroyalty of Caucasus: Baku *guberniya* (est. in 1846), Tiflis *guberniya* (est. in 1846), Kutaisi *guberniya* (est. in 1846), Erivan *guberniya* (est. in 1849), Yelisavetpol [Gence] *guberniya* (est. in 1868), Batumi *oblast* (est. in 1878), and Kars *oblast* (est. in 1878).³¹

The full integration of the region to the Empire was notably provided with the administrative reforms of 1860s and 1870s. These reforms had considerable long-term social, political and economic consequences for the region. After Emperor Alexander II (r.1855-1881) abolished the serfdom in the territories of the Empire in 1861, the landless peasants moved to towns in search of jobs. A number of Georgians, Azerbaijanis, and Armenians went to study in Russia and brought new liberal ideas to their homes on their return, which would influence the political movements in the region. As a result, these migration waves paved the way for the

²⁷ The word *guberniya* is usually translated as province.

²⁸ The word *oblast* is usually translated as region.

²⁹ A.A. Cuciev, "Atlas Etnopoliticheskoy Istorii Kavkaza." *Proekt po istorii i kul'ture Osetii i osetin Osetiny i Osetiya*. Iriston, 6 June 2009. <http://www.iriston.com/books/cuciev_-_etno_atlas/cuciev_etno-polit_map.htm>.

³⁰ Vladimir Bobrovnikov, "Islam in the Russian Empire," In Dominic Lieven, ed., *The Cambridge History of Russia: Imperial Russia, 1689-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 215.

³¹ Sergey Tarkhov, "Izmenenie Administrativno Territorial'nogo Deleniya Rossii V Xiii—Xx Vv.," *Logos* (Vol. 1, No. 46, 2005), p. 69.; Frederik Coene, *The Caucasus: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 129.; Cuciev.

creation of an intellectual class in the region which would be effective before and after the 1905 revolution.³²

In the reign of the Emperor Alexander III (r. 1881-1894) Transcaucasus went under a dramatic change. The new Emperor desired to create unity in the empire via centralization of the administration of the non-Russian parts of the Empire.³³ Therefore, the Viceroyalty of Caucasus was abolished in 1882 and replaced by a local governor-generalship.³⁴ Apart from centralization policies, another objective of Alexander III was Russification. He was often considered as the “first nationalist on the Russian throne.”³⁵ During his reign, Russification was extended to the peoples of Transcaucasus.³⁶ Cultural absorption was one of the main pillars of this policy. Therefore, systematic elimination of the natives from the local administrations and the elimination of the native language instruction in the schools were the two processes adopted by the Russian administration in Transcaucasus.³⁷ The attempts of the imperial authorities to speed up Russification of the multi-ethnic Transcaucasian population were followed by an extension of discriminatory practices. However, these policies caused a counter effect and provoked the rise of nationalist consciousness among the local intellectual elite.³⁸ Consequently, this attempt for

³² Thomas De Waal, *The Caucasus: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 50.

³³ Seton-Watson, pp. 460-463.; Riasanovsky, pp. 391-396.

³⁴ “Namestnik,” In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 17, 684 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1974), p. 684.; Cuciev.; David Ghambashidze, *The Caucasus: Its People, History, Economics, and Present Position* (London: Anglo-Georgian Society, 1918), p. 9.; “Kavkaz,” In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 11, 326-344 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1973), pp. 338-339.

³⁵ Riasanovsky, p. 394.

³⁶ Riasanovsky, p. 394.

³⁷ Cuciev.; Seton-Watson, pp. 485-488.

³⁸ Seton-Watson, p. 487.

Russification resulted with the consolidation of local elites, reminded them their ethnic roots.³⁹

By the 1905 Revolution, an increasing polarization of political forces was to play an important role in the region. Due to this polarization, social and ethnic problems of the region could not have been accurately addressed by the authorities. Provoked by the government during the course of the 1890s, the politicization and radicalization of ethnic elites increased substantially to an extent that could not be safely neutralized. The social, economic and national contradictions in the region were paired with a tendency toward the attainment of a regional self-government.⁴⁰ Yet, until 1914, these political movements were not separatist movements in their nature.⁴¹ The structures, ideologies and policies of these movements will be analyzed in detail in the following sections.

2.1.2 1905 Revolution and the Peoples of Transcaucasus

The evolution of Transcaucasus under the Tsarist rule notably affected the conditions and the peoples of the region on the eve of 1905 Revolution. Therefore, it would be beneficial first to draw a sketch of the evolution of Transcaucasus under the Tsarist rule.

The Tsarist occupation of Transcaucasus played an important role on the sociological transformation of the region, especially when we focus on the 1905

³⁹ Cuciev.

⁴⁰ Cuciev.

⁴¹Theodore R Weeks. *Across the Revolutionary Divide: Russia and the USSR, 1861–1945* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 98.

Revolution.⁴² Three processes were effective in the shaping of the region; the imposition of the tsarist rule, the rise of a market economy, and the emergence of national *intelligentsias*. These processes also determined the intensification of political and national consciousness among the ethnic and religious communities of Transcaucasus.⁴³

The Tsarist regime fostered commerce, industry, and education in the region in accordance with its colonial policy. Therefore, Transcaucasus region was relatively peaceful and secure by the end of the nineteenth century.⁴⁴ Despite this development, some problems relating with the changing dynamics of the region emerged by the end of the nineteenth century. In Georgia, traditional Georgian nobility was challenged as a result of the emancipation of the serfs and the increasing power of the urban middle class, which was largely composed of Armenians.⁴⁵ The Armenians gained greater economic power in Georgia.⁴⁶ In 1900, 44% of the largest industrial establishments in Georgia belonged to the Armenians, while only 10% was owned by the Georgians.⁴⁷ The situation in Azerbaijan was similar. The Azerbaijani people were under the pressure of a strong Armenian bourgeoisie. The Armenians were dominant in both the Baku's vital oil industry and the trade circles.⁴⁸ For the

⁴² Alex Marshall, *The Caucasus under Soviet Rule* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 35.

⁴³ Glenn E. Curtis and Ronald G. Suny, "Armenia," In Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia Country Studies* (Washington D.C.: Federal Research Division, 1995), p. 12.

⁴⁴ Curtis and Suny, p. 13.

⁴⁵ Ronald Grigor Suny, "The Emergence of Political Society in Georgia," In R.G. Suny, ed., *Transcaucasia, Nationalism, and Social Change* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983), p. 114.

⁴⁶ Darrell Slider, "Georgia," In Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia Country Studies* (Washington D.C.: Federal Research Division, 1995), p. 160.

⁴⁷ E.V. Khoshtaria, 1974. *Ocherki sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi 'istorii Gruzii: Promyshlennost', goroda, rabochii klass (XIX v.- nachalo XX v.)*. In Suny, Ronald Grigor. 1996. "The Emergence of Political Society in Georgia." In R.G. Suny, ed., *Transcaucasia, Nationalism, and Social Change* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 109-140, p. 114.

⁴⁸ Audrey Altstadt, "The Azerbaijani Bourgeoisie and the Cultural-Enlightenment Movement in Baku: First Steps toward Nationalism," In R.G. Suny, ed., *Transcaucasia, Nationalism, and Social Change* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983), pp. 201-202.

Armenians, the problems were not mainly economic as in the cases of Georgia and Azerbaijan. The confiscation of the Armenian Church properties in 1903 by the Russian Empire was the major problem which caused resentment among the Armenians of the Empire.⁴⁹

The 1905 Revolution shook the foundations of the autocratic regime and created the preconditions for the subsequent struggle for the overthrow of the tsarist regime. The revolution against the autocratic regime became a stimulus for the oppressed non-Russian nationalities of the Empire.⁵⁰ The 1905 Revolution created an environment of chaos in Transcaucasus. There were waves of peasant uprisings, strikes by railway workers, office workers, artisans, and students. The authorities were inefficient in dealing with the situation in the region until the end of 1907. These uprisings of Transcaucasian nationalities became more complex by the conflicts among the three nationalities due to the abovementioned problems originating from the social changes in the region.⁵¹

As a result of the 1905 Revolution, the Russian Empire became a semi-constitutional monarchy, where the half-elected Senate was the upper house of the parliamentary system, while the Duma made up the lower house.⁵² The Russian “center–regions” system became more complex with the establishment of the State Duma, which was the first all-imperial representative institution, in 1906. New

⁴⁹ Anahide Ter Minassian, "Nationalism and Socialism in the Armenian Revolutionary Movement (1887-1912)," In R.G. Suny, ed., *Transcaucasia, Nationalism, and Social Change* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983), pp. 160-168.

⁵⁰ “Revolyutsiya 1905-1907 v Rossii,” In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 21, 1639-1656 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1975), p. 1639.

⁵¹ Minassian, pp. 175-176.

⁵² Zhand P Shakibi, "Government," In Dominic Lieven, ed., *The Cambridge History of Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 446.

parliamentarism enabled the representatives of regions and peoples to take place in an elected institution and to express their national and regional interests from an official platform in the Empire. However, since the autocratic government opposed to decentralization, the Duma was not allowed to change the political and administrative system of relations between the center and the regions.⁵³

The national representation of the peoples of Transcaucasus in the State Dumas between 1906 and 1917 was dependent upon the density, the social and the national-religious composition of the population. The Georgians were represented in the Dumas as following: seven deputies in the first and second, two deputies in the third, and three deputies in the fourth Dumas. The number of deputies of the Azerbaijanis decreased regularly in the course of the elections. They were represented by six deputies in the first, five deputies in the second and one deputy in the third and fourth Dumas. The representation of the Armenians was more of a stable one: five deputies in the first, seven deputies in the second, and four deputies in the third and fourth Dumas.⁵⁴

⁵³ Rustem Tsiunchuk, "Peoples, Regions, and Electoral Politics: The State Dumas and the Constitution of New National Elites," In Mark von Hagen Jane Burbank, Anatolyi Remnev, eds., *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700–1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), pp.367-368.

⁵⁴ Tsiunchuk, p. 384.

Table 1. Representation of Transcaucasian Peoples in the State Dumas

	First Duma (April 27 - July 8, 1906)	Second Duma (February 20 - June 2, 1907)	Third Duma (November 1, 1907-June 9, 1912)	Fourth Duma (November 15, 1912-October 6, 1917)
Georgians	7	7	2	3
Azerbaijanis	6	5	1	1
Armenians	5	7	4	4

Although the State Duma was a weak democratic formation and there were relatively low number of deputies from the three Transcaucasian nationalities, the Dumas played a significant role in the formation of national political elites in Transcaucasus. They have “aided the growth of the political culture of society and the development of regional and national self-consciousness, and favored the diffusion of democratic ideas of national self-determination.”⁵⁵ The aforementioned problems of Transcaucasian nationalities, hand in hand with the effects of 1905 revolution, had significant consequences in terms of national awakening in Transcaucasus.⁵⁶ Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani intellectuals began to advocate nationalism and socialism, and started to support revolutionary fractions by the beginning of the twentieth century.

⁵⁵ Tsiunchuk, p. 367.

⁵⁶ Bohdan Nahaylo and Victor Swoboda, *Soviet Disunion: A History of the Nationalities Problem in the USSR* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), pp. 12-14.

2.1.3 Russian Empire and Transcaucasian Nationalities

Russia has always been a multinational Empire. However, the concepts of nation and nationality were not parts of the political system of the Russian Empire to a great extent until the later nineteenth century.⁵⁷ Before the nineteenth century, religion was the dominant factor determining the concepts of nation and nationality. In this context, Russian culture and Russian Orthodox religion were the predominant characteristics of the Tsarist regime, which was not in favor of diversity. Therefore, the Tsarist regime did not adopt an explicit nationalities policy before the end of the nineteenth century. The regime was more concerned with the order of newly conquered lands and collection of taxes than dealing with the non-Russian nationalities of the Empire. In the aftermath of the Polish uprising of January 1863, a nationalities policy emerged in the Empire, solely focusing on the Polish problem.⁵⁸ After the uprising, the Tsarist regime tried to foster the Russian military and administration in its non-Russian regions. To be described as Russification later, this policy helped strengthening cultural and administrative centralization of the Empire. Yet, an official Russification policy was not adopted in Transcaucasus until the end of the nineteenth century.⁵⁹

The 1905 revolution unraveled a civil unrest among the minorities of the Empire. Relative liberal attitude of the tsarist regime towards the non-Russian peoples starting with the establishment of the State Duma was reversed by 1907, and the policy of the regime became more pro-Russian and nationalistic.⁶⁰ The

⁵⁷ Weeks, "Managing Empire: Tsarist Nationalities Policy," p.27.

⁵⁸ Weeks, "Managing Empire: Tsarist Nationalities Policy," p. 37.

⁵⁹ Margot Light, "Russia and Transcaucasia," In John F.R.Wright, Suzanne Goldenberg, and Richard Schofield, eds., *Transcaucasian Boundaries* (London: UCL Press, 1996), p. 36.

⁶⁰ Weeks, *Across the Revolutionary Divide: Russia and the USSR, 1861–1945*, p. 98.

government changed the electoral laws in favor of the upper Russian classes, “depriving the remainder of the population of a proportionate voice in the legislative institutions of the state.”⁶¹ As a result, nationalism in both cultural and political spheres became more visible among the non-Russian peoples of the Empire in the post-1907 period. This helped the Transcaucasian peoples to build a national identity in due time.⁶²

The national movements among the non-Russian peoples of the Russian Empire were affected by the same forces, which also became influential on the Russian society in the nineteenth century: romantic idealism including the notion of *narod* (people, nation) and the historic traditions, populism including the idealization of the peasantry, and socialism.⁶³ In parallel with these lines, three associated processes paved the way for the transformation of the peoples of Transcaucasus into politically conscious and mobilized nationalities. The creation of a single legal order in Transcaucasus, development of commerce and industry, imposition of bureaucratic absolutism on loose political structures of Transcaucasus have undermined the local elites and brought about resistance movements of gentry and peasants. Consequently, the educated classes of Transcaucasians were pulled apart between the advantages and disadvantages of the autocratic Tsarist regime and some became pro-Tsarist, while the others headed for the revolutionary movements.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 7.

⁶² Weeks, *Across the Revolutionary Divide: Russia and the USSR, 1861–1945*, p. 98.

⁶³ Pipes, p. 20.

⁶⁴ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.98.

The development of three Transcaucasian national identities occurred at different rates and in different ways depending on their social, economic and political structures.⁶⁵ In terms of urbanization level, the Armenians were the most urban while the Azerbaijanis were the least. The population densities were different as well. The Georgians and the Azerbaijanis lived in more compact territories while the Armenian settlements were scattered. Different classes were dominant in three societies: national nobility in Georgia, landed-*mirzas*⁶⁶ and clergy in Azerbaijan, and merchant middle class in Armenia. Originating from all these differences, the characteristics of the national movements among the three societies were distinct. In Georgia, Marxism was the predominant ideology rather than nationalism, while Islamic reference and nationalism were stronger in Azerbaijan. Lastly, there was a stronger nationalist tendency in Armenia which dominated socialism.⁶⁷

At the end of the nineteenth century, Georgia witnessed a conflicting process of social formation.⁶⁸ On the one hand, the Georgians were becoming a part of the industrialized, urban and economically developed life. On the other hand, the disappearance of traditional feudal society, decline of the nobility, the incorporation of new market economy, the rise of the Armenian bourgeoisie, and the isolation of lower-class Georgians contributed to the creation of “the nationalist ideal of a unified and harmonious” Georgian “social order without class conflict.”⁶⁹ With this ideal in mind, Russian educated intellectuals of Georgia adopted a Marxist political view preaching democratic socialism.⁷⁰ This political view was excluding the Armenians

⁶⁵ Pipes, p. 17.

⁶⁶ The word denotes the rank of a nobleman or Prince.

⁶⁷ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*, p.98.

⁶⁸ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 144.

⁶⁹ Suny, "The Emergence of Political Society in Georgia," p.139.

