

ENC ANALYSIS

Russia's disinformation campaigns in the occupied territories of Georgia: a brief analysis of speeches and historical documentation

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Author: Nika Chitadze (ENC External Advisor)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Nika Chitadze is a specialist in Caucasus geopolitics, World Politics and strategic affairs. He is a Professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the International Black Sea University and visited Professor at the European University and Caucasus International University in Tbilisi, Georgia. He is the Director of the Center of International Studies at the International Black Sea University, and also President of the George C. Marshall Alumni Union, Georgia – International and Security Research Center. Dr. Chitadze previously served as senior advisor on the National Security Council of Georgia and was Head of the Public Relations Division of the State Agency for Regulation of Oil and Gas Resources of Georgia. He has also held senior positions in the Department of Strategic and Military Policy at the Georgian Ministry of Defense and foreign policy research and analysis center of the Ministry of Foreign affairs. Dr. Chitadze has received his educational credentials in Georgia (Tbilisi State University and Diplomatic Academy of Georgia) as well as several international higher educational institutions, including Oxford University in the UK, George C. Marshall European College for Security Studies (Germany) and several other well-known European educational institutions. He is the author of about 220 researches and articles and six books on Geopolitics, World Geography and International Relations.

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Vladimir Putin's disinformation campaign distorts the history of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region (the former South Ossetian Autonomous District): a brief analysis of speeches and historical documentation

Introduction

Within the framework of Russia's policy against Georgia one of the main results has been the illegal occupation of Abkhazia and the former South Ossetia Autonomous Region) a further cause of concern is the Kremlin's current policy of spreading misinformation about the history of Georgia.

One striking example of this is the distortion of historical facts exemplified by Moscow's attempt to justify its aggressive actions against Georgia before the international community by claiming that historically neither Abkhazia nor the Tskhinvali region have ever been part of Georgia, instead claiming that it was Georgia, which occupied the Abkhazia and "South Ossetia". Russian President Vladimir Putin regularly portrays the period of the Soviet Union as a clear example of this historical revisionism, when the two Georgian leaders of the Communist Party - J. Stalin and L. Beria - initiated the forceful incorporation of Abkhazia and "South Ossetia" within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic during which both Ossetian and Abkhazian people were under serious pressure. Later, President Putin attempted to legitimize his stance by noting that Russia protected both Ossetian and Abkhaz peoples from a Georgian "genocide" while "restoring historical justice."¹ Within the framework of the Kremlin's hybrid war, the situation culminated following an interview with President Putin in the summer of 2019 where he gave extensive interviews to various media outlets and continued pursuing his narrative on Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region.

¹Основа. 2019. Путин напомнил Грузии о геноциде осетин и оккупации Абхазии. 9 июля 2019
<http://osnova.news/n/3916/>

Taking into account the current situation described above, it should be considered the duty of every Georgian citizen and, first of all, Georgian scientists, to provide objective information to the international community, including the Russian community and inhabitants of the two Regions of Georgia about the historical belonging to Georgia of the territories of Abkhazia and former South Ossetia.

The primary purpose of the current research paper is therefore to provide a detailed and fact-based analysis of the historical chronology of Abkhazia and Samachablo in order to reignore the lie that Russian President Vladimir Putin spread by the appealance to a wide audience in order to distort history of Georgia. In this regard, one of the basic aims of the article is to use preferably Russian sources itself and by this way maximally avoid providing the reader with the general character of the research in favor of a Georgian-biased narrative.