⁷⁰ Most important activists were Noe Zhordania and Filipp Makharadze.

and the Russians from the society as they were the representatives of bourgeoisie and autocracy. The main supporters of Georgian Social Democrats were the workers. In 1895, Marxists had taken over the journal *Kvali* (Trace) and became the most significant intellectual movement among the Georgians.⁷¹ By 1905, they gained extensive support from the peasantry as well. In the process, Georgian Marxist intellectuals, who were leading a national liberation movement, joined their forces with the Russian Social Democratic Party, the *Mensheviks*, and won the elections of the State Dumas from 1906 to 1912.⁷² Georgian *Mensheviks* even adopted a formula in 1910 aiming to gain extraterritorial cultural autonomy for Georgia.⁷³

In Azerbaijan, the favored status of the Armenians by the Russians caused resentment among the Azerbaijanis who were suffering from the poor socio-economic conditions. "Ethnic and religious differences, enhanced by feelings of inferiority and superiority,"⁷⁴ between the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis elicited a political awakening among the Azerbaijanis by the supplementary effects of 1905 revolution.⁷⁵ These differences between the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis were also the bases of the enduring clashes between the two nations. The decade preceding the 1905 revolution laid the foundations of three ideologies that would construct the future of Azerbaijani political life: Pan-Islamism, Pan-Turkism and liberalism.⁷⁶ 1905 revolution also revealed the clashes between the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis. In 1905, Tatar⁷⁷-Armenian conflicts spread from Baku to Nakhichevan.

⁷¹ Suny, "The Emergence of Political Society in Georgia," p. 140.

⁷² Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*, p.100.

⁷³ Pipes, p. 18.

⁷⁴ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*, p. 99.

⁷⁵ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*, p. 99.

⁷⁶ Tadeusz Swietochowski, "National Consciousness and Political Orientations in Azerbaijan, 1905-1920," In R.G. Suny, ed., *Transcaucasia, Nationalism, and Social Change* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983), p. 213.

⁷⁷ The word "Tatar" was used to describe the Azerbaijanis as a Turkic-Muslim nation.

Approximately ten thousand people were killed, and cities, towns, and villages were destroyed. The main fighting force of the Armenians was formed by the members of Armenian Revolutionary Federation (*Dashnaktsutyun*). In response, the Azerbaijanis founded a political association named *Difai* (Defense)⁷⁸ in 1905 as the first “proto-nationalist” Azerbaijani organization against the Russian rule.⁷⁹

By 1905, a substantial number of Azerbaijanis embraced the slogan of ‘Turkify, Islamize, Modernize’.⁸⁰ Azerbaijani sense of self was consisting of the perception of threat from the Armenians as a privileged group living among themselves and a sense of connection to other Muslims, particularly Turks.⁸¹ Despite this Turkic and Islamic sense of self, the new Azerbaijani national identity was defined as Turkic but separate from Turkey, Shiite Islamic but detached from the clerical establishment.⁸² In the following process, Azerbaijani liberals became active in All-Muslim Russian Congresses of 1905 and 1906,⁸³ and Baku based Muslim Constitutional Party, affiliated with the *Kadets*, was established in 1905. When the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) founded the constitutional regime in Turkey in 1908, the ideas of Pan-Turkism were strengthened in Azerbaijan.⁸⁴ The main Azerbaijani nationalist party *Musavat* (Equality), which was based on the

⁷⁸ For more information on *Difai* see: Fahri Sakal. *Ağaoğlu Ahmed Bey* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1999).; Hüseyin Baykara, *Azerbaycan İstiklal Mücadelesi Tarihi* (İstanbul: Azerbaycan Halk Yayınları, 1975).

⁷⁹ Swietochowski, "National Consciousness and Political Orientations in Azerbaijan, 1905-1920," pp. 215-216.

⁸⁰ The expression of ‘Turkify, Islamize, Modernize’ was first seen in the article series of Ziya Gökalp in the journal of *Türk Yurdu* in 1911. These articles were formed as a book named *Türkleşmek, İslamlaşmak, Muasırlaşmak* in 1918. See: Ziya Gökalp, *Türkleşmek, İslamlaşmak, Muasırlaşmak* (İstanbul: Türk Kültür, 1974).

⁸¹ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*, p. 99.

⁸² Mehmed Emin Resulzade, *Kafkasya Türkleri* (İstanbul: Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Vakfı, 1993). p. 40.

⁸³ Firouzeh Mostashari, *On the Religious Frontier: Tsarist Russia and the Islam in the Caucasus* (New York: IB Tauris, 2006), p. 139.

⁸⁴ Swietochowski, "National Consciousness and Political Orientations in Azerbaijan, 1905-1920," pp. 217-219.

ideology of democratic Turkism,⁸⁵ was founded in 1911 in Baku as a result of Mehmet Emin Resulzade's efforts.⁸⁶ *Musavat* would be the sole political force in Azerbaijan by 1917.⁸⁷

The main problem for the Armenians in the Empire was the autocratic regime which repressed the Armenian nation. Moreover, an intellectual awakening influenced by Western ideas, "a new interest in Armenian history and an increase in social interaction created a sense of secular nationality among many Armenians."⁸⁸ The Armenian movement, which was mainly composed of middle and lower middle classes, gained a conspirational and para-military character by the end of the nineteenth century. It was less socialist in nature compared to the Georgian national movement.⁸⁹ In the last decade of the nineteenth century, two Armenian revolutionary movements were founded: socialist *Hunchak* (Clarion) in 1887 in Geneva and *Dashnaktsutyun* in 1890 in Tiflis. *Dashnaktsutyun* was established by some of the detached members of *Hunchak*.⁹⁰

In the process, radical nationalist *Dashnaks* outperformed the socialist *Hunchaks* and became more influential in politics. *Dashnaktsutyun* adopted revolutionary plans against both the Russian and the Ottoman rules. When the government expropriated the Armenian Church properties in 1903, the *Dashnaks*

⁸⁵ Musavatists affiliated themselves with the nationalist liberal democracy.

⁸⁶ For a detailed account of Azerbaijani nationalism see: Mehmed Emin Resulzade, *Kafkasya Türkleri* (İstanbul: Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Vakfı, 1993) and Mehmet Emin Resulzade, *Azerbaycan Cumhuriyeti : Keyfiyet-i Teşekkülü ve Şimdiki Vaziyeti* (İstanbul: Azerbaycan Türkleri Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği, 1990).

⁸⁷ For a detailed account of the *Musavat* Party see: Mirza Bala Mehmetzade. *Millî Azerbaycan Hareketi-Millî Azerbaycan "Müsavat" Halk Fırkası Tarihi* (Berlin, Parti Divanı, 1938) and Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan 1905-1920: The Shaping of a National Identity in a Muslim Community* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁸⁸ Curtis and Suny, "Armenia," p. 13.

⁸⁹ Pipes, p. 19.

⁹⁰ Pipes, p. 19.

organized a resistance and gained wide support from the peasantry.⁹¹ By 1905, they already adopted terror tactics and assassinated many Tsarist officers.⁹² The revolutionary struggles and the party struggles during the election campaigns for the State Dumas strengthened the *Dashnaktsutyun* which would be politically active both during the years of Russian Revolutions and later in Soviet Armenia.⁹³

Apart from being influential on the political fates of three nationalities of Transcaucasus, “the differences in their economic statuses perpetuated and accentuated barriers of culture, religion and language.”⁹⁴ Consequently, the divergent political development of the Georgians, the Azerbaijanis and the Armenians aggravated national rivalries⁹⁵ and became more apparent with the outbreak of the First World War.

The First World War paved the way for a profound transformation in the dynamics of the region. Becoming one of the most important stages of the war, Transcaucasian countries experienced both unification and separation during the course of the war. The political heritage that the Transcaucasian peoples have developed since the end of the nineteenth century was a decisive factor that determined this process. Principally, the war was multi-dimensional for the peoples of the Transcaucasus who, time to time, struggled with each other, with the Great Powers and finally with the Bolsheviks. As a result, socio-economic and political conditions have irreversibly changed in the region. The Bolshevik takeover after the

⁹¹ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*, p. 102.

⁹² De Waal, p. 51.

⁹³ Minassian, p. 181.

⁹⁴ Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan 1905-1920: The Shaping of a National Identity in a Muslim Community*, p. 21.

⁹⁵ Light, p. 37.

end of the war, which would endure for seventy years, contributed to these changes along with playing a key role in destining the future of the region.

CHAPTER 3

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SOVIET POWER IN TRANSCAUCASUS (1914-1921)

Russia's control over Transcaucasus was mitigated when the First World War broke out in 1914. In 1917, the Russian Empire was entirely demolished as a result of the internal problems which had been compounded by the effects of the war. By the time the Tsar abdicated his throne after the February 1917 Revolution, to be succeeded by the Provisional Government, the traditional political authority in the borders of the Empire collapsed.⁹⁶ As a result, from February 1917 on, Transcaucasus became free of Russian rule, but remained without any effective government. In the process, the Transcaucasian countries established the Transcaucasian Federative Republic, and then separated as independent republics. The enduring chaos in the region led to civil wars and invasions which lasted until the victory of the Bolshevik led Red Army in 1921.

⁹⁶ Marshall, p. 51.

3.1 Transcaucasus during the First World War (1914-1917)

The First World War emerged as a result of the ongoing economic, political and military problems in Europe since the 19th century. The disturbances among the European states were unraveled by the murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary by a Serbian nationalist on June 28, 1914.⁹⁷ Due to ineffective diplomatic initiatives, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on July 28, 1914 and the First World War broke out on the same day. On July 30, Tsar Nicholas II ordered General Suchomlinov to initiate general mobilization in Russia.⁹⁸ Thereupon, Germany declared war on Russian Empire on August 1,⁹⁹ and the war between Russia and Germany started. The war was an opportunity for the Russian Empire to have the chance to dominate Eastern Europe via protecting the Slavic people in the region and to have the control of the Straits.¹⁰⁰ Russia, therefore, joined the war along with the Allied Powers.

Transcaucasus became an important front in the war after the Ottoman Empire joined to the Central Powers in late October 1914.¹⁰¹ Internal tensions that were enduring since the end of the nineteenth century in the region were worsened with the outbreak of the war. Transcaucasus inevitably was “destined to be a pawn in a game played” by the great powers.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ David R. Jones, "World War I," In J.R. Millar, ed., *Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan, 2004), p. 1676.

⁹⁸ Akdes Nimet Kurat, *Rusya Tarihi: Başlangıçtan 1917'ye Kadar* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1987), p. 412.

⁹⁹ Charles E. Ziegler, *The History of Russia* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2009), p. 64.; Jones, p. 1676.; Kurat, *Rusya Tarihi: Başlangıçtan 1917'ye Kadar*, p. 412.

¹⁰⁰ Kurat, *Rusya Tarihi: Başlangıçtan 1917'ye Kadar*, p. 411.

¹⁰¹ Mark Von Hagen, "The First World War, 1914-1918," In R.G. Suny, ed., *The Cambridge History of Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 95.

¹⁰² Thomas Streissguth, *The Transcaucasus* (San Diego: Lucent Books, 2001), p. 29.

The nations of Transcaucasus had divergent views on the war. Georgian socialists considered whether to declare support for the Germans while the Azerbaijanis were unwilling to be at war against the Turks. On the other hand, the Armenians were ready to fight in order to have a chance to “liberate their brethren from the Ottoman rule.”¹⁰³

While the Russian Empire was suffering from devastating defeats against the Germans on the western front,¹⁰⁴ it also waged war against the Ottoman Empire in the south,¹⁰⁵ where the Russian Caucasian Army entered into the Ottoman territory.¹⁰⁶ The Ottoman Third Army led by Enver Paşa initiated the Caucasus campaign with a call for jihad in December 1914,¹⁰⁷ aiming to reach Baku in order to capture the oilfields and then to move into Central Asia and Afghanistan in order to establish a Turanic empire. The first battle between the Russian Caucasian Army under the command of General Vorontsov-Dashkov and the Ottoman Third Army was the Battle of Sarıkamış.¹⁰⁸ The battle started on December 22, 1914 with the Turkish offensive. The Russian Caucasian Army overwhelmingly defeated the Third Army, who suffered from exhaustion and cold weather,¹⁰⁹ and reestablished its position by January 17, 1915.¹¹⁰ The Turks had to retreat back to Erzurum.¹¹¹ Well-prepared Russian forces launched a new attack in Eastern Anatolia under the

¹⁰³ De Waal, p.53.

¹⁰⁴ Akdes Nimet Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1990), p. 501.

¹⁰⁵ Coene, p. 130.

¹⁰⁶ *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk Harbi: Kafkas Cephesi 3.Ordu Harekatı*, edited by T.C. Genelkurmay Başkanlığı (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1993), p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Jones, p. 1677. For a detailed account of the Ottoman policies in Transcaucasus during the First World War see: Reha Yılmaz, "Birinci Dünya Savaşı Başlarında Osmanlı Devleti'nin Kafkasya Siyaseti," *Orta Asya ve Kafkasya Araştırmaları* (Vol. 3, No. 6, 2008).

¹⁰⁸ *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk Harbi: Kafkas Cephesi 3.Ordu Harekatı*, pp. 347-535.

¹⁰⁹ See: Arif Baytın, *İlk Dünya Harbinde Kafkas Cephesi 29 Tümen ve Alay Sancağı(Hatıralar)* (İstanbul: Vakıf Matbaası, 1946).

¹¹⁰ “Sarykamyskaya operatsiya 1914-15,” In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 22, 1797 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1975), p. 1797.

¹¹¹ Coene, p. 130.; Jones, p. 1677.

command of General Yudenich by the start of 1916, defeated the Ottoman forces, and gained the control over some parts of the southern Black Sea coast, including Erzurum, Erzincan, and Trabzon.¹¹² Although the Grand Duke Nikolas Nikolaevich was ready for a major offensive at the beginning of 1917, the February Revolution changed the plans. Soon, the Russian army fell apart.¹¹³ In January 1918, the Ottoman army launched a campaign to exploit this sudden weakness in the Russian armed forces in order to help Azerbaijani brethren in Gence and Baku.

3.2 Transcaucasus during the Civil War (1917-1921)

During 1916 and 1917, Transcaucasus was under the authority of the Grand Duke Nikolas Nikolaevich who led military campaigns against the Turks.¹¹⁴ When the Tsar abdicated his throne, Nikolaevich resigned and yielded his civil authority to the Special Transcaucasian Committee (*Osobyi Zakavkazskii Komitet-OZAKOM*) which was the regional authority of the Provisional government.¹¹⁵ The committee “exercised little authority and limited itself during its existence to the introduction of organs of local self-rule (*zemstva*) into Transcaucasia.”¹¹⁶ Therefore, a diverse collection of socialist and nationalist parties and workers’ soviets were wielding the real power in Transcaucasus by 1917.¹¹⁷ Particularly, the two socialist-dominated soviets which were located in Tiflis and Baku were the preponderant political power

¹¹² *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk Harbi: Kafkas Cephesi 3.Ordu Harekatı*, pp. 2-3.; Jones, p. 1679.; Mevlüt Yüksel, "I. Dünya Savaşı'nda Erzurum'un İlk İşgal Günleri," *A.Ü. Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi*, (No. 37, 2008), pp. 260-261.

¹¹³ See: Allan Wildman, "The February Revolution in the Russian Army," *Soviet Studies* (Vol. 22, No. 1, 1970).

¹¹⁴ Pipes, p. 98.

¹¹⁵ “Osobyi Zakavkazskii Komitet” In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 18, 1714 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1974), p. 1714.

¹¹⁶ Pipes, p. 98.

¹¹⁷ De Waal, p. 61.

in Transcaucasus.¹¹⁸ Noe Zhordania's *Mensheviks* were strong in the Tiflis soviet,¹¹⁹ while there was a division of power between the Social Revolutionaries, the *Mensheviks*, the *Musavatists*, and the *Dashnaks* in the Baku soviet until 1918, when it started to incline to the left.¹²⁰

The postures and programs of the political parties of the three nationalities were different from each other since these nationalities had experienced different courses of development during the previous decades.¹²¹ Among the other political parties of Transcaucasus, the Georgian *Mensheviks* were more interested in the participation in the Russian political life rather than focusing on local aims. After the February Revolution, they attained important positions in the politics of Russia, such as the ones in the Petrograd Soviet.¹²² Considering the close connection of the Georgian *Mensheviks* with the all-Russian socialist politics, Georgian Social Democratic Party was not a national party until 1918. Accordingly, it neither pursued specific demands for the Georgian people nor undertook a Georgian attitude towards the regional problems.¹²³

The outbreak of the First World War had put the Azerbaijani political leaders in a troublesome situation. Russia's war with the Ottoman Empire, with which the *Musavatists* shared their common pro-Turkish tendencies, made them revise their

¹¹⁸ Jeremy Smith, "Non-Russians in the Soviet Union and After," In R.G. Suny, ed., *The Cambridge History of Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 496.

¹¹⁹ Donald J. Raleigh, "Civil War of 1917-1922," In J.R. Millar, ed., *Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan, 2004), p. 270.

¹²⁰ Pipes, p. 98.

¹²¹ Donald J. Raleigh, "The Russian Civil War, 1917-1922," In R.G. Suny, ed., *The Cambridge History of Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 150.

¹²² Rex A. Wade, "February Revolution," In J.R. Millar, ed., *Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan, 2004), p. 485.; Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, p. 458.

¹²³ Pipes, p. 99.

Pan-Turkic and Pan-Islamist ideas.¹²⁴ Although the *Musavat* was the strongest political movement in Baku by 1917, the Bolsheviks were also effective in Baku where they formed the Baku Commune in 1918.¹²⁵

The situation of the Armenian political movement was different from the two other examples. The events of the First World War caused great hostility between the Armenians and the Turks which resulted with a conflict between the Azerbaijanis and the Armenians. The Armenians were in favor of any Russian government which would be anti-Turkish. In this context, the Armenians were loyal to the Provisional Government just like the Georgian *Mensheviks* but for different reasons. The *Dashnaktsutyun*, with its party program and military formation symbolized the only working institution of the Armenians.¹²⁶

In this political environment, the Transcaucasian Soviets formed a Regional Center (*Kraevoi tseñtr sovetov*) in Tiflis in order to coordinate their work in the spring of 1917. The Center, which is controlled by proletarian organs of self-rule, “passed resolutions on all political and economic measures of general interest for the Caucasus and enforced them through a network of subordinate provincial soviets.”¹²⁷ Due to this political agreement among the soviets, the period from the February 1917 revolution to the October 1917 Revolution was not turbulent for Transcaucasus

¹²⁴ “Musavat,” In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 17, 372-373 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1974), p. 372.

¹²⁵ See: “Bakinskaya kommuna,” In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 2, 1600-1601 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1970).

¹²⁶ “Dashnaktsutyun,” In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 7, 1679 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1972), pp. 1679-1680.

¹²⁷ Pipes, p. 98.

region, which was not largely affected by the anarchy caused by the breakdown of the political institutions and the officers of the disintegrated army.¹²⁸

After the October Revolution, Soviet power was established in Petrograd and Moscow, which were the political and administrative centers of the country. However, in a number of regions, the Soviets were opposed by counterrevolutionary forces, and consequently the process of the establishment of Soviet power resulted in a civil war in these regions.¹²⁹ Transcaucasus was one of the regions where the harsh conditions of the revolution became apparent. Refusing to recognize the Bolshevik government in Petrograd, the socialist parties of Transcaucasus, except for local Bolsheviks, gradually separated the region from Russia “by first declaring autonomy and later independence for the whole Transcaucasia and finally establishing three separate independent republics.”¹³⁰

3.2.1 Transcaucasian Federative Republic (1918)

In the course of 1917, the political parties of the three principal nationalities of Transcaucasus reorganized hastily and undertook important roles in Transcaucasian affairs.¹³¹ Apart from refusing to recognize the Bolshevik rule, the political leaders of Transcaucasus were concerned about the dissolution of the Russian army and a possible Turkish advance in Transcaucasus as a result. The fear

¹²⁸ Pipes, pp. 98-99.

¹²⁹ “Grazhdanskaya voyna i voennaya interventsia 1918-20,” In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 7, 655-692 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1972), p. 656.

¹³⁰ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*, p. 101.

¹³¹ Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, pp. 458-459.

of being invaded by the Turks on the part of the Georgians and the Armenians, and the need for an organization to deal with problems such as the influx of returning soldiers necessitated the creation of an institution.¹³² Nevertheless, many Transcaucasian leaders did not want to secede from Russia. Therefore, they decided to establish a regional autonomy until the constitutional system in Russia re-established. They later formed an interim government under the name of Transcaucasian Commissariat (*Zakavkazskii Komissariat*) in November 1917.¹³³ Georgian *Mensheviks* were dominant in this Commissariat¹³⁴ which was chaired by a Georgian *Menshevik* E.P. Gegechkori. One other *Menshevik*, two Socialist Revolutionaries, two *Dashnaks*, four *Musavatists* and one Georgian Federalist were the other members of the Commissariat.¹³⁵

Transcaucasian Commissariat was the first attempt to create a proper federal structure, although the vertical and horizontal organizations of the authority were not very clear.¹³⁶ The main aim of the Commissariat was to provide order in the region until the establishment of a new government for the entire Russia by the All-Russian Constituent Assembly. However, the Bolsheviks suspended the Constituent Assembly, and the Transcaucasian Commissariat formed a Transcaucasian Diet, i.e. Parliament, (*Zakavkazskii Seim*) on 10 February 1918.¹³⁷ The *Seim* was basically a parliamentary coalition composed of deputies elected from different regions of

¹³² Pipes, pp. 102-103.

¹³³ "Zakavkazskii komissariat," In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 9, 878 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1972), p. 878.; Coene, p. 131.; De Waal, p. 61.; Pipes, p. 103.

¹³⁴ Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, pp. 462-463.; Marshall, p. 87.

¹³⁵ Pipes, p. 103.

¹³⁶ Stephen Jones. "Transcaucasian Federations." In J.R. Millar, ed., *Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan, 2004), p. 1567.

¹³⁷ "Zakavkazskii seim," In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 9, 878 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1972), p. 878.

Transcaucasus for the Constituent Assembly.¹³⁸ The Bolsheviks refused to participate in the *Seim* and protested its establishment.¹³⁹

Thereby, at the beginning of the February 1918, Transcaucasus region had two administrative organs: a legislative body (*seim*) and an executive organ (*komissariat*)¹⁴⁰ which assumed effective control over the region. There were two urgent problems threatening the security of Transcaucasus to be dealt by these organs: the influx of returning soldiers and Bolshevism.¹⁴¹ However, in March 1918, a greater threat for Transcaucasus emerged in the shape of the marching Ottoman Third Army.

The war between the Russian Caucasian Army and the Ottoman Third Army was stopped by the Armistice of Erzincan on December 18, 1917. The vacuum created by the retreating Russian forces was filled by the Armenian militia in Eastern Turkey. They were engaging the Ottoman forces and terrorizing the civilians in Eastern Anatolia.¹⁴² Ottoman General Vehib Paşa sent a telegram to General Odishelidze, the commander of the Russian Caucasian Army, demanding “the termination of Armenian violence against the Muslims” on January 22, 1918.¹⁴³ Despite the fact that General Odishelidze gave assurances that the Armenian attacks would stop, the violence continued. Therefore, Enver Paşa concluded that Eastern

¹³⁸ Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, p. 462.

¹³⁹ “Zakavkazskii seim,” In Prokhorov, p. 878.

¹⁴⁰ Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, p. 462.

¹⁴¹ Pipes, p. 103.

¹⁴² *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk Harbi: Kafkas Cephesi 3.Ordu Harekatı*, p. 438.; Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, p. 461.

¹⁴³ *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk Harbi: Kafkas Cephesi 3.Ordu Harekatı*, p. 438.

Anatolia could only be stabilized by a military operation. He ordered Vehib Paşa to complete the preparations for a new operation to be initiated on February 12, 1918.¹⁴⁴

With the advance of the Ottoman Third Army on February 12, 1918, Turkish march to Baku started.¹⁴⁵ Turkish forces entered Erzincan on February 13, Trabzon on February 24 and Erzurum on March 12.¹⁴⁶ Finally on March 14, the Third Army reached to the Turco-Russian border of 1914.¹⁴⁷ In the meantime, Russian Bolshevik regime signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918 with Germany and the Ottoman Empire,¹⁴⁸ without consulting Transcaucasian countries, and promised to cede Kars, Ardahan and Batum provinces back to the Turks. The *Seim* was now facing the threat of the approaching Ottoman Third Army. The telegram received on March 10 from Vehib Paşa demanding the evacuation of Kars, Ardahan, and Batum provinces demonstrated the urgency of the situation for the *Seim*. The *Seim* objected to the Brest-Litovsk Treaty and decided to seek a separate treaty with the Turks.¹⁴⁹ However, Transcaucasian Parliament did not have the legal grounds to sign a separate treaty since it had not yet declared its independence from Russia.¹⁵⁰ During the Conference of Trabzon (March 14-April 14, 1918), Turkish authorities stipulated the declaration of independence of the Transcaucasian countries from Russia and the acceptance of Brest-Litovsk Treaty by the *Seim*, as a condition for further negotiations.¹⁵¹ During the course of the conference, the Third Army entered

¹⁴⁴ Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, p. 466.

¹⁴⁵ Marshall, p. 90.

¹⁴⁶ *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk Harbi: Kafkas Cephesi 3.Ordu Harekatı*, p. 438.; Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, pp. 445-469.

¹⁴⁷ William Edward David Allen and Paul Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields: A History of the Wars on the Turco-Caucasian Border 1828–1921* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 463.

¹⁴⁸ Coene, p. 131.

¹⁴⁹ Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, pp. 466-467.

¹⁵⁰ Pipes, p. 106.

¹⁵¹ See: Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, pp. 467-473.

Sarikamış on April 5 and Batum, where the world's first oil pipeline connecting the Batum port to Baku existed, on April 14, 1918.¹⁵²

Then, the critical situation in Transcaucasus became evident. It was a region, without a united authority, under the direct threat of advancing Turkish forces. Therefore, Transcaucasian nations started to debate over the question of independence which was put forward by the Turks. The underlying reason of this debate was the idea that the independence option would liberate them from more misfortunes that the Bolsheviks might bring. The debates were ended with the decision of the *Seim* for the secession of Transcaucasus from Russia.¹⁵³ Finally on April 22, 1918, the *Seim* proclaimed the independence of Transcaucasian Federative Republic (*Zakavkazskaia Federativnaia Respublika*).¹⁵⁴ The government of the new state was comprised of a coalition of the three principal national parties- the *Mensheviks*, the *Musavatists* and the *Dashnaks*-, which was led by Akaki Chkhenkeli, a Georgian *Menshevik*.¹⁵⁵

By declaring the independence of the Transcaucasian Federative Republic, Transcaucasian countries finally acquiesced to the Ottoman demands and recognized the Brest-Litovsk Treaty. However, Batum Peace Conference (May 11-June 4, 1918), aimed at establishing peace between the Ottomans and the Transcaucasians on the principles of Brest-Litovsk Treaty revealed important differences among the Transcaucasian nations which would end up with the dissolution of the Transcaucasian Federative Republic in May 26, 1918.

¹⁵² *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk Harbi: Kafkas Cephesi 3.Ordu Harekatı*, p. 438.; Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*. pp. 480-486.

¹⁵³ “Zakavkazskii seim” In Prokhorov, p. 878.

¹⁵⁴ Pipes, p.107.; Coene, p. 131.; “Zakavkazskii seim” In Prokhorov, p. 878.

¹⁵⁵ Pipes, p. 193.

3.2.2 Dual Statehood, Nationalist Independence and the Bolshevik Takeover of Transcaucasus

Transcaucasian Federative Republic was an ephemeral experience for Transcaucasian countries. It lasted only five weeks (April 22, 1918-May 26, 1918) and then vanished due to the divergent views among the Transcaucasian nationalities. The main reason for the dissolution was that every nation was seeking for the support of a Great Power. Towards the end of the war, Georgia sided with Germany, Azerbaijan sided with the Ottoman Empire, and the Armenians made an attempt to get British and Russian support.¹⁵⁶

Under the pressure of German and Turkish forces, the federation disintegrated into separate republics: Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. On 26 May 1918, the *Seim* dissolved itself.¹⁵⁷ On the same day, Georgia placed itself under the German protectorate, and Azerbaijan declared its independence on 28 May 1918.¹⁵⁸ Gence became the capital of independent Azerbaijan.¹⁵⁹ The Azerbaijanis desired to march to and control Baku, where the Bolsheviks established a Soviet government in mid-April.¹⁶⁰

Ottoman Empire signed separate peace treaties with Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia at the end of the Batum Conference on 4 June 1918. As a result of the treaty signed with Georgia, Ottoman Empire annexed *Ahıska* and *Ahalkelek* districts and reached to its frontiers in 1828. On the other hand, on its frontiers with Armenia and

¹⁵⁶ Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, p. 463.; Coene, p. 132.

¹⁵⁷ “Zakavkazskii seim” In Prokhorov, p. 878.; Jones, "Transcaucasian Federations," p. 1567.

¹⁵⁸ Coene, p. 132.; Pipes, pp. 194-195.

¹⁵⁹ Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, p. 477.

¹⁶⁰ Pipes, pp. 201-204.

Azerbaijan, Ottoman Empire reached its 1877-1878 line.¹⁶¹ The treaty signed with Azerbaijan on the same day paved the way for further march of Ottoman forces deeper in Transcaucasus. With this treaty, Ottoman Empire assured military assistance to Azerbaijan. Finally on September 15, 1918, the Turkish troops entered Baku.¹⁶² However, after the Armistice of Mudros was signed between the Ottoman Empire and the Allies on October 30, 1918, Turkish troops had to evacuate the city in accordance with the articles of the armistice.¹⁶³ At the evacuation,¹⁶⁴ Baku's administration was handed over to British troops on November 17.¹⁶⁵ The city remained under the British occupation until August 1919.¹⁶⁶

The independent republics of Transcaucasus were not able to become stable and prosperous states mostly due to the chaotic environment after the war. They were suffering from administrative, economic, financial, and agricultural problems. Moreover, the relations among these three states were not peaceful at all.¹⁶⁷ Still, these three nations maintained their political systems. *Mensheviks*-Social Democrats constituted the strongest political movement in Georgia while *Musavatists* dominated the Azerbaijani political life; and the *Dashnaks* were the most effective political force in Armenia.

¹⁶¹ Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, p. 477.

¹⁶² *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk Harbi: Kafkas Cephesi 3.Ordu Harekatı*, p. 591. ; Nasır Yüceer, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Osmanlı Ordusu'nun Azerbaycan ve Dağıstan Harekatı: Azerbaycan ve Dağıstan'ın Bağımsızlığını Kazanması 1918* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1996), p. 120.

¹⁶³ Kurat, *Türkiye ve Rusya*, p. 542.

¹⁶⁴ See: *Birinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türk Harbi: Kafkas Cephesi 3.Ordu Harekatı*, pp. 629-632.

¹⁶⁵ Yüceer, p. 162.; James Nichol, "Azerbaijan," In Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia Country Studies* (Washington D.C: Federal Research Division, 1995), p. 91.

¹⁶⁶ Pipes, p. 206.

¹⁶⁷ Georgia fought with Armenia over the Borchalo region while Azerbaijan engaged in armed struggles with Armenia over the Karabakh and Zanzegur regions.

After two years of full independence, all three republics were attacked by the Russian Red Army. Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan were first turned into separate Soviet Socialist Republics. Georgia was the last which came under the Soviet rule in 1921, following the falls of the independent republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia in 1920. The takeover of Georgia by the Soviet power “completed the process of reconquest of the separated borderlands and initiated the last phase in the formation of the Soviet Union: the integration of the conquered territories into a single state.”¹⁶⁸ In line with this aim, Soviet power consolidated Transcaucasian organizations, such as the Economic Bureau of Transcaucasian Republics.¹⁶⁹

The Soviet state dictated the need for economic and military-political union of the Transcaucasian Soviet Socialist Republics by providing the “recovery of the economy, the elimination of inter-ethnic distrust and hostility which was heightened by a three year economic management of *Musavatists*, *Dashnaks* and Georgian *Mensheviks*.”¹⁷⁰ Accordingly, Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (*Zakavkazskaia Sotsialisticheskaia Federativnaia Sovetskaia Respublika-ZSFSR*), which would be analyzed in detail in the following sections, was established in 1922.

For this first phase of the establishment of the Soviet power in Transcaucasia, it would be enough to say that the Soviet authorities did not have much idea what to do exactly with this region. Having experienced a two plus years of independence, this border region was comparatively difficult to deal with, considering especially the

¹⁶⁸ Pipes, p. 241.

¹⁶⁹ Audrey Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity under Russian Rule* (California: Hoover Institution Press, 1992), pp. 114-116.; Jones, "Transcaucasian Federations," p. 1567.

¹⁷⁰ “Zakavkazskaia federatsiia,” In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 9, 877 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1972), p. 877.

existence of hostilities among the three major Transcaucasian nations. With the establishment of the Soviet power in the region, Transcaucasian nations witnessed a decade of reconciliation and integration during the 1920s. Among the numerous policy instruments of the Soviet state which determined the later developments in the region was the nationalities policy, a policy that shaped the region in every respect.