Georgia and Russian economic pressure

During his interview in Summer 2019, President Putin declared, that despite the mass protests in Georgia against Russian occupation and one journalist's statements (Giorgi Gabunia's broadcast on Rustavi-2 TV, when Georgian journalist used the bad words by TV Channel toward the Russian President) he opposed the adoption of sanctions (e.g. economic sanctions) against Georgia as a sign of respect to the Georgian people². This perspective is however best understood when analyzed in relationship to the economic export importance of Georgia in Russia. In fact, economically speaking, Georgian export to Russia have grew by 26% within the first seven months of 2019³. More than 60% (around 53 million bottles) of Georgian wine has been sold on the Russian market in 2018 alone⁴. Based on such strong figures of trade, it is clear that Russia intends to regain Georgian economic dependence on Russia. By not sanctioning a growing economic

² Газета. Ру. 2019. «Не море, а болото»: грузины испытывают терпение России. Retrieved from: <https://www.gazeta.ru/business/2019/07/09/12487033.shtml>

³ Forbes. Georgia. Georgian export in EU increased for 54 percent (In Georgian). საქართველოს ექსპორტი ევროკავშირში 54 პროცენტით გაიზარდა. Retrieved from: <https://forbes.ge/news/7021/ivlisSi-saqarTvelos-eqsporTi-evrokavSirSi-54-procentiT-gaizarda>

⁴ Georgian Wines. In 2018, 86,2 million bottles of wine were exported from Georgia to 53 countries. Retrieved from: <http://georgianwine.gov.ge/En/News/23618/>

sector; which increases Georgian export dependence on Russia, President Putin is likely to be indirectly increasing the political dependence of Georgia on Russia as of 2018. This can be hypothesized to be a preemptive calculation, in which Russia not only renders Georgia militarily vulnerable and under constant information warfare, but equally possesses a new bargaining chip, namely the economic leverage, which will persuade Georgian exporters from maintaining a less critical approach towards Russia.

Putin distorts Georgian history: the occupied territories in historical context

In an extensive interview - in which President Putin "taught a history lesson" - the attitude towards Georgia was apparent. In the past, many politicians and experts in Moscow have tried to rewrite the history of Georgia to Russia's favor. In that sense, President Putin should not be regarded as an exception. Importantly however, it should be noted that President Putin's comments suffer from serious factual limitations and incorrect historical narratives regarding the regions of Abkhazia and Samachablo (former South Ossetia).

Confirming such inaccuracies, President Putin said: "What I'm guiding with, we have to look back a little at history. Look: Ossetia became a part of the Russian Empire in 1774. Two parts of Ossetia - the South and the North Ossetia integrated to Russia as an independent state"⁵.

When analyzing his statement, a first inaccuracy becomes apparent. The term "South Ossetia" was for the first time used in a Russian newspaper, "Тифлисские ведомости" (Tiflis News), published in Georgia in 1830, when Georgia was already occupied by the Russian Empire⁶. (Note: Tiflis is Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. Russian authorities referred to the city as Tiflis). In the anonymous newspaper article from 1830, the term "South Ossetia" was connected as the name of the Tskhinvali region settled together with Georgian by ethnic Ossetians. In the same article, the term "North Ossetia" is used, referring to what is commonly known as the Ossetian territory of the North Caucasus. After the introduction of both term, before the Sovietization of Georgia, the Russian

⁵ Регнум. 2019. Путин рассказал, что он думает о ситуации в Грузии. Подробности: <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2662863.html>

⁶ Много Рефератов. 2019. Южная Осетия. <http://xn--80aebia3bhibdsc1ay.xn--p1ai/%D1%8E%D0%B6%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%8F-%D0%BE%D1%81%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%8F/>

Empire made an effort to stir up animosity between Georgians and Ossetians. There is ample historical evidence of such divisive maneuvering during the period of Tsarist Russia, which supported the separation of the special "Ossetian District" from the Gori Region (Gori is one of the oldest cities of Georgia) in 1843, which was part of the Tiflis governorate⁷.

A second misconception equally helps to understand President Putin's historically inaccurate statement. This specifically concerns the "voluntary" entrance of "North and South Ossetia" into the Russian Empire⁸, which at times is historically debated. In 1774, a peace treaty was signed in the village of Kuchuk-Kainarji, which ended the Russian-Ottoman war in 1768-74. Today, the village of Kuchuk-Kainarji is located inside of the European Union (EU) in Bulgaria. As a result of the treaty, the Russian Empire established control over important territories in the North Caucasus and the Black Sea region. Many historians, for example Russian scientists Sviatoslav Kniazev and Igor Kukurion believe that it was after the end of this war that the Russian Empire began to consolidate control over the Caucasus⁹. The treaty outlined Russia's new border across the Caucasus until the Terek River¹⁰. An important part of Northern Caucasus, including the territory of modern North Ossetia and Alania became part of the Russian Empire. However, it is necessary and historically accurate to note that as a result of the Kuchuk-Kainarji treaty, no single part of the present-day Georgian territory was a part of the Russian Empire. As for the territory of the former South Ossetian Autonomous Region, during this period (1774) it was part of the Georgian Kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti, followed by its abolition and annexation by the Russian Empire in 1801 which violated the bilateral treaty between Russia and Kartli-Kakheti Georgia from 1783¹¹. The following

⁷ Акты Кавказской археологической комиссии, Тифлис, 1885, т. IX, с. 749

⁸ Регнум. 2019. Путин рассказал, что он думает о ситуации в Грузии.

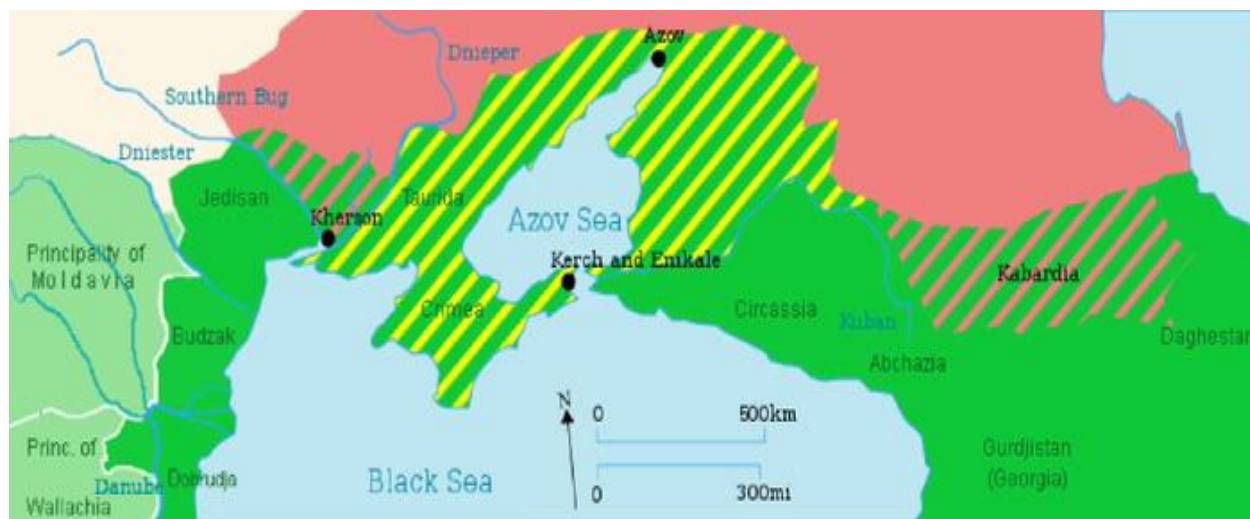
Подробности: <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2662863.html>

⁹ RT, 2019. «Победоносный дух»: какую роль в истории России сыграла победа над турками в войне 1768—1774 годов. <https://russian.rt.com/science/article/651788-rossiya-turtsiya-pobeda-dogovor>

¹⁰ Дружинина Е. И. Кючук-Кайнарджийский мир 1774 года (его подготовка и заключение). — М.: Изд-во АН СССР, 1955. <https://runivers.ru/lib/book8956/478692/>

¹¹ Сборник архивных документов. М., Русская книга, 1992 Договор о признании царем Карталинским и Кахетинским Ираклием II покровительства и верховной власти России (Георгиевский трактат) 24 июля 1783 г. <http://www.hist.msu.ru/ER/Text/georgia.htm>

map was redrawn based on existing Russian sources related to the territories, which were annexed as a result of the treaty of 1774, where no name of “Ossetia” is present.