CHAPTER 4

TRANSCAUCASUS UNDER THE SOVIET RULE (1922-1945)

After the Bolshevik takeover of Transcaucasus, the process of establishing the Soviet power in the region began. In order to assume its authority on the non-Russian nationalities of the state, the Bolsheviks initiated a state-nation building policy which aimed at creating a Soviet nation. By means of nationalities policy and delimitation of borders, autonomous republics and autonomous oblasts came into being in Transcaucasus. After the 1920s, *korenizatsiia*, New Economic Policy and collectivization processes, and after the 1930s, purges, deportations and the Second World War inevitably transformed the Transcaucasus region thoroughly with its peoples, socio-economic and political conditions, and delineation. Therefore, the analysis of the Soviet era is of utmost importance in terms of understanding Transcaucasus, especially considering that the underlying reasons of the enduring problems in the region were the results of Soviet policies in Transcaucasus.

4.1 Stalin and the Nationalities Question

Nationalities question was one of the primary occupations of the Bolsheviks since approximately 130 different nations and nationalities had lived throughout Russia.¹⁷¹ The Bolshevik state adopted the Leninist view on the nationalities question by focusing on the issue of national self-determination. Although the classical Marxism does not address the question of nationalities, it was Lenin who established an understanding of right of self-determination of nations for the creation of a socialist state. By stating that “Victorious socialism must necessarily establish a full democracy and, consequently, not only introduce full equality of nations but also realize the right of the oppressed nations to self-determination, i.e., the right to free political separation,”¹⁷² he extended the notion to the oppressed peoples, and emphasized the equality among the nations.

Although Lenin endorsed the right of nations to secede, he did not imply that any separatist movement should be promoted. In this context, he specified that the separation “implies only a consistent expression of struggle against all national oppression.”¹⁷³ A significant point to bear in mind was that Lenin’s understanding of self-determination had nothing common with the national-cultural autonomy; it was exclusively about political self-determination. Moreover, a centralized state and a centralized party were essential to secure socialism for Lenin.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Robert Conquest, *Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice* (London: The Bodley Head, 1967), p. 13.

¹⁷² Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, “The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination,” In *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, 143-56 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), p. 143. (Originally written in January-February 1916, printed in April 1916 in the magazine *Vorbote* No. 2, and printed in Russian in October 1916 in *Sbornik Sotsial-Demokrata* No. 1)

¹⁷³ Lenin, “The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination,” p. 146.

¹⁷⁴ See: Lenin, “The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination”.

Stalin reiterated Lenin's views on the right of nations to self-determination. He explained the notion of self-determination as: "The right of self-determination means that only the nation itself has the right to determine its destiny, that no one has the right forcibly to interfere in the life of the nation, to destroy its schools and other institutions, to violate its habits and customs, to repress its language, or curtail its rights."¹⁷⁵ He pointed out that the workers should combat against oppression in all its forms and Social Democracy should guarantee the right of nations for self-determination.¹⁷⁶ It can be inferred from this statement that Stalin had an understanding of self-determination which was limited to the proletariat. Moreover, he particularly emphasized that the principles of equality, sovereignty, and the right of self-determination of nations would not mean that Social Democracy would support every demand of all nations. In his notion of self-determination, Social Democracy would combat against the "harmful" demands of nations.¹⁷⁷

The policy of the Bolsheviks towards nationalities was galvanized "by the ideology of egalitarianism and by the goal of national unification"¹⁷⁸ within the context of the abovementioned Leninist principles. This policy was aimed towards two different goals: "to maintain equality among the nations and to strengthen the Soviet state" which meant Soviet control over the nations.¹⁷⁹

As soon as the Soviet state was formed, the Bolsheviks established The People's Commissariat for Nationalities (*Narodnyy komissariat po delam*

¹⁷⁵ Joseph Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," In *Works*. Vol. 2, 300-81 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), p. 321.

¹⁷⁶ Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," pp. 320-321.

¹⁷⁷ Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," pp. 369-370.

¹⁷⁸ Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, *The Nationality Question in the Soviet Union and Russia* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1995), p. 17.

¹⁷⁹ d'Encausse, p. 17.

natsionalnostei-Narkomnats) at the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets on November 8, 1917 by the decree on the Establishment of the Council of People's Commissars (*Sovet Narodnyy Komissariat-Sovnarkom*).¹⁸⁰ This Commissariat (Ministry) was in charge of the nationalities question. The *Narkomnats* was "intended to serve as an intermediary between the central Soviet organs and the minorities and to assist the Government in dealing with problems of a purely national character."¹⁸¹ The aim and structure of the *Narkomnats* were determined by the political and ideological perspectives of the Bolsheviks.

These perspectives mainly included the aim of retaining the empire-if necessary, by force-, the acceptance of an undefined federal state structure, the need for an institution which would legalize the political participation of the minorities. Additionally, the continuation of the unitary and centralized party structure, the aim of spreading the revolution to Finland, Poland, Eastern Europe, and Asia via the party's nationalities policy, and lastly the realization of the self-determination principle were also among these perspectives.¹⁸² The official publication of the *Narkomnats* was the *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* (Life of Nationalities). The articles published in *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* were mostly focused on socialism and issues relevant to the nationalities. Especially, there were debates about how the future of the new Bolshevik state would be shaped concerning the nationalities question.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ "Narodnyy komissariat," In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 17, 837-838 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1974), p. 837.

¹⁸¹ Conquest, *Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice*, p. 32.

¹⁸² Stephen Blank, *The Sorcerer as Apprentice: Stalin as Commissar of Nationalities, 1917-1924* (London: Greenwood, 1994), pp. 11-12.

¹⁸³ For a more detailed account of *Zhizn' natsional'nostei*, see: Yelena Zeifert, "Zhizn' Natsional'nostei v Zhurnale," *Literaturnaia Gazeta* (2009).

After the establishment of *Narkomnats*, a further step on the nationalities question was taken by the promulgation of the Declaration of the Rights of Peoples of Russia on November 15, 1917 by the approval of *Sovnarkom*.¹⁸⁴ Being one of the first acts of the Soviet state, the Declaration emphasized following principles of Leninist nationalities policy:

equality and sovereignty of the peoples of Russia; the self-determination right of the peoples of Russia, including secession and the formation of an independent state; the abolition of all privileges and restrictions based on ethnic or ethnic-religious distinctions; and the free development of national minorities and ethnic groups inhabiting the territory of Russia.¹⁸⁵

Moreover, with the Declaration, acts of provocation of the nations against each other and the oppression of the nations were denounced by the Soviet state on the grounds that these acts were in contrast with the “policy of voluntary union of the peoples of Russia.”¹⁸⁶

In accordance with the self-determination principle, Bolshevik leaders intended to grant cultural and linguistic rights, autonomy and even territory to the non-Russian people in order to hinder any kind of separatist movement. In this context, the understanding of national culture by the Bolsheviks was of utmost importance. The main concept of national culture under the dictatorship of the proletariat for the Bolsheviks was best described by Stalin as “socialist in content and national in form.”¹⁸⁷ In this way, under the supremacy of the proletariat, the national

¹⁸⁴ “Deklaratsiya prav narodov Rossii,” In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 8, 125-126 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1972), p. 125.

¹⁸⁵ “Deklaratsiya prav narodov Rossii,” In Prokhorov, p. 125.

¹⁸⁶ “Deklaratsiya prav narodov Rossii,” In Prokhorov, pp. 125-126.

¹⁸⁷ Joseph Stalin, “Political Report of the Central Committee to the Sixteenth Congress of the C.P.S.U.(B.),” In *Works*, Vol. 12, 242-385 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), p. 378.

differences and antagonisms between people would vanish.¹⁸⁸ On the other hand, in the Bolshevik understanding, giving equal cultural rights to each nation was a means to divide some larger groups,¹⁸⁹ which would prevent these groups from attaining political unity.

In time, the idea of giving the right of self-determination to nations in a federation gained strength, mostly due to the increasing number of autonomies. At the Third-All Russian Congress of Soviets in January 1918, it was declared that federalism was accepted as a principle and the future Soviet state would be a federation of national republics.¹⁹⁰ The consequence of adopting the principle of federalism was the establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. With the Treaty on the Formation of the USSR in December 1922, four Soviet Socialist Republics, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), the Ukrainian SSR, the Belorussian SSR, and the Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia), were integrated into the Union. The Treaty was confirmed at the First Congress of Soviets on December 30, 1922 along with the Declaration on the Formation of the USSR. Finally, on January 31, 1924, the First Constitution of the USSR was issued at the Second Congress of Soviets of the USSR and the Treaty, which was based on Leninist principles aiming at the creation of a federal socialist state, was consolidated into the Constitution.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ Ronald Grigor Suny, "People's Commissariat of Nationalities," In J.R. Millar, ed., *Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan, 2004), p. 1158.

¹⁸⁹ d'Encausse, p. 22.

¹⁹⁰ Conquest, *Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice*, p. 25.

¹⁹¹ "Dogovor ob obrazovanii SSSR," In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 8, 1145-1146 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1972), p. 1146.

4.1.1 *Korenizatsiia* (Nativization)

The content of the Soviet nationalities policy was delineated by the resolutions passed at the Twelfth Party Congress in April 1923 and at a special Central Committee (TsK) conference on nationalities policy in June 1923. The Bolshevik nationalities policy was determined by these two resolutions. These resolutions “affirmed that the Soviet state would maximally support those forms of nationhood that did not conflict with a unitary central state” which “meant a commitment to support the following four national forms: national territories, national languages, national elites, and national cultures.”¹⁹²

In line with the new principles, a political doctrine under the name of *korenizatsiia* was established as the crucial agenda item of the Soviet nationalities policy in 1923. The word *korenizatsiia* was derived from *korennoi narod* (indigenous people) as an expression of the Bolsheviks’ decolonizing rhetoric.¹⁹³ Although the origins of *korenizatsiia* were generated as early as 1920, its transformation into a policy was brought by the 1923 resolutions. *Korenizatsiia* basically meant raising a new generation of political and technocratic cadres from the titular nationalities of the non-Russian regions. The policy was aimed at promoting local leaders and paving the way for the administration of the national republics by their own native cadres with the aim of consolidating the Soviet power over these nationalities.

The doctrine was originally derived from Stalin’s objective of consolidation of Soviet control over the borderlands. This has also included eliminating the threat

¹⁹² Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 9-10.

¹⁹³ Martin, p. 12.

of centrifugal pressures, cementing the Soviet power among the non-Russians, transforming the native society economically, socially, and culturally, and exploiting the borderlands economically.¹⁹⁴ In Stalin's own words, *korenizatsiia* can be best explained as:

Soviet power must become just as near and dear to the masses of the border regions of Russia. But this requires that it should first of all become comprehensible to them. It is therefore necessary that all Soviet organs in the border regions—the courts, the administration, the economic bodies, the organs of direct authority (and the organs of the Party as well)—should as far as possible be recruited from the local people acquainted with the manner of life, habits, customs and language of the native population; that all the best people from the local masses should be drawn into these institutions; that the local labouring masses should participate in every sphere of administration of the country, including the formation of military units, in order that the masses should see that the Soviet power and its organs are the products of their own efforts, the embodiment of their aspirations. Only in this way can firm spiritual ties be established between the masses and the Soviet power, and only in this way can the Soviet power become comprehensible and dear to the labouring masses of the border regions.¹⁹⁵

The policy of *korenizatsiia* became the main approach of the Soviet state towards the nationalities question during the 1920s. Moreover, being mixed with the socialist principles, it turned the Soviet state into “the world's first affirmative action empire,”¹⁹⁶ which was “the first of the old European multiethnic states to confront the rising tide of nationalism and respond by systematically promoting the national consciousness of its ethnic minorities and establishing for them many of the characteristic institutional forms of the nation-state.”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Conquest, *Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice*, p. 50.; d'Encausse, pp. 20-21.; Donald W. Treadgold and Herbert J. Ellison, *Twentieth Century Russia* (Colorado: Westview, 2000), pp.227-228.

¹⁹⁵ Joseph Stalin, "The Policy of Soviet Government on the National Question in Russia," In *Works*, Vol. 4, 363-76 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), pp. 370-371.

¹⁹⁶ See: Martin.

¹⁹⁷ Martin, p. 1.

Thanks to *korenizatsiia*, local national cadres were integrated into the Soviet institutions such as the labor unions and the party organs. These peoples went through an experience of quasi-nation state due to the use of native languages, establishment of national academies and creation of national literature.¹⁹⁸ During this period, *korenizatsiia* was a tool to cement the nations of the Soviet state. Transcaucasian nationalities were parts of this process as well. After the period of national independence between 1918 and 1920, an important portion of the national cadres of Transcaucasian nationalities had joined to the ranks of the Bolsheviks. Then, *korenizatsiia* helped them to be integrated into the Soviet state structure.

However, during the 1930s, Stalin aimed at creating a multinational, Russian speaking Soviet state. Therefore, a change in the political and social way of life in Soviet Russia emerged, which would bring an end to *korenizatsiia*. In this period Russocentric tendencies dominated the political, social and economic life. On the political level, more authoritarian and unitary approaches prevailed upon the pluralist idealist approaches. On the social and economic level, a reform process including the industrialization and collectivization resulted in a more centralized administration.

4.1.2 New Economic Policy (1921-1928) and Collectivization

During the civil war, the peasantry throughout Russia was subject to several measures due to the harsh conditions of the war such as compulsory grain requisitioning (*prodrazverstka*). By early 1921, this kind of measures resulted in

¹⁹⁸ Robert Maier, "Korenizatsya," In J.R. Millar, ed., *Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan, 2004), p. 771.

peasant strikes in many regions of Russia such as Volga provinces, Siberia, Moscow and Petrograd.¹⁹⁹ In March 1921, an uprising occurred among the sailors, who supported the Bolsheviks during the Civil War, in the naval base of Kronstadt. These uprisings showed the necessity of a new approach in economics.

Finally, at the Tenth Party Congress in March 1921, the principles of the New Economic Policy (*Novaia Ekonomicheskaiia Politika*-NEP), as a new approach, were introduced by Lenin.²⁰⁰ Main essence of NEP was established on the alliance between the working class and the peasantry on economic basis. In order to draw the peasants into the socialist construction, a link between socialist industry and small-scale peasant enterprises was tried to be created through the rather liberal money-commodity relations.²⁰¹ Grain requisitioning was replaced with a fixed tax and the peasants were let to sell their products at free market prices after paying this tax. Moreover, the society was able to engage in legal private economic sector, and large industrial enterprises were established. Although the Bolshevik state granted huge concessions to private enterprises during this period, efforts for the centrally planned system of industrialization has continued.²⁰²

Lenin and the Bolsheviks believed that by permitting a limited capitalism to work out in economics and a competition between the capitalist and socialist sectors, the construction of socialism would be completed successfully in Russia. During the period of NEP, the supply of both the agricultural and industrial products increased,

¹⁹⁹ Alan Ball, "Building a New State and Society: NEP, 1921–1928," In R.G. Suny, ed., *The Cambridge History of Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 168.

²⁰⁰ Ziegler, p. 70.; Martin C. Spechler, "New Economic Policy," In J.R. Millar, ed., *Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan, 2004), p. 1040.; Ball, p. 168.

²⁰¹ "Novaia Ekonomicheskaiia Politika," In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 18, 150-155 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1974), pp. 150-151.

²⁰² Ball, pp. 169-170.

and both the heavy and the light industries were developed.²⁰³ Finally, the abovementioned competition was terminated in favor of socialism in 1928 with the early practices of collectivization as a tool of centralization policies.

Collectivization (*kollektivizatsiia*) process was initiated in 1929 and mostly completed by the mid-1930s. It meant the transformation of small, individual peasant farms into large public farms through cooperatives,²⁰⁴ as a requirement of socialist economy. Collectivization involved the creation of large state-owned enterprises on the one hand, and the gradual transformation of individual peasant farms into collective farms on the other.²⁰⁵ Essentially, collectivization aimed at introducing socialist organizational formations to the peoples living in the countryside and altering “the nature of the relationship between the rural and the industrial sectors of the Soviet economy.”²⁰⁶

4.1.3 The USSR in Transition: Some Results

Thanks to nationalities policy and 1924 delimitation of borders, an ethnic mosaic of Union republics, autonomous republics, autonomous regions and non-territorial national autonomies came into being.

²⁰³ “Novaia Ekonomicheskaiia Politika,” In Prokhorov.

²⁰⁴ “Kollektivizatsiia sel'skogo khoziaistva,” In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 12, 1263-1272 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1973), p. 1263.

²⁰⁵ “Kollektivizatsiia sel'skogo khoziaistva,” In Prokhorov, pp. 1263-1264.

²⁰⁶ Robert C. Stuart, “Collectivization of Agriculture,” In J.R. Millar, ed., *Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan, 2004), p. 284.

Collectivization was actually an attack on the nationalities that were granted large scale national liberties by the *korenizatsiia* before. This was because the transition period of collectivization was violent,²⁰⁷ and the masses that showed resistance to the collectivization were suppressed by the Soviet authorities. Collectivization went hand in hand with the *raskulachivanie* (dekulakization) policy. More than 1.8 million of better-off peasants, branded as ‘kulaks’, were accused of being class enemies and either liquidated or deported to Siberia and Central Asia between the years 1929-1932.

Even the national communists of these nationalities witnessed a punishment process under the name of the struggle against bourgeois nationalism, in order to prevent any national deviation. Throughout 1930s, leading intellectuals and politicians of non-Russian peoples were exposed to purges and trials on the grounds that they were bolstering anti-Soviet nationalism.²⁰⁸

In some cases, ethnically different peoples were compelled to live together, in a way ignoring their religious and/or linguistic differences, while in other cases the peoples belonging to the same ethnic group were separated from each other thanks to the borders drawn by the abovementioned nationalities policy. This policy would show its impacts in the shape of intense conflicts after the 1980s, especially after the breakup of the Soviet Union.

²⁰⁷ In the cases of Ukraine and Kazakhstan, collectivization caused mass deaths due to the man-made famines.

²⁰⁸ Jeremy Smith, "Nationalities Policies, Soviet," In J.R. Millar, ed., *Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan, 2004), p.1013.

Furthermore, thanks to administrative centralization achieved by collectivization uniform cultural, social and educational policies by Moscow were started to be imposed upon all peoples of the Union. For example, educational policy was designed according to the principles of Russification. The Soviet authorities again forced the non-Russian peoples to leave their traditions by making the Russian language compulsory in education,²⁰⁹ replacing the scripts of these nationalities by Latin, and then Cyrillic, and suppressing the ethnic literatures.²¹⁰

Return to the Russian nationalism was succeeded by the apotheosis of the patriotic Russian symbols such as Alexander Nevsky and Peter the Great.²¹¹ As the history was considered to be one of the most important policy tools in the Soviet Union, the histories of the non-Russian peoples were subjected to revisions in accordance with the resurgence of traditional Russian symbols.²¹² In this context, the views of two historians, Mikhail Pokrovsky and Mykhailo Hrushevsky, were denounced which had previously presented the Russian Empire “as the unremitting oppressor of the non-Russians.”²¹³ The official history writing in the Union then appraised the Russian Empire as a conveyor of civilization and progress.

At the Extraordinary 8th All-Union Congress of Soviets on November 25, 1936, Stalin declared the necessary conditions for national territories to gain Union Republic status. First, the Republic must have been a border republic; second, the nationality which had given its name to the Republic must have been a majority, and

²⁰⁹ Graham Smith, "Nationalities Policy from Lenin to Gorbachev," In G. Smith, ed., *The Nationalities Question in the Soviet Union* (New York: Longman, 1990), p. 6.

²¹⁰ Conquest, *Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice*, pp. 61-75.

²¹¹ Simon Dixon, "The Russians: The Dominant Nationality," In G. Smith, ed., *The Nationalities Question in the Soviet Union* (New York: Longman, 1990), p. 24.

²¹² Conquest, *Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice*, pp. 79-88.

²¹³ Smith, "Nationalities Policies, Soviet," p.1013.

the last, the Republic must have had a population no less than a million.²¹⁴ At the end of this Congress, on December 5, 1936, the Constitution of the Soviet Union was approved and adopted.²¹⁵ Based on this Constitution, constitutions of the Union republics²¹⁶ were approved respectively.²¹⁷

Due to the rising international tension towards the end of the 1930s and the threat perception of Soviet Russia from Japan along with the Nazi Germany, more strict applications of Russification and centralization emerged.²¹⁸ The purges of the late 1930s were fiercer than the previous purges. The year 1936 marked the beginning of the most repressive period of the Soviet history; the period of Great Terror (1936-1938).²¹⁹ Central Soviet power has inserted a reign of terror over national republics and especially over the native cadres raised by the wave of *korenizatsiia*. A large number of national officials were arrested, executed, committed suicide, exiled or disappeared in most cases.²²⁰ Also in this period, some diaspora nationalities were identified as potential threats and subjected to exiles, mass deportations and executions.²²¹ The first instance of an en masse deportation of an ethnic group in the USSR was the deportation of the Koreans.²²² More than

²¹⁴ Conquest, *Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice*, pp. 115-116.

²¹⁵ "Chrezvychainiy vos'moi s'ezd Sovetov SSSR," In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 29, 692-693 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1978), p. 692.

²¹⁶ The establishment of the individual Republics of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia followed this Congress, right after the dissolution of the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic in 1936.

²¹⁷ See: "Konstitutsii sovetskie," In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 13, 136-139 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1973).

²¹⁸ Weeks, *Across the Revolutionary Divide: Russia and the USSR, 1861-1945*, p. 104.

²¹⁹ See: Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (London: Pimlico, 1992).

²²⁰ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*, pp. 261-268; Conquest, *Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice*, p. 94.

²²¹ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, p. 423.

²²² Eric D. Weitz, "Racial Politics without the Concept of Race: Reevaluating Soviet Ethnic and National Purges," *Slavic Review* (Vol. 61, No. 1, 2002), p. 13; Alexander Statiev, "Soviet Ethnic Deportations: Intent Versus Outcome," *Journal of Genocide Research* (Vol. 11, No. 2-3, 2009), p. 244.

170,000 Koreans were accused of being Japanese agents²²³ and deported from Far East to Central Asia in 1937. The deportations reached their climax by the time the USSR engaged in war with Germany.

The nations of Transcaucasus were inevitably affected by the abovementioned policies and practices. Just like all nations of the Soviet Union, Transcaucasians were also subject to all these policies and their consequences.

4.2 Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic-ZSFSR (1922-1936)

In 1921, six Soviet republics existed in Russia: the Russian Soviet Federated Republic, Ukrainian SSR, Belorussian SSR, Georgian SSR, Azerbaijani SSR and Armenian SSR. In late 1921, an important question was raised on how to deal with these border republics. As an answer to this question, Stalin aimed at establishing greater control over these three republics, starting with the republics of Transcaucasia.²²⁴ Therefore, the unification of three republics was favored on the grounds that:

internal and international positions of the Georgian SSR, Armenian SSR and the Azerbaijan SSR after the Civil War and military intervention of 1918-20 necessitated their economic and military-political union in the fight against the hostile actions of the imperialists and the remnants of the Transcaucasian counterrevolution, the restoration of the economy, the elimination of inter-ethnic distrust and hostility.²²⁵

²²³ Alexander M. Nekrich, *The Punished Peoples: The Deportations and Fate of Soviet Minorities at the End of the Second World War* (New York: Norton&Company, 1978), p. 99.

²²⁴ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*, p. 142.

²²⁵ “Zakavkazskaia federatsiia,” In Prokhorov, p. 877.

Among these three nationalities, the Georgians opposed the unification of the three republics and declared that they would preserve their individual identity as a separate republic.²²⁶ Stalin and Ordzhonikidze²²⁷ insisted on the unification of the three Transcaucasian Republics, and their supporters finally surpassed the opposition within Georgia.²²⁸

On March 12, 1922, a conference was organized in Tiflis, with the participation of representatives from the central executive committees of the three Soviet republics. During the conference, a treaty creating the Federated Union of Socialist Soviet Republics of Transcaucasia was approved. The chief authority of the union was determined as the Authorized Conference of Representatives, which would be selected in equal number by the governments of the republics; the executive organ was determined as the Union Council, which would be elected by the conference. On December 13, 1922, at the first Transcaucasian Congress of Soviets organized in Baku, Federated Union was transformed into the single Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (*Zakavkazskaia Sotsialisticheskaia Federativnaia Sovetskaia Respublika-ZSFSR*). The congress also approved the Constitution of the Transcaucasian Federation and established the Transcaucasian Central Executive Committee (ZTsIK), and the Council of People's Commissariats (*Sovnarkom*), which would be responsible to the Committee. Finally on December 30, 1922, the ZSFSR was integrated into the USSR.²²⁹

²²⁶ Ball, p. 175.

²²⁷ Grigory Konstantinovich (Sergo) Ordzhonikidze (1886-1937) was a Georgian Bolshevik, who became a member of the CPSU Politburo later, and a close ally of Stalin.

²²⁸ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*, p. 142.

²²⁹ "Zakavkazskaia federatsiia," In Prokhorov, p. 877.

By the 1936 Constitution of the Soviet Union, ZSFSR was dissolved and the three Transcaucasian states were given the status of separate union republics.²³⁰ Effective on 1936, Soviet Socialist Republics of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia became directly subordinate to Moscow administratively, without any intermediate Transcaucasian administration.²³¹ However, the national minorities in these republics retained their status.²³² Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region and the Autonomous Republic of Nakhichevan stayed within Azerbaijan, while the South Osetian Autonomous Region and the Abkhazian and Adjara Autonomous Republics were consolidated into Georgia as three separate administrative units.

4.3 Transition in the Soviet Transcaucasus

During the Soviet period, Transcaucasus had changed tremendously. Administrative, legislative and executive structures of the region were re-defined by the Bolsheviks. Due to the implementation of the nationalities policy as a whole, the region was transformed socially, economically and culturally as well. As mentioned above, the promulgation of Declaration of the Rights of Peoples of Russia on November 15, 1917 had already induced the establishment of federalism. Moreover, the principles of the Declaration granted the non-Russian nationalities some rights. During the 1920s, national education system and written national languages were created for the peoples of Transcaucasus, which in the end “contributed to the

²³⁰ “Zakavkazskaia federatsiia,” In Prokhorov, p. 877.

²³¹ Jones, “Transcaucasian Federations,” p. 1567.

²³² Charlotte Hill, *State Building and Conflict Resolution in the Caucasus* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p. 199.

preservation and reproduction of ethnicity.”²³³ The policy of *korenizatsiia* was implemented simultaneously with these developments. However, towards the end of the 1920s, Russocentric tendencies became evident and dominated the nationalities policy. Significant changes continued during the period of NEP, collectivization and purges.

Administratively, new national quasi-states were formed in the Transcaucasus. The foundations of today’s ethno-territorial disputes in the region were laid during Stalin era and under his nationalities policy. The creation of territorial units which did not accord with the ethnic realities of these territories was the main tool of Stalin’s nationalities policy. This policy resulted in ethnic rivalries and clashes between different ethnic groups in a single political unit,²³⁴ which are extant even today.

4.3.1 Nationalities Policy in Transcaucasus

Although the ultimate aims of Soviet nationalities policy were acculturation and bilingualism, assimilation, and the creation of a multinational type of Soviet people, the early practices of the nationalities policy in Transcaucasus based on the ethnic consolidation and growing cohesion of the major nationalities,²³⁵ which were initiated by the nativization policies. However, these policies were altered in the

²³³ Svetlana Akkueva, "The Caucasus: One or Many? A View from the Region," *Nationalities Papers* (Vol. 36, No. 2, 2008), p. 261.

²³⁴ Shireen Hunter, "Borders, Conflict, and Security in the Caucasus: The Legacy of the Past," *SAIS Review* (Vol. 26, No. 1, 2006), p. 113.

²³⁵ Ronald Grigor Suny, "On the Road to Independence: Cultural Cohesion and Ethnic Revival in a Multinational Society," In R.G. Suny, ed., *Transcaucasia, Nationalism, and Social Change* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983), p. 385.

subsequent decades due to the increasing promotion of Russification all over the Union.

As the first step of the nationalities policy, the policy of *korenizatsiia* was implemented in Transcaucasus during the 1920s. As mentioned above, *korenizatsiia* was the practice of raising a new generation of political and technocratic cadres from the titular nationalities of the non-Russian regions which was aimed at promoting local leaders and paving the way for the administration of the national republics by their own native cadres with the aim of consolidating the Soviet power over these nationalities. This policy worked well especially in Georgia and Armenia, where the percentage of the socialist oriented natives in rule was higher with respect to the population.

Along with *korenizatsiia*, the modernization attempts of the Soviet power were seen in Transcaucasus during the 1920s and 1930s. The change from rural lifestyle to the urbanization and from agricultural based economy to industrialization marked the modernization process in Transcaucasus, which, in the end, entailed the transition of the Transcaucasian nationalities.

First and foremost, the Bolsheviks faced an economically devastated country along with a strong ideological opposition of the *Mensheviks* in Georgia. Due to this economic downturn, modernization and industrialization waves during the 1920s were not successful. This setback was also originated from the predominantly rural structure of the Georgian society. By 1921, approximately 70% of the Georgian

national income was based on agriculture and some 85.5% of the population lived in the countryside.²³⁶

Therefore, the first attempts of the Soviet power to modernize Georgia did not succeed much. The collectivization and industrialization in Georgia took place between the years 1928 and 1932 genuinely. The most intense phase of the collectivization took place between October 1929 and March 1930. In this period, the number of collectivized families increased to 65.2% from 3.4%.²³⁷ During the collectivization process, Soviet power used violence against those who opposed the collectivization. Finally, at the end of the 1930s, almost 93% of agriculture was collectivized. Rapid industrialization was striking, as in the case of the transformation of agriculture. Between 1930 and 1934, the number of industrial workforce doubled itself as well as the population of Tiflis.²³⁸ As can be seen in the following section, the political purges of 1936-1938 followed these developments and eliminated most of the Georgian intelligentsia and the Georgian *Mensheviks*. By the end of the 1930s, Georgia was mostly transformed economically and socially. A new type of peasants, intelligentsia and party circle was created owing to the Soviet system.

The aim of the Soviet nationalities policy was twofold in Azerbaijan: keeping its economic resources under control in order to secure the interests of the Soviet

²³⁶ Stephen Jones, "The Establishment of Soviet Power in Transcaucasia: The Case of Georgia 1921-1928," *Soviet Studies* (Vol. 40, No. 4, 1988), p. 618.

²³⁷ *Komunisti*, 25 February 1930. In Parsons, Robert. 1990. "Georgians," In Graham Smith, ed., *The Nationalities Question in the Soviet Union* (New York: Longman), 180-196, p. 184.

²³⁸ Robert Parsons, "Georgians," In G. Smith, ed., *The Nationalities Question in the Soviet Union*, (New York: Longman, 1990), p. 184.

power, and creating a loyal population via the carrot and stick system.²³⁹ Unlike the examples of Georgia and Armenia, the Soviet power attempted to Sovietize Azerbaijan more fiercely. Apart from a harsh collectivization process and purges, a cultural and anti-religious policy was also administered for Azerbaijanis. Their alphabet, which was Arabic before, was changed to Latin in 1922 and then to Cyrillic in 1939.²⁴⁰ Cultural monuments, libraries and archives were decimated²⁴¹ and some of the historical sites which had religious significance were demolished.²⁴²

Armenia was an economically devastated country by the time of the Bolshevik takeover. Therefore, the first problem to deal with for the Soviet power in Armenia was to revive the country. Therefore, during the first decade of the Soviet rule, the priority of the Bolsheviks was the economic reconstruction. It was 1929 when the collectivization and industrialization were started to be implemented in the country.²⁴³ By 1935, industry's share in total economic production increased to 62.1% and by 1936, the collectivized families constituted 80% of the population. The traditional rural lifestyle was replaced by a collective one in which a new class of Sovietized urban proletariat was created in towns.²⁴⁴

The forced collectivization and the forced change on the traditional lives of the Transcaucasian nationalities reversed the process of *korenizatsiia*. While the

²³⁹ Tamara Dragadze, "Azerbaijanis," In G. Smith, ed., *The Nationalities Question in the Soviet Union* (New York: Longman, 1990), p. 166.

²⁴⁰ Martin, pp. 186-194.

²⁴¹ Glenn E. Curtis, ed. *Azerbaijan: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1995), p. 85.

²⁴² Dragadze, p. 166.

²⁴³ Edmund M. Herzig, "Armenians," In G. Smith, ed., *The Nationalities Question in the Soviet Union* (New York: Longman, 1990), p. 149.