Source: КЛЮЧИ ОТ КРЫМА И МОРЕЙ. КЮЧУК-КАЙНАРДЖИЙСКИЙ МИРНЫЙ ДОГОВОР (KEYS FROM CRIMEA AND SEAS. KYUCHUK-KAYNARJIY PEACE AGREEMENT). <https://www.liveinternet.ru/users/4768613/post334845346/>

The word "Ossetia" is never mentioned in any of the articles in the Kuchuk-Kainarji Treaty, as can be seen from Russian-sourced evidence. For example, according to the Russian news portal История РФ (History of Russian Federation), the Kuchuk-Kainarji agreement, it is demonstrable that Russia annexed territories. Here is the unedited text, in Russian:

“Мир был заключен 10 июля 1774 г. В деревне Кючук-Кайнарджи. К России отходили причерноморские города Керчь, Еникали, Кинбурн. Российской признавалась Кабарда на Северном Кавказе. Россия получила право иметь военный и торговый флот на Черном море. Торговые суда могли беспрепятственно проходить в Средиземное море через турецкие проливы Босфор и Дарданеллы. Дунайские княжества (Валахия, Молдавия, Бессарабия) формально остались за Турцией, но фактически Россия держала их под своей защитой. Турция обязывалась выплатить огромную контрибуцию в 4 млн. Рублей. Но самой существенной потерей Блистательной порты являлось признание независимости Крымского ханства”¹².

¹² История РФ (2019). Кучук-Кайнарджийский мир с Османской империей. 1774. <https://histrf.ru/lenta-vremeni/event/view/kuchuk-kainardzhiiskii-mir-s-osmanskoj-impieriei>

This is the English translation of the Treaty:

“The peace was concluded on July 10, 1774 in the village of Kucuk-Kainardzhi. The Black Sea cities of Kerch, Yenikali, Kinburn become territories of Russia. Kabarda was recognized as Russian in the North Caucasus. Russia gained the right to have a military and merchant fleet in the Black Sea. Merchant ships could freely pass into the Mediterranean Sea through the Turkish Bosphorus and Dardanelles. The Danube principalities (Wallachia, Moldova, Bessarabia) formally remained with Turkey, but in fact Russia kept them under its protection. Turkey pledged to pay a huge indemnity of 4 million rubles. But the most significant loss of the Brilliant Port was the recognition of the independence of the Crimean Khanate.”¹³

Demonstrably, there are no mentions of the terms "South Ossetia" and "North Ossetia". With regard to the North Caucasus territories, the treaty only mentions about "Kabarda".