²⁴⁴ Mary Kilbourne Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia* (Leiden: Brill, 1962), pp. 102-116.

interest in native values such as native languages was awakened by the Soviet power by the time the formation of the Union, the forced collectivization aimed at driving the people apart from their native traditional values. As a result, the forcefully imposed rapid social mobilization and industrialization along with Sovietization contributed to the national awareness among the people.

The efforts of nation-building and the enhancement of the national culture lost its significance in early 1930s, as mentioned above. A distrust campaign towards the non-Russian people was boosted by the Soviet power, led by Stalin. During the 1930s, the nationalist expressions and local nationalism were denounced on the grounds that they threatened the Soviet unity. The level of autonomy of the non-Russian republics was constrained as a practice of this approach.

Although the three Transcaucasian nationalities were subjected to Stalin's repression, they were not subjected to harsher practices such as man-made famines as in the case of the Ukrainians and Kazakhs. Moreover, when Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia were uplifted to Union Republic status, their societies were not inflicted with overwhelming Russification attempts as it was the case in some other union republics.

Consequently, Soviet nationalities policy in Transcaucasus alternated between giving concessions to the people on the one hand, and centralizing the authority and assimilating the ethnic groups on the other. Still, the republics were developed economically. Apart from industrialization and urbanization, the rate of literacy and education increased which means that the Soviet economic and political

system transformed the Transcaucasian republics from rural societies to industrialized and urban societies despite the system's violence and deficiencies. Most importantly, due to the Soviet policies, Transcaucasian nationalities acquired an increased awareness of themselves as national entities.

4.3.2 Territorial Arrangements in Transcaucasus under the Soviet Rule

As part of the Stalin's nationalities policy, Transcaucasus was subjected to administrative arrangements, as mentioned above, in order to govern the ethnically diverse territories and eliminate any nationalistic demands. These arrangements underpinned the ethno-territorial disputes that emerged after the demise of the USSR.

Within this framework, in all three Transcaucasian republics, new autonomous republics and autonomous oblasts were established during the Soviet era: in the north of the Georgian SSR, the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast (1922); in the northwest the Abkhazian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (1931)²⁴⁵ and in the west the Adjara Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (1921). Also, the Nakhichevan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (1924) was founded as an exclave of Azerbaijan SSR,²⁴⁶ populated almost exclusively by Azerbaijanis. Finally, the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (1923), populated mostly by Armenians, was established inside the Azerbaijan SSR.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ The Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia, which was originally established in March 1921, was downgraded to the status of Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Georgian SSR in 1931.

²⁴⁶ Nakhichevan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was formed in 1920 and became a part of the Azerbaijan SSR in 1924.

²⁴⁷ Christoph Zürcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), p. 26.; Anna Matveeva, *The South*

Stalin's policy of creating these territorial units where rival ethnic groups were gathered within single political units did not correspond to the ethnic realities of the region and resulted in significant problems due to the claims of these rival ethnic groups on particular territories on the basis of asserted historical rights.²⁴⁸ These problems inevitably evolved to real conflicts in the last decades of the USSR.

In the Georgian SSR, three autonomous oblasts/republics were formed. Before the Soviet power was established in Georgia, Georgia's declaration of independence in May 1918 cut the link between the North Ossetians and South Ossetians living in the region. The sense of isolationism created distrust among the South Ossetians towards the *Menshevik* Georgian government and some protests took place, which were brutally suppressed by Georgia. When the Red Army took the control of the region and overthrew the *Menshevik* Georgian government in February 1921, South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast was created within Georgia on April 20, 1922.²⁴⁹ In fact, the Ossetians were aiming to create a united republic with the unification of the South and the North Ossetians,²⁵⁰ which never came into existence since the North Ossetian Autonomous Region was located within the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic in 1924.²⁵¹

Once being an autonomous oblast within Georgia, the South Ossetians were exposed to Georgianization. Starting from 1930s, all Ossetian schools were closed

Caucasus: Nationalism, Conflict and Minorities (Minority Rights Group Report, 2002), p. 7.; Akkieva, pp. 253-254.

²⁴⁸ Hunter, p. 113.

²⁴⁹ "Yugo-Osetinskaia avtonomnaia oblast'," In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 30, 996-1002 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1978), p. 998.

²⁵⁰ Victor A. Shnirelman, *The Value of the Past: Myths, Identity and Politics in Transcaucasia* (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2001), p. 354.

²⁵¹ Brian Boeck, "Osetins," In J.R. Millar, ed., *Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan, 2004), p. 1122.

and Georgian alphabet was introduced. Along with the Georgianization attempts, the poor financial and living standards resulted in an anti-Georgian sentiment among the South Ossetians.²⁵² The increasing reaction against Georgia continued in the coming decades and paved the way for national movements among the Ossetians.

As another problematic region, Abkhazia had already gone under the Russian protectorate in 1810, and the Russian Empire annexed Abkhazia in 1864. The Russian conquest of Abkhazia in 1864 forced more than half of the Abkhaz population into exile to the Ottoman Empire. The rest of the population was forcibly converted to Christianity. After the Bolshevik revolution, the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia was established on March 4, 1921. However, in February 1931, its status was downgraded to Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Georgian SSR.²⁵³

During Stalin's rule, a Georgianization campaign was carried out also in Abkhazia, as in the case of South Ossetia.²⁵⁴ However, between the two, Abkhazia was the most troubled case.²⁵⁵ By the end of the 1930s and the start of the 1940s, a new Abkhazian alphabet was invented based on the Georgian script, Abkhazian was removed from the schools, Georgian became compulsory as the education language, Abkhazians were extracted from the power structures, Abkhaz intellectuals were arrested and the local Abkhaz names were replaced by Georgian names.²⁵⁶ Due to the

²⁵² Shnirelman, p. 355.

²⁵³ "Abkhazskaia Avtonomnaia Sovetskaia Sotsialisticheskaia Respublika," In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 1, 97-109 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1970), pp. 100-101.

²⁵⁴ Hunter, p. 117.; Shale Horowitz, "Explaining Post-Soviet Ethnic Conflicts: Using Regime Type to Discern the Impact and Relative Importance of Objective Antecedents," *Nationalities Papers* (Vol. 29, No. 4, 2001), p. 642.

²⁵⁵ Crego, p. 551.

²⁵⁶ Shnirelman, pp. 207-208.

encouraged migration of Georgians to Abkhazia, the population of the ethnic Abkhaz decreased to 15 per cent while it formed 42 per cent of the total population in 1886.²⁵⁷ As a result, the Abkhaz started to voice their discontent of the attempted Georgianization.²⁵⁸ In time, the discontent turned into an anti-Georgian agitation and the Abkhaz tended to affiliate themselves with a North Caucasian identity.²⁵⁹ More importantly, discriminatory policies of the Stalin years and the Georgian pressure bolstered Abkhaz nationalism and resulted in Abkhaz protests for independence later during the *glasnost* era.²⁶⁰

Lastly, Adjara Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was formed on July 16, 1921 as a part of the Georgian SSR.²⁶¹ Adjara was the only autonomous republic within the USSR based on religion²⁶² rather than ethnic roots.²⁶³ Due to their ethno-religious identity, Adjars suffered from both the Soviet policies and the Georgianization.²⁶⁴ During the 1920s, Adjars were exposed to the offensive Soviet policy against Islam along with collectivization and some of them were deported to Central Asia. Moreover, they were counted as Georgians rather than Adjars in Soviet censuses. Therefore, there is a lack of information on their exact population in the USSR. During the Soviet rule, they were also subjected to an assimilation policy by

²⁵⁷ Coene, p. 149.

²⁵⁸ B.George Hewitt, "Abkhazians," In J.R. Millar, ed., *Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan, 2004), p. 2.

²⁵⁹ Horowitz, p. 642.

²⁶⁰ Pal Kolsto and Helge Blakkisrud, "Living with Non-Recognition: State- and Nation-Building in South Caucasian Quasi-States," *Europe-Asia Studies* (Vol. 60, No. 3, 2008), p. 486.

²⁶¹ "Adzharskaia Avtonomnaia Sovetskaia Sotsialisticheskaia Respublika," In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 1, 645-654 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1970), pp. 648-649.

²⁶² Adjars are Muslim Georgians.

²⁶³ Coene, p. 162.

²⁶⁴ See: Zürcher, pp. 201-202.

the Georgians, including the Christianization. Nevertheless, the Adjars resisted to the assimilation policies and preserved their religion.²⁶⁵

As another autonomous republic in Transcaucasus, the Nakhichevan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was created under the Soviet rule. Soviet power was first established in Nakhichevan on July 28, 1920. Simultaneously, a revolutionary committee was created in the region. On the same day, the Nakhichevan Soviet Socialist Republic was formed which had close military and economic ties with the Azerbaijan SSR and the RSFSR.²⁶⁶

The Treaty of Moscow (1921) signed between Turkey and the USSR envisaged that the region was to be an autonomous region under the protectorate of Azerbaijani SSR.²⁶⁷ In early 1921, at the First *Krai* Party Conference, the Nakhichevan Oblast Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan was chosen. Then, the Nakhichevan Autonomous *Krai* was created within the Azerbaijan SSR, based on a resolution came out of the Third All-Nakhichevan Congress of Soviets in February 1923. On February 9, 1924, the *Krai* was transformed to the Nakhichevan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and the first constitution of the Nakhichevan ASSR was adopted on April 18, 1926.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus* (Richmond, Surrey : Curzon, 2001), pp. 163-164.

²⁶⁶ "Nakhichevanskaia Avtonomnaia Sovetskaia Sotsialisticheskaia Respublika," In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 17, 1038-1045 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1974), p. 1040.

²⁶⁷ For the full text of the Treaty in Russian see: "*Moskovskii dogovor mezhdurusskimi i Turtsiei*." http://www.hrono.ru/dokum/192_dok/19210316ru_tur.html.

²⁶⁸ "Nakhichevanskaia Avtonomnaia Sovetskaia Sotsialisticheskaia Respublika," In Prokhorov, p. 1040.

Nakhichevan stayed as an exception in the Soviet style of federalism. There is no other example of an autonomous republic whose titular nationality is the same with the central republic's titular nationality.²⁶⁹ In spite of the fact that the Armenians were frustrated by the loss of both Nakhichevan and Nagorno-Karabakh and they tried to regain control over the two regions, they mostly focused on the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh, and therefore, the ethnic tensions in Nakhichevan did not become as problematic as in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Finally, in Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast was created under the Soviet rule in 1923. Nagorno-Karabakh is a historically disputed region between the Azerbaijanis and the Armenians. According to the Azerbaijanis, Nagorno-Karabakh has always been under Azerbaijani rule; while the Armenians assert the contrary. The disputed situation of the region can be found in its name; the word Karabakh is a combination of Turkish and Persian,²⁷⁰ and the word '*nagorno*' means 'mountainous' in Russian. Azerbaijanis and Armenians have been debated over the history of the region; specifically over both its origin of the population and its state affiliation.²⁷¹ The region held a significant place in the historical and ethno-political views of the Azerbaijanis and the Armenians. The Azerbaijanis see the region as the homeland of scientific and cultural figures and the hereditary land of Turkic khans. The Armenians, on the other hand, affiliate the region with the development of the Armenian people and their religion, art, culture and history.²⁷²

²⁶⁹ Cornell, pp. 62-63.

²⁷⁰ In Turkish, '*kara*' means 'black', while '*ba*' means 'garden' in Persian. The ending '*-bakh*' is originated in the Russification of the word '*ba*'.

²⁷¹ Cornell, p. 48.

²⁷² Shnirelman, pp. 149-150.

Moreover, the region²⁷³ has always become the scene of clashes between the Azerbaijanis and the Armenians. Swietochowski states that “Massive eruptions of violence in the form of mutual inter-communal massacres began with the 1905 Russian Revolution, and would re-emerge each time the Russian state was in a condition of crisis or overhaul-during the civil war in 1918 and during the perestroika from 1988 on.”²⁷⁴ When Azerbaijan and Armenia declared their independences in 1918, the disputed situation of the region became evident.

Following the Bolshevik revolution, the dispute over the region was politicized and intensified. The international rivalries also determined the changes in the region. Initially, Nagorno-Karabakh became a part of Azerbaijan in 1920. Despite the opposition of the Armenians, the British supported this arrangement²⁷⁵ and the region stayed as a part of the Azerbaijan SSR until December 1920 when Moscow decided to bring the region under Armenian control.²⁷⁶ Still, the fate of the region was to be determined. On July 4, 1920, in Stalin’s presence, *Kavbyuro*²⁷⁷ voted in favor of the inclusion of Karabakh in the Armenian SSR. However, the following day the *Kavbyuro* revoked this decision and agreed to transfer Karabakh to the Azerbaijani SSR.²⁷⁸ In the end Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast was established within the Azerbaijani SSR on July 7, 1923.²⁷⁹

²⁷³ Under the Tsarist rule (1806-1917), the region stayed as a part of the Yelisavetpol province which linked the region economically and historically to Azerbaijan.

²⁷⁴ Tadeusz Swietochowski, “The Problem of Nagorno-Karabakh: Geography versus Demography under Colonialism and in Decolonization,” In Hafeez Malik, ed., *Central Asia* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1994), p. 145.

²⁷⁵ Gerard J. Libaridian, “Nagorno-Karabakh,” In J.R. Millar, ed., *Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan, 2004), p. 989.

²⁷⁶ Zanzegur and Nakhichevan were also attached to Armenia with this arrangement.

²⁷⁷ The Caucasian Bureau. It was the Caucasian section of the Soviet Communist Party.

²⁷⁸ Cornell, p. 60.

²⁷⁹ “NagornoKarabakhskaia avtonomnaia oblast,” In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 17, 582-588 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1974), p. 584.

Since then, the Armenians persistently tried to persuade Moscow to transfer the region to the Armenian SSR. The autonomous status of Nagorno-Karabakh was stipulated by the Stalin constitution of 1936.²⁸⁰ This territorial arrangement laid the roots for future conflicts since it caused Armenian aggression and periodic clashes between the two nations.

In the final analysis, the establishment of the above-mentioned territories in Transcaucasus under the Soviet rule represents the most decisive circumstance in the history of the region, which determined the region's contemporary situation. The re-drawn map of Transcaucasus provided the titular nationalities some privileges; however, they had always confronted the demands of the non-titular groups. This situation was designed as a counterweight to any possible nationalist politics on the part of the respective union republics of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. That means the Soviet power aimed at using the new administrative-territorial division as an instrument in controlling the national ambitions of the major Transcaucasian nationalities.²⁸¹

Nevertheless, the distorted ethnic balance created an adverse effect. The territorial claims caused by the new arrangements fuelled inter-ethnic rivalries. The re-drawing of the map of the region regardless of ethnic and demographic facts poisoned the already existed ethnic antagonisms rooted in history throughout the region.²⁸² Not only the titular nationalities, but also the minorities of the region showed an increasing nationalist tendency and started to express themselves through

²⁸⁰ Cornell, p. 62.

²⁸¹ Zürcher, p. 26.

²⁸² Klas-Göran Karlsson, "Nationalism, Ethno-National Conflicts and History in South Caucasus," In Ole Hoiris and Sefa Martin Yürükel, eds., *Contrasts and Solutions in the Caucasus* (Oxford: Aarhus University Press, 1998), p. 137.

nationalism. Thus, and so, the Bolshevik ambitions to create loyal nations in order to bring the Soviet state and nation building to perfection resulted in separatist demands, crises and clashes, in contrary.

These cases have been significant determinants in the precarious inter-ethnic relations of Transcaucasus. Since their establishments, the problems in these regions have haunted from time to time and turned the region into a boiling cauldron, in which sometimes the outside forces have intervened. The actual problem, however, is that any solution does not seem feasible since a brand new effort for the re-drawing the map of the region can further complicate the situation.

Table 2. The Dates of Formation of the Autonomous Republics and Oblasts of Transcaucasus

	Annexation by the Russian Empire	1917-1924	1924-1945
South Ossetia	1774	1922-Autonomous Oblast	-
Abkhazia	1864	1921-Soviet Socialist Republic	1931- Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
Adjara	1878	1921-Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic	-
Nakhichevan	1828	1920-Soviet Socialist Republic 1923- Autonomous Krai 1924-Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic	-
Nagorno- Karabakh	1813	1923-Autonomous Oblast	-

4.3.3 Purges in the Cadres of the Local Communist Parties-The Great Terror in Transcaucasus

From the very beginning, the ethnicity factor was seen as both an enemy and a tool for the Soviet power in terms of nationalities policy. State apparatus used the ethnicity factor as a tool to alleviate the tensions in the society, when necessary. The realization of this policy was seen during the period of *korenizatsiia* and in the following developments. Within the context of this understanding, in later stages, nationalism was condemned in the USSR on the grounds that it could hinder the realization of the Soviet Union. Therefore, the Soviet power aimed at eliminating the bourgeois elements from all the political cadres. This approach resulted in the purges of 1930s throughout the Union.²⁸³

For the Bolsheviks, subversion, the remnants of the elite class of prerevolutionary times and the supporters of dissolved political parties represented the greatest threats for the State. Fearing that they would claim power in the authority, most of the Trotskyites and other “deviationists” of the 1920s were seen as dangerous adversaries.²⁸⁴ Since the other treacherous elements were eliminated by the mass terror of collectivization and dekulakization, the terror now had a new direction: the Party itself.²⁸⁵

This approach finally resulted in the campaign of the Great Terror (1936-1938). In parallel with the aforementioned problems of the era, the Great Terror has its roots in the past; specifically the evolution of the Soviet society and the

²⁸³ Hill, p. 195.

²⁸⁴ Gabor T. Rittersporn, "The Great Purges," In J.R. Millar, ed., *Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan, 2004), p. 1248.

²⁸⁵ Treadgold and Ellison, p. 211.

Communist Party. Therefore, “the development of the Party, the consolidation of the dictatorship, the movements of the faction, the rise of individuals, and the emergence of extreme economic policies” were the primary determinants of the era of Great Terror.²⁸⁶ The Great Terror can simply be identified as a process of the enforcement of violent change upon the Soviet society and the Party itself by eliminating the old cadres of the Party.

The first practices of the Great Terror began as early as 1935. Although some of the “deviationists” remained in the Party until 1937, most of them were expelled between 1935 and 1936. After the Kirov murder of 1934, Kirov’s asserted “murderers” were deported to Siberia in 1935. Between 1935 and 1936, the supporters of Trotsky and Zinoviev were arrested.²⁸⁷ Then, with the show trial in August 1936 where the “deviationist” leaders Kamenev and Zinoviev stood before trial for their terrorist aims, the Great Terror made a ferocious start. This trial triggered a campaign which targeted not only the “deviationists”, but also the “oppositionists” and the Party members who were not favored by the Bolsheviks for their attitudes or criticisms of the Party.²⁸⁸ Most of them were executed.

In the period of Great Terror, approximately 100.000 Communist Party members were arrested, sent to camps, tortured to confess apocryphal crimes and in most cases, they were shot to death. This great number was a result of the efforts of “dedicated” Party officials. Although these officials were also purged later, in the process they continuously sought for new arrests and shootings in order to show their “dedication” to the Party.

²⁸⁶ Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, p. 3.

²⁸⁷ Treadgold and Ellison, p. 212.

²⁸⁸ Rittersporn, p. 1248-1249.

Moreover, the regime particularly targeted some diaspora nationalities.²⁸⁹ They were subjected to mass arrests and executions on the basis of their ethnic identity. The executions of these diaspora nationalities, as ‘national operations’,²⁹⁰ constitutes almost half of the 700.000 executions during the era of Great Terror. In fact, diaspora nationalities were specifically targeted by the Soviet power towards the end of the era.²⁹¹

At the end of the era, about 700.000 people were killed and about 600.000 people were deported to Siberia.²⁹² However, in the end, the Great Terror did not solve the problems that the regime has been suffering from. What was even worse was that the losses in the Party, the state agencies, and the army caused more problems in terms of the functioning of the state. In the final analysis, the Great Terror demonstrated how such an indiscriminate and violent campaign can be used as a policy instrument in the social engineering projects of the Soviet Union. At this point, it is worth to bear in mind that the non-Russian regions and nationalities of the Union were more harshly affected by the Great Terror in accordance with the principles of the nationalities policy.

The history of the purges in Transcaucasia began with the appointment of Beria (1899-1953), firstly as the head of the Georgian OGPU (*Obyedinyonnoye gosudarstvennoye politicheskoye upravleniye*- Joint State Political Directorate under the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR) in 1926, secondly as the First

²⁸⁹ Finns, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Poles, Germans, Kurds, Chinese, Koreans, Greeks and Bulgarians

²⁹⁰ Martin, pp. 335-343.

²⁹¹ Terry Martin and Ronald Grigor Suny, eds. *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 14.

²⁹² Rittersporn, p. 1250.

Secretary of the Communist Party in Georgia in 1931, and finally, as the First Secretary of the Transcaucasian Communist Party in 1932. During these years, Beria, as the aide of Stalin, enforced the Soviet domination over the Transcaucasian nationalities and practiced the purges in the region on small scale. However, after the Kirov murder of 1934, Beria operated the purges in Transcaucasia in full force.

For Transcaucasia, the alarm bells rang for the initiation of the “Great Terror” when Beria wrote an article named “Turn the Enemies of Socialism to Dust” which was published on August 21, 1936, in all the central newspapers.²⁹³ From this date, several public trials, being not public actually, were held in the region, and party officials were executed for several alleged crimes.²⁹⁴ Specifically in Georgia and Azerbaijan, the terror between the years 1937 and 1938 was worse than of the other non-Russian republics, with the exception of Ukraine.²⁹⁵ In Georgia, for example, 425 out of 644 members of the Party Congress were arrested and executed in only 1937.²⁹⁶

In Georgia, the most important trial took place between July 10 and 12, 1937. The former enemies of Stalin, initially Mdivani as the former Premier of Soviet Georgia and Okudzhava as an Old Bolshevik, were accused of several crimes. The campaign against Mdivani was actually a part of the larger campaign against the old party elite including names such as Kavtaradze, Kiknadze, Chikhladze, and Eliava.²⁹⁷ Indeed, Mdivani had been blamed for being a Trotskyite in 1929, and then he was

²⁹³ Eldar Ismailov, "1937: “Great Terror” in Azerbaijan," *Caucasus Analytical Digest* (No. 22, 2010), p. 10.

²⁹⁴ Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, p. 225.

²⁹⁵ Nahaylo and Swoboda, p. 76.

²⁹⁶ Helen Rappaport, *Joseph Stalin: A Biographical Companion* (California: ABC-CLIO, 1999), p. 97.

²⁹⁷ Levan Avalishvili, "The “Great Terror” of 1937–1938 in Georgia: Between the Two Reports of Lavrentiy Beria," *Caucasus Analytical Digest* (No. 22, 2010), p. 3.

involved in the Party again. At the Zinoviev (1936) and Piatakov (1937) Trials, he was accused of being a terrorist and planning terrorist acts against Yezhov and Beria respectively.²⁹⁸ He and the others, including Okudzhava, were blamed for “terrorism, espionage, and links with émigré Georgian *Mensheviks*”,²⁹⁹ were sentenced to death by the Georgian Supreme Court, and executed.

At the beginning of September, 1937, a new group of Georgian and Transcaucasian Communists were arrested. Thousands of party members and leaders in government were decimated in this wave.³⁰⁰ During 1937 and 1938 the whole leading cadre in the Georgian Communist Party was destroyed. In his secret report to Stalin on October 30, 1937, Beria stated that in 1937 more than 12,000 people were arrested, of which 7,374 were convicted at the end of October 1937 in Georgia.³⁰¹ At the end of the era, a totally new generation was appointed to the leading posts in the Party and the State.³⁰²

In Azerbaijan, the first strong wave of purges began in the autumn of 1936. The former oppositionists within the Bolshevik Party, people suspected of disloyalty to the Stalinist leadership and the former members of the non-Bolshevik parties were arrested in the first place. Also, “insurgent” groups among the peasantry were also identified. The darkest phase of the purges in Azerbaijan began in 1937 and continued till the fall of 1938.³⁰³ This purge of 1937-1938 eliminated most of the top officials including Musabekov, former chairman of the Council of People’s

²⁹⁸ Even after his death, at the Bukharin Trial of 1938, he was denounced as a British agent.

²⁹⁹ Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, p. 225.

³⁰⁰ Nahaylo and Swoboda, p. 76.

³⁰¹ Avalishvili, p. 6.

³⁰² Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, p. 226.

³⁰³ Ismailov, p. 10.

Commissars of Transcaucasia, and Hüseyin Rahmanov, chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of Azerbaijan and the secretary of the Central Committee.³⁰⁴ During this period in Azerbaijan, 2,792 people were executed, including 22 People's Commissars, 49 secretaries of district committees, 29 chairmen of district executive committees, and 4,435 people were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. Although the repressions slowed down in 1938, still around 1,100 people were shot to death.³⁰⁵

At the zenith of the Great Terror era, between the years 1936 and 1937, the ranks of Armenian Communist Party leaders and intellectuals were annihilated by Beria.³⁰⁶ The purges in Armenia were initiated in May 1937 in full force. Former Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, Ter-Gabrielian was the first to be interrogated and shot to death. After the meeting of the Armenian Central Committee on September 15, 1937, Malenkov was appointed to carry out the operations. It was planned that the Armenian leadership would be blamed for the death of Khandzhyan. The First Secretary Amatouni, the Second Secretary, the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, the President of the Republic and the head of NKVD (Peoples Commissariat for Internal Affairs- *Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del*) were arrested and interrogated by Malenkov. At the end of the September 1937, in order to identify the enemies, mass arrests among various social strata, especially political figures and intellectuals were carried out in the Republic.³⁰⁷ Almost the entire elected members of the Central Committee were expelled from the Party and arrested. Apart

³⁰⁴ Nahaylo and Swoboda, p. 76.

³⁰⁵ Ismailov, p. 10.

³⁰⁶ Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Armenia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1995).

³⁰⁷ Eduard Melkonian, "Repressions in 1930s Soviet Armenia," *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, (No. 22, 2010), p. 7.

from the leaders, substantial amount of Party, Soviet, economic and military officials were arrested, many of whom were shot without trials.³⁰⁸ During the Great Terror, 8,837 people became victims in Armenia, including the intellectuals, scientists, priests, and poets. Out of the 4,639 people who were executed, the large majority, 4,530 people were shot between 1937 and 1938.³⁰⁹

Under the Stalinist regime, Transcaucasus was strictly controlled in order to hinder any revival of national identity among its political cadres and intelligentsia. In this context, purges were strictly conducted in the Republics. During the purges, with respect to the total population of the region, substantial number of people, around 50.000, were arrested, exiled and executed in Transcaucasus.³¹⁰ The old cadres of the Party were totally destroyed and new cadres were created. Stalin formed his own cadres and in some cases, appointed them to high ranks in Moscow.

4.3.4 Transcaucasus during the Second World War

Although the footsteps of the Second World War were first heard in the 1920s, the war started when Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. France and Britain went into the war two days later. On June 10, Italy declared war on Britain and only ten days later, on 21 June, France was defeated by Germany and surrendered. A year later, Germany attacked the USSR on June 22, 1941. By 1943, retreats came: Italy surrendered to an Anglo-American invasion on September 3, 1943; Germany to the Anglo-American forces on May 7, 1945, and to the Red Army

³⁰⁸ Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, p. 226.

³⁰⁹ Melkonian, p.9.

³¹⁰ Rappaport, p. 291.

the following day; and Japan to the Americans on September 7, 1945.³¹¹ By the surrender of Japan, Second World War terminated.

During the 1920s, Stalin was well aware of the forthcoming new threats from expansionist Germany and Japan. Therefore, he had already aimed at modernizing the Soviet military industry and consolidating an anti-fascist collective security pact in Europe in 1930s. However, he failed in his latter aim. Contrarily, he signed the Molotov–Ribbentrop non-aggression pact of 1939 with Germany in order to gain space and time for the USSR, since he thought of the war as inevitable.³¹² This pact contained a Secret Additional Protocol on “the delimitation of their respective spheres of interest in Eastern Europe”³¹³ which envisages that Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Bessarabia would be in the Soviet sphere while Lithuania and Vilno would stay in the German sphere.³¹⁴ The protocol also secretly divided Poland between Germany and the USSR. From this time on, the USSR shifted its strategy from a defensive policy to offensive military expansion.³¹⁵ The Red Army invaded Poland on September 17, 1939.³¹⁶ Accordingly, in the period until the German attack on the USSR, Stalin sold war materials to Germany, annexed the Baltic States and the northern part of Romania, attacked Finland and expanded war preparations.³¹⁷

While Stalin was engaged in the Sovietization of the new acquisitions from the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Hitler was preparing for the attack on the USSR that

³¹¹ Mark Harrison, "World War II," In J.R. Millar, ed., *Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan, 2004), p. 1683.

³¹² Marshall, p. 244.

³¹³ Nahaylo and Swoboda, p. 82.

³¹⁴ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the Ussr, and the Successor States*, p. 301.

³¹⁵ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the Ussr, and the Successor States*, p. 303.

³¹⁶ Nahaylo and Swoboda, p. 83.

³¹⁷ John Barber and Mark Harrison, "Patriotic War, 1941-1945," In R.G. Suny, ed., *The Cambridge History of Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 221-222.

he had been looking forward to, for both ideological and strategic reasons. On December 18, 1940, Hitler signed Directive 21, Barbarossa Plan, for the invasion of the Soviet Union.³¹⁸ According to the plan, strategic objective of Operation Barbarossa was to defeat the USSR in a short time before finishing the war against Britain by splitting the front of the main forces of the Russian army which was concentrated in the western part of the USSR and destroying them. It was planned that the German army would reach to the line of Arkhangelsk - Volga – Astrakhan, and particular importance was attached to the capture of Moscow. Although the original date appointed for the attack was May 1941, the attack was postponed to June 22 due to the German operations in Yugoslavia and Greece.³¹⁹

Operation Barbarossa,³²⁰ the most massive military confrontation between the USSR and Germany in history,³²¹ was initiated on June 22, 1941. Hitler ordered the destruction of the Red Army and the acquisition of the Soviet territory in Europe. German forces occupied the Baltic region, Belorussia, Ukraine, and sizable territory in Russia. By the end of September, having advanced more than a thousand kilometers on nearly a thousand kilometers-wide front, the German forces captured Kiev, blockaded Leningrad and approached Moscow.³²² Despite their successes, German forces were compelled to retreat in the Battle of Stalingrad by the start of 1943. The last strategic offensive of Hitler also failed in Kursk in the summer of

³¹⁸ Jonathan Haslam, "Comintern and Soviet Foreign Policy: 1919–1941," In R.G. Suny, ed., *The Cambridge History of Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 659.

³¹⁹ "Barbarossa Plan," In Alexander Mikhaylovich Prokhorov, ed., *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, Vol 2, 1859-1862 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe nauchnoe izdatel'stvo, 1970), p. 1861.

³²⁰ For a detailed analysis on the background and the course of the operation, see: H. W. Koch, "Hitler's 'Programme' and the Genesis of Operation 'Barbarossa'," *The Historical Journal* (Vol. 26, No. 4 1983).

³²¹ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the Ussr, and the Successor States*, p. 310.

³²² Barber and Harrison, p.222.

1943. Still, the complete retreat of the German forces from the Soviet territory was carried out in eighteen more months.³²³

Transcaucasus was of utmost importance for the course of the war. The region was significant for its large oil and gas resources in Azerbaijan, which supplied almost all the petrol and diesel of the USSR.³²⁴ The strategic importance of Azerbaijan for Hitler's Germany came to the fore during the war for two reasons: first, Hitler was planning to control the supplies of the Allies from the Persian Gulf. Second, Azerbaijan was a significant fuel source for Germany.³²⁵ The region was also important for the invasion of the Middle East, which necessitates the neutralization of the Soviet forces in the Black Sea and the Caspian. Therefore, Transcaucasus became one of the primary aims of Germany in 1942. In turn, Hitler planned a three-stage attack under the name of *Edelweiss Plan*, "moving from northwest to southeast, to secure control of the Don River, the mountain passes of the Caucasus, and such major ports as Novorossiisk, Poti, Batumi, and eventually the oilfields of Baku."³²⁶

According to the plan, in detail, *Generalfeldmarschall*³²⁷ Wilhelm List's Army Group A would encompass and demolish the Soviet formations that retreated across the Don to the northern Caucasus, occupy the entire Black Sea coastline, including Soviet naval bases, which would annihilate the Red Fleet. Simultaneously, mountain and light infantry divisions would capture the high ground around Maikop

³²³ Harrison, p. 1686.

³²⁴ Coene, p. 135.