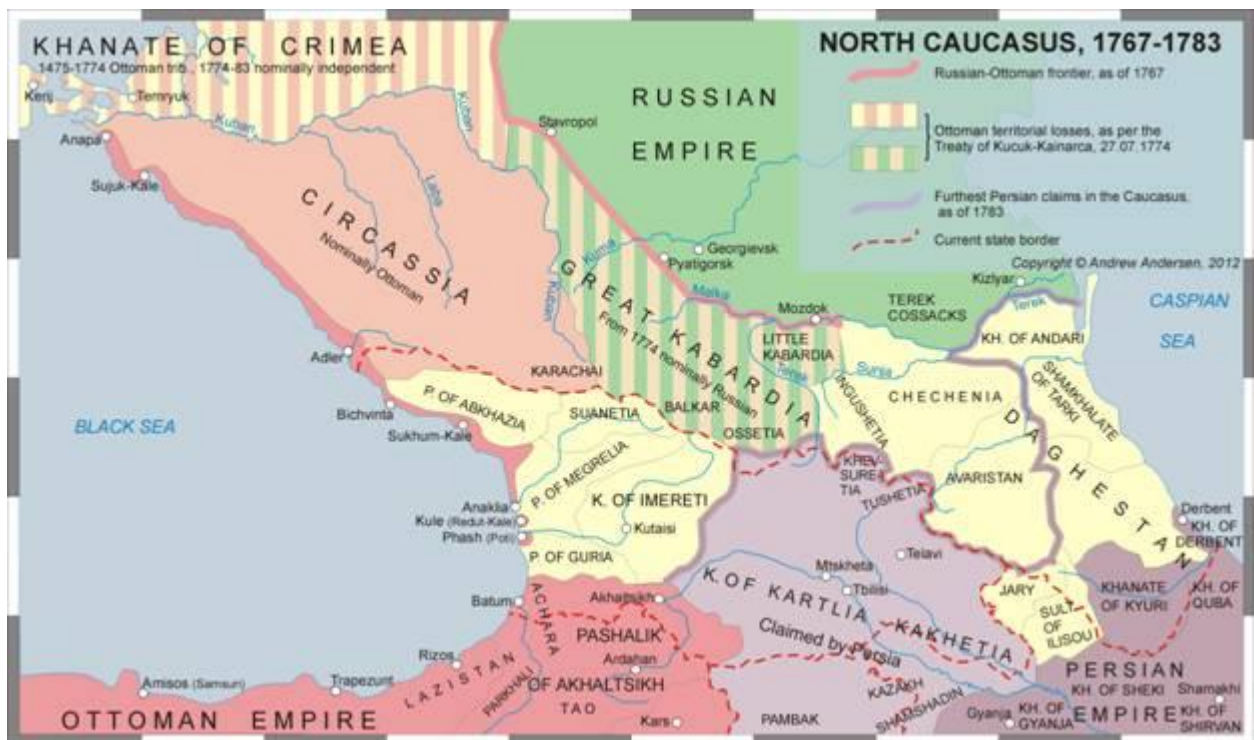
In addition, it should strike the reader as paradoxical that President Putin would mention this particular treaty, due to the fact that the agreement mentions the Crimean Khanate, which historically was a vassal of the Ottoman Empire and under the treaty's Turkish requirement stipulated for the Russian Empire to recognize the independence of the Crimean Khanate.

Crimea was later conquered by Russia in 1783. The Russian government's claim of "restoring historical justice" was used by President Putin to legitimize the otherwise internationally condemned illegality of the occupation of Crimea in 2014, the latter being summarized succinctly by the United Nations General Assembly vote and the OSCE PACE Statement condemning Russia's territorial violation of Ukraine¹⁴. The Kuchuk-Kainarji treaty clearly shows that Crimea historically has never belonged to Russia until the late 18th century. Accordingly, Moscow has no legal or moral right to announce Crimea as a "Russian historical land", while it should be noted from a demographic

¹³ Author's translation.

¹⁴ Council of Europe, 2014. Parliamentary Assembly. PACE strongly supports Ukraine's territorial integrity and national sovereignty. <http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/News/News-View-EN.asp?newsid=4908&lang=2&cat=17>

standpoint that Crimean Peninsula's Indigenous residents are not culturally Russian, but principally Crimean Tatars (with their own distinct religions, culture and history).



Source: <https://baltvilks.livejournal.com/68540.html>¹

Within the context of annexation, the revision of documents and historical narratives remain key. For example, with regards to the Caucasus, there are no maps or archival documents, where the term “South Ossetia” is mentioned. As can be seen in the map, provided by livejournal, there is no mention of “South Ossetia”, a visible trend among all maps from the 18th and 19th centuries¹⁵. This map relates to the Russian Tsarist expansionist periods in the Caucasus within the period of 1783-1878, clearly indicating missing references to “Ossetia” in the North Caucasus which would have been bordering the Georgian Kingdom Kartlia-Kakhetia. As it is known, historically territory of Ossetia – since the ancient period – having been settled by Alan tribes, was and is located in North Caucasus, with its modern name North Ossetia – Alania, which is the part of Russian Federation and which has the common border with Georgia.