³²⁵ Gregory Twyman, "Azerbaijan and Azeris," In J.R. Millar, ed., *Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan, 2004), pp. 106-107.

³²⁶ Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 195.

³²⁷ The word is translated as "General Field Marshal" which referred to the highest military rank in the armies of several German states.

and Armavir and close the passes of the western Caucasus. Eventually, a mobile force would close the military road between Ossetia and Grozny, and reach to Baku via the Caspian.³²⁸

The Battle of the Caucasus, between the German Army Group A and Soviet North Caucasian and Transcaucasian front, started on July 25, 1942 when German forces crossed the lower Don. Then, the German troops advanced rapidly through the Don and Kuban steppes, captured Stavropol, Krasnodar, Maikop, Cherkessk, Nalchik and Mozdok. By the end of the August 1942, North Caucasian front was defeated. Despite this defeat, the Transcaucasian front succeeded in its defense along the main Caucasus range and the Terek River, and blocked the way to the mountain passes into the South Caucasus. As a result, apart from a small German invasion in Abkhazia, there was not any military activity in the South Caucasus and Dagestan.³²⁹

The Red Army commenced efficient counter-attacks in December 1942 and January 1943 and encircled the German forces which incurred losses.³³⁰ Also, German concentration on the Battle of Stalingrad hindered the German advance towards Baku.³³¹ Having lost the Battle for Stalingrad on February 2, 1943, Army Group A started to retreat from the Caucasus and excluding some of the Black Sea coast, the Caucasus became free of German occupation on April 22, 1943. The Battle came to an end on October 9, 1943 by the withdrawal of the last German troops from

³²⁸ Joel Hayward, "Too Little, Too Late: An Analysis of Hitler's Failure in August 1942 to Damage Soviet Oil Production," *The Journal of Military History* (No. 64, 2000), p. 777.

³²⁹ Coene, pp. 135-136.

³³⁰ Hayward, p. 789.

³³¹ Twyman, "Azerbaijan and Azeris," pp. 106-107.

the Taman peninsula.³³² By then, Soviet forces recaptured the occupied ports, mountain passes and lands from where the German forces retreated.³³³

Before the war ended, Soviet officials initiated a cruel campaign of deportations³³⁴ and ethnic cleansing against the minorities of the Caucasus region on the grounds that they had collaborated with the Germans.³³⁵ During the course of the war, the first deportees in the Caucasus were the Volga Germans. They were deported between September 1941 and January 1942 to special settlements dispersed in Soviet Asia. In May 1942, the Greeks living in the Transcaucasian Republics were deported to Kazakhstan. Then, the NKVD conducted en masse deportations of; Karachays and Kalmyks in 1943, and Chechens, Ingushs, Balkars, Crimean Tatars, Crimean Greeks, Meskhetian Turks, Kurds, and Hemshinids³³⁶ to Kazakhstan and Central Asia in 1944.³³⁷

Among the other groups, the reason behind the deportation of the Kurds, Hemshinids and Meskhetian Turks was different. These peoples, specifically Meskhetian Turks, were counted as the potential allies of Turkey in the possibility of a war with Turkey.³³⁸ Therefore, 85,000 Meskhetian Turks, 8,700 Kurds and 1,400 Hemshinids³³⁹ living in Georgia were deported together to the special settlements in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kirghizia in November 1944. The decree ordering the

³³² Coene, p. 136.

³³³ King, p. 196.

³³⁴ The deportations were planned by Stalin and Beria, the NKVD was responsible for the implementation of the deportations, and Soviet security apparatus was in charge of the strict administration and supervision of special settlements where the deported people were forced to live. These special settlements for deportees mostly located in Kazakhstan, Central Asia, the Urals, and Siberia.

³³⁵ Rappaport, p. 291.

³³⁶ Hemshinids are Muslim Armenians.

³³⁷ J. Otto Pohl, *Ethnic Cleansing in the USSR, 1937-1949* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), p. 2.

³³⁸ Isabelle Kreindler, "The Soviet Deported Nationalities: A Summary and Update," *Soviet Studies* (Vol. 38, No. 3, 1986), pp. 391-392.

³³⁹ Coene, p. 137.

deportation of these nations did not accuse them with collaboration with the Germans or espionage unlike the others; they were seen as potential threats and deported in order to improve the security of the borders of the Georgian SSR and the USSR.³⁴⁰

According to the numbers that N. Bugai gave, 749,613 Germans; 69,267 Karachays; 93,139 Kalmyks; 387,229 Chechens; 91,250 Ingushs; 44,415 Balkars-Kabardinians; 183,155 Crimean Tatars³⁴¹; 12,422 Crimean Bulgarians, 9,621 Armenians and 15,040 Greeks; 91,095 Meskhetian Turks, Kurds and Hemshinids were deported in the USSR between 1941 and 1944.³⁴²

The Great Patriotic War between the USSR and Nazi Germany lasted almost four years from the initiation of Operation Barbarossa (June 22, 1941) to the fall of Berlin (May 9, 1945). It is estimated that nearly 26 million Soviet citizens,³⁴³ of whom 20 million were men, died during the war.³⁴⁴ While the war devastated the USSR economically, it contributed to the strengthening of the Stalinist regime. The victory over Nazism provided support for the Soviet system which was nourished by the apotheosis of Russian motherland, patriotism, and national traditions.³⁴⁵ Stalin left his discourse of “a union of equal nations” and attributed a leadership to the Russian people of whom he propagandized superiority over all other peoples of the

³⁴⁰ Pohl, p. 131.

³⁴¹ Kemal Özcan gives the number of deported Crimean Tatars as 238.500, (See: Kemal Özcan, "II. Dünya Savaşı Sırasında Sovyetler Birliği'nde Yaşanan Sürgün Hadiseleri," *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları* (No. 141, 2002). Sheehy and Nahaylo give the number as between 200.000 and 250.000. (See: Ann Sheehy and Bohdan Nahaylo, *The Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans and Meskhetians: Soviet Treatment of National Minorities* (Minority Rights Group Report, 1980).

³⁴² Alexander Statiev, "Soviet Ethnic Deportations: Intent Versus Outcome," *Journal of Genocide Research* (Vol. 11, No. 2-3, 2009), p. 246; Pohl, p. 5.; See: Nikolai Bugai, *The Deportation of Peoples in the Soviet Union* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 1996).

³⁴³ Coene, p. 135.

³⁴⁴ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the Ussr, and the Successor States*, p. 331.

³⁴⁵ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the Ussr, and the Successor States*, p. 335.

USSR.³⁴⁶ This approach marked the beginning of a new era of repression for the three major Transcaucasian nationalities.

³⁴⁶ Nahaylo and Swoboda, p. 95.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The three titular nations of Transcaucasus witnessed significant changes since they came under the rule of the Russian Empire. During the period under the Russian rule, social, economic, and political developments took place within the region. First of all, with the development projects of the Tsarist Russia, the region was industrialized and modernized. On the other hand, the Russification attempts of the empire created a sense of national awakening among the three major Transcaucasian nationalities and contributed to the formation of local intellectual elites and national movements which would maintain themselves in the Soviet and post-Soviet eras.

On the social strata, discriminatory practices of the Russian power towards the Transcaucasian nationalities laid the foundations of ethnic antagonisms, which would later be strengthened by the Soviet power. The dissimilarities in the economic statuses and political views of the titular nationalities of the region eternalized the barriers of their cultures, religions and languages. These differences became more evident during and after the First World War and resulted in temporary administrative unifications and separations. The titular nationalities of Transcaucasus

ran through a sovereign era from the fall of the Russian Empire to the Bolshevik takeover of the region. In this era, they had the chance to practice their own political programs which differentiated from each other since they had experienced different courses of development in the preceding decades.

Despite these developments, the tremendous change of the Transcaucasian nations coincided with the establishment of the Soviet power on the region. The Soviet state dictated the economic, political and military union of the independent republics of Transcaucasus at first. However, the formation of the short-lived Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, in line with this aim, once more manifested the huge economic, social and political differences between the three major nationalities. In fact, the dilemma of the Soviet power was the difficulty of dealing with a border region of which major nationalities were engaged in hostilities towards each other, along with the minority nationalities. During the process of Soviet state building, Transcaucasia was re-shaped in every respect. Specifically, it would not be an overstatement to assert that Stalin's nationalities policy completely transformed the region, and more than that, it shaped the future of Transcaucasus.

First and most of all, with the delimitation of borders and the creation of autonomous republics and oblasts, and then, with *korenizatsiia*, New Economic Policy, collectivization and purges, the Soviet nationalities policy was exercised over the Transcaucasian nationalities. Obviously, these practices had bitter results. Considering that the Soviet nationalities policy was based on the use of nationality factor as a tool to prevent any nationalist demand in a multinational state, it can be

claimed that their distinctive nationalities became both a blessing and a curse at the same time for the Georgians, Azerbaijanis and Armenians.

By means of delimitation of borders, an ethnic mosaic of Union republics, autonomous republics, autonomous regions and non-territorial national autonomies came into being. With the re-drawing of the map of the region, ethnically different peoples were compelled to live together, in a way ignoring their religious and/or linguistic differences, while in other cases the peoples belonging to the same ethnic group were separated from each other. This policy would show its impacts in the shape of intense conflicts after the 1980s, especially after the break-up of the Soviet Union.

On the other hand, under the policy of *korenizatsiia*, local national cadres of the titular nationalities of Transcaucasus were integrated into the Soviet institutions such as the labor unions and the party organs and went through an experience of quasi-nation state in the 1920s. Nevertheless, this process stayed ephemeral. During the 1930s, Stalin aimed at creating a multinational, Russian speaking Soviet state. Therefore, more authoritarian and unitary approaches prevailed on the Bolshevik ideals of self-determination. On the social and economic level, a reform process including the industrialization and collectivization resulted in a more centralized administration in Transcaucasus, which, in time, imposed uniform cultural and educational policies as well. Finally, the purges in the era of “Great Terror” destroyed the old local Transcaucasian political cadres, elites and intellectuals and irreversibly affected the collective political and social memory of the Georgians, Azerbaijanis and Armenians.

It should be kept in mind that the Great Patriotic War also contributed to the transformation of the Transcaucasian nationalities. The Soviet victory over Nazism strengthened the Soviet system which started to affiliate itself with the Russian values. The Bolshevik discourse of “a union of equal nations” was abandoned and the superiority of Russian people over all other peoples of the USSR was propagandized, which marked the beginning of a new era of repression for the three major Transcaucasian nationalities.

All in all, Soviet nationalities policy in Transcaucasus gave concessions to the nationalities on the one hand, and centralized the authority while assimilating the ethnic groups on the other. Still, the republics were developed economically; they were industrialized and urbanized. Apart from that, the rate of literacy and education increased proving that the Soviet system transformed the Transcaucasian republics from rural societies to industrialized, educated urban societies despite the system’s problematic aspects. Most importantly, due to the Soviet assimilation policies, Transcaucasian nationalities acquired an increased awareness of themselves as national entities.

Among all these developments, the administrative arrangements in the region hold a significant position. Although the arrangements were carried out in order to eliminate any nationalist demands, the distorted ethnic balance created an adverse effect. The inter-ethnic discords resulted in increasing nationalist and separatist tendencies and clashes between the minority and titular nationalities of the region, and eventually turned the region into an area of frozen conflicts.

The long-lasting results of the territorial arrangements of the 1920s and the 1930s in Transcaucasus resurrected in 1980s and 1990s. By the 1980s, the tension between the South Ossetians and the Georgians, had already mounted. During the Gorbachev period the Ossetians renewed their demands for the unification of the two autonomous republics of the Ossetians into a single entity,³⁴⁷ and on the eve of the dissolution of the USSR, South Ossetians started to express their aim of separation from Georgia. In September 1990, South Ossetia declared its independence. Upon the declaration, in January 1991, Georgian forces entered into South Ossetia and fightings took place during 1991 and 1992 between the South Ossetians and the Georgians. Despite the ceasefire which was signed in June 1992, there were several clashes until 1995. Further accords were signed in 1996, but the political situation remained unresolved. South Ossetians recapitulated their demands for independence under the rule of Saakashvili. Escalating tensions resulted in the Georgian invasion of the region in August 2008.

In Abkhazia, protests were erupted against Georgia in 1957, 1964, 1967 and 1978.³⁴⁸ In 1988 and 1989, the Abkhaz renewed their claims for independence and secession from Georgia, which resulted in a boosted feeling of nationalism among the Georgians. The protests in Tbilisi in April 1989 were suppressed by the Soviet troops. The tension increasingly intensified from then on.³⁴⁹ In April 1991, Abkhazia declared its independence, and the Georgian troops interfered in Abkhazia in an aim to restore the order in August 1992. Despite the cease-fires, negotiations, and UN proposals, the conflict continued. The clashes broke out in 1998, 2001 and 2004

³⁴⁷ Boeck, p. 1122.

³⁴⁸ Horowitz, p. 643.

³⁴⁹ Coene, p. 149.

again, and revived during the August 2008 War. As an internationally unrecognized state, Abkhazia stayed also as a region of frozen conflict.

As in the cases of the South Ossetians and Abkhazians, the Adjars voiced their demand on keeping their autonomous status in 1989. However, when Gamsakhurdia came to power in Georgia in 1991, he sought for the termination of Adjara's autonomous status. Protests for the preservation of autonomy emerged in Adjara in April 1991. The efforts of the Adjars to keep their autonomous status succeeded under Aslan Abashidze's rule (1991-2004). Moreover, in comparison with the other autonomous oblasts and autonomous republics of Transcaucasus, Adjara has escaped from the post-Soviet chaos in the region to some extent.³⁵⁰ Nevertheless, in 2004, Georgia mobilized its forces in the region in order to redeem its authority over the region, and toppled Abashidze's rule.

Nakhichevan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was also severely suffered from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Armenian assaults, sometimes in the form of embargos in the late 1980s. Today, Nakhichevan still maintains its internationally recognized autonomy as a part of Azerbaijan,³⁵¹ and it has established close relations with Turkey since 1990s.

In de-Stalinization era, nationalist protests emerged among the Armenians demanding the inclusion of Nagorno-Karabakh region into the Armenian SSR and these protests were transformed to a bloody war between the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis during the *glasnost* era. From this time on, the region became a major

³⁵⁰ Cornell, pp. 163-166.

³⁵¹ Gregory Twyman, "Nakhichevan," In J.R. Millar, ed., *Encyclopedia of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan, 2004), p. 991.

issue for Transcaucasus,³⁵² and since 1988, when the dispute turned into an inter-ethnic violence, the temperature of the dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh was hardly below the boiling point.³⁵³

By the end of 1993, Armenians took the control of most of the region along with the neighboring parts of Azerbaijan to the west and south. Despite the unofficial cease-fire in 1994 through Russian mediation, there have been still small clashes since 1994.³⁵⁴ The negotiations conducted by the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe also did not succeed to resolve the problem on the status of the region.³⁵⁵ Therefore, a final political resolution to the situation has not been concluded, which turned the problem into a frozen conflict destabilizing Transcaucasus,³⁵⁶ and the region is currently a *de facto* part of Armenia.

All the above-mentioned developments evidently demonstrate that the nationalities policy, especially in the form of territorial re-setting in the region contributed much to the contemporarily volatile situation of Transcaucasus.

Consequently, this thesis attempts to shed light on the evolution of Transcaucasian nationalities under the Soviet rule. Approximately 25 years of Soviet rule until 1945 presented both benefits and drawbacks for these nationalities. It is undeniable that the region witnessed remarkable modernization and development.

³⁵² Kolsto and Blakkisrud, p. 487.

³⁵³ Archie Brown, "The Gorbachev Era," In R.G. Suny, ed., *The Cambridge History of Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 345.

³⁵⁴ Nagorno-Karabakh parliament declared its independence in 1996. However, its independent situation was not recognized by any single state.

³⁵⁵ Libaridian, p. 990.

³⁵⁶ Aydın Balayev and Aliaga Mamedov, "The Karabakh Conflict and Present Day Situation," In Ole Hoiris and Sefa Martin Yürükel, eds., *Contrasts and Solutions in the Caucasus* (Oxford: Aarhus University Press, 1998), p. 345.

Furthermore, the Soviet rule contributed to the national awareness and political culture of Georgians, Azerbaijanis and Armenians, which each of the nationalities have sustained within their independent states after the breakup of the USSR. However, on the other hand, the distrust originating from the assimilation practices, purges, forced modernization and the problematic administrative-territorial composition created by the nationalities policy generated a precarious and fragile setting in the region.

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