¹⁵ Livejournal, 2012. Fragmentation of Oppressed Nations as an Instrument of Keeping W. Caucasus under Russian Control. <https://baltvilks.livejournal.com/68540.html>

President Putin has also been recorded as saying that during the Russian Empire, the South of Ossetia was part of the Tiflis governorate, adding that there was no Georgia, only the Tiflis governorate. The Tiflis governorate was created by Tsarist Russia as a result of the gross violation of the Georgievsk Treaty, which was a bilateral treaty concluded between the Russian Empire and the East Georgian Kingdom of Kartalia-Kakhetia on July 24, 1783¹⁶. According to this treaty, together with other articles it was clearly mentioned, that the Statehood of Eastern Georgian Kingdom had to be preserved¹⁷. However, later as a result of violation regarding this treaty by Russia in 1801, when Eastern Georgia (and later other regions of historical Georgia) were occupied and annexed and became a part of Russian Empire by force¹⁸. As a result of this occupation, the Tiflis governorate was created and it remains historically factual to recall that Georgian statehood has three millennia of history and was thus one of the oldest states in the world to be created many centuries before the creation of other countries, including Russia¹⁹. For example, in the map presented below the Georgian Kingdoms Colchis and Iberia during the 19th century, where the modern territories of Abkhazia and former South Ossetian Autonomous District are located within the territories of Colchis and Iberia.

¹⁶ Густерин П. Российская империя и Кавказ. — Саарбрюккен: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, 2014. — 64 с

¹⁷ Договор о признании царем Карталинским и Кахетинским Ираклием II покровительства и верховной власти России (Георгиевский трактат) 24 июля 1783 г. <http://www.hist.msu.ru/ER/Etext/georgia.htm>

¹⁸ Eadaily, 2017. Этот день в истории: 1801 год — манифест о присоединении Грузии к России. Подробнее: <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2017/01/30/etot-den-v-istorii-1801-god-manifest-o-prisoedinenii-gruzii-k-rossii>

¹⁹ David Marshall Lang, 1966. *The Georgians* (New York: Praeger)



Source: Colchis and Iberia, IV-III centuries B.C. (Alexandri magni imperium et expeditiones, Félix Delamarche, 1833)

The processes that followed were based on the establishment of a united state, in this case the Russian Empire, through annexations. In this specific case, Russia annexed the Kingdom of Kartlia-Kakheti in 1801, which also included the territory that the Bolsheviks referred to as the autonomous district of South Ossetia in 1922. The annexed territories of Eastern Georgia were incorporated into the Tiflis governorate and later the annexed territories of Western Georgia were also included into the governorate of Kutaisi. As a consequence, it should be added that the annexations by the Russian Empire de facto divided Georgia into two artificial administrative units, as can be seen in the maps provided.

In the aforementioned interview, President Putin also claimed that Georgian troops in Ossetia were acting brutally in 1919 and 1920, which is essentially the same as what is called genocide today²⁰. These claims equally deserve some historical specifications. During the independence of Georgia within the period between 1918-1921, the Bolshevik uprisings (which were supported by Soviet Russia) took place in the Shida Kartli region

²⁰ Georgian Journal. 2019. President Putin falsifies History of Georgia. <https://www.georgianjournal.ge/society/35983-president-putin-falsifies-history-of-georgia.html>

(the Autonomous District of South Ossetia did not exist then). The authorities of the Georgian Democratic Republic took the military action only after the Bolsheviks had seized power in Tskhinvali , appealing to the Leader of Bolshevik Russia – Vladimir Lenin – and announced the creation of the "Soviet Socialist Republic of South Ossetia" and separation from Georgia²¹. Both Ossetian and Russian Bolsheviks were involved in the uprising. Based on the principles of national sovereignty, the Georgian military attempted to restore constitutional order, thereby suppressed the rebellion several times, which are referred to as illegal band formations in the Shida Kartli region, while the civilian population retained largely unaffected in the region according to historical documentation²². As for claims of genocide, as of 2020, no peer-reviewed or historically archived documentation exists to support this claim, unlike ample documentation proving the empirical genocide(s) of the Circassians and the Abkhazians populations by the Russian Empire, which also led to their mass exiles from the territories during the same period. I return in detail to this process in the second part of this analysis. Another paradox, linked to the aforementioned statement by President Putin, is tied to the harsh and internationally criticized Russian stifling of the uprisings during the military operations in Chechnya. For example, during the first war in Chechnya, in 1994-1996, accounts have been provided which document the disappearance and murder of over 100.000 people, while refugee figures from the same period amount to approximately 1 million²³. As a result of two wars in Chechnya, according to the international sources, about 250.000 people, of which a majority were civilian populations, were killed²⁴. In terms of demography, population estimations show that in the beginning of the 19th century

²¹ Тедеева Ульяна, 2017. CyberLeninka, *ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ ЮГО-ОСЕТИНСКОЙ АВТОНОМНОЙ ОБЛАСТИ КАК РЕЗУЛЬТАТ УСТАНОВЛЕНИЯ СОВЕТСКОЙ ВЛАСТИ В РЕГИОНЕ*. <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/obrazovanie-yugo-osetinskoj-avtonomnoj-oblasti-kak-rezultat-ustanovleniya-sovetskoj-vlasti-v-regione>

²² Ментешашвили. А. Советская Россия и Осетинский сепаратизм в Грузии в 1918—1920 годах <http://sisauri.tripod.com/politic/Osetia.html>

²³ Россия Сегодня. 2019. **Российская оккупация и геноцид в Чечне**. <https://inosmi.ru/social/20160818/237571172.html>.

²⁴ *Гуа Чечен Пресс*, 2005. Велло Нийноя, Латвия, ИА DAYМОНК, МИР ДОЛЖЕН ОСТАНОВИТЬ ГЕНОЦИД В ЧЕЧНЕ. <http://thechechenpress.com/archive-2005-year/280-%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%80-%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B6%D0%B5%D0%BD-%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%82%D1%8C-%D0%B3%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%B4-%D0%B2-%D1%87%D0%B5%D1%87%D0%BD%D0%B5.html>

Chechnya was home to approximately 1,5 million people, whereas the Soviet census from 1926 indicated the number to have fallen to about 400.000, indicating strong demographic shifts caused by exile and instability²⁵.

President Putin also made the following points in public speeches concerning the matter: “This grave legacy of the past not only was not analyzed, but completely neglected by one of the first presidents of modern Georgia, when he completely abolished all autonomies, including Adjara, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. All of this has led to an explosion and a fratricidal war”²⁶.

This point equally deserves revision. The first President of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who never abolished the Abkhazian or Adjarian Autonomous Republics, and the constitution of 1978²⁷ which was active during Gamsakhurdia’s presidency provided the autonomy of these regions. The autonomy of two republics (Abkhazia and Adjara) is provided by the acting constitution of Georgia, which was adopted several years later after the restoration the Georgian independence, particularly in 1995, and text of the constitution exists on Russian language too, where in many articles of the supreme law of Georgia is mentioned about autonomies of Abkhazia and Adjara²⁸.

The South Ossetian Autonomous District was abolished before Georgia's independence from the Soviet Union. Specifically, the district was abolished in December 1990 by a resolution of the Supreme Council (Parliament) of the Republic of Georgia, though this action was preceded by a resolution of the South Ossetian District Council on September 20, 1990, declaring the independence and establishment of a "Soviet Socialist Republic of South Ossetia"²⁹. The decision was made without the consent of the Georgian

²⁵ Same source.

²⁶ Газета. Ру. 2019. «Не море, а болото»: грузины испытывают терпение России. Retrieved from: <https://www.gazeta.ru/business/2019/07/09/12487033.shtml>

²⁷ **КОНСТИТУЦИЯ (ОСНОВНОЙ ЗАКОН) ГРУЗИНСКОЙ СОВЕТСКОЙ СОЦИАЛИСТИЧЕСКОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКИ (15 АПРЕЛЯ 1978 Г.)** <http://nodussr.ru/konstituciya-gruzinskoj-ssr>

²⁸ КОНСТИТУЦИЯ ГРУЗИИ принята 24 августа 1995 года. <https://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texisvtx/rwmain/opendocpdf.pdf?docid=548f04404>

²⁹ МЕЖДУНАРОДНОЕ ИНФОРМАЦИОННОЕ АГЕНТСТВО. ЮЖНАЯ ОСЕТИЯ СЕГОДНЯ. Источник: <https://south-ossetia.info/25-let-nazad-sostoyalsya-referenduma-o-nezavisimosti-ryuo/>

authorities, and later the authorities of the Tskhinvali region scheduled the so-called Elections in the pre-independence Legislature – known as the “People's Choice” (“Nikhasi”) – on December 9, 1990³⁰. This took place without proper consultation of Georgian laws. The Georgian authorities called on representatives of the Tskhinvali region not to hold these elections and they gave the guaranties that the rights of the Ossetian people in Georgia would be maximally protected. However, separatist forces, operating in the Tskhinvali region have ignored all demands of the Georgian authorities. Based on lacking willingness for compromise, the Georgian legislature decided to abolish the Autonomous status of South Ossetia. The demographic reality of today shows that a large number of Ossetians still live outside the former South Ossetian Autonomous District in the different regions of Georgia without any threat, legal violations or discrimination.

Russian myths about Abkhazia

Regarding the second historical region of Georgia – namely Abkhazian - President Putin also mentioned that this region voluntarily became part of the Russian Empire in 1810, as an independent state, or principality³¹.

According to many leading historians, the period between the 9th and 6th centuries BC, the territory of modern Abkhazia was part of the ancient Georgian kingdom of Colchis. It is proved by the works of many foreign scientists (names of Georgiana scientists and Georgian sources are not mentioned specially), for example the history of Abkhazia in the ancient period is researched by David Braund in his work: “Georgia in Antiquity: A History of Colchis and Transcaucasian Iberia, 550 BC – AD 562”³². This position is equally supported by Ronald Grigor in the research “The Making of the Georgian Nation”³³, and Stuart Kaufman, in the work: “Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic

³⁰ Same source.

³¹ **Газета. Ру. 2019.** «Не море, а болото»: грузины испытывают терпение России. Retrieved from: <https://www.gazeta.ru/business/2019/07/09/12487033.shtml>

³² Braund, David (8 September 1994), *Georgia in Antiquity: A History of Colchis and Transcaucasian Iberia, 550 BC – AD 562*, USA: Oxford University Press

³³ Grigor, Ronald, 1994. *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, SUNY. Indiana University Press.

War"³⁴. The special program to the ancient Abkhazia was dedicated by BBC in the program "BBC News – Regions and territories: Abkhazia"³⁵.

In 63BC, the Colchis Kingdom with the modern territory of Abkhazia was subsequently absorbed in 63 BC into the other Georgian Kingdom, the Kingdom of Lazica. The modern territory of Abkhazia was part of the Kingdom of Lazica until 690 A.D.³⁶

Historically, Georgian and Abkhazian principals jointly fought against Byzantine, and later Arab influences. For example, Arab incursions into Abkhazia led by Marwan II, was repelled by Abkhazian principal Leon I jointly with his Lazic and Iberian (two Georgian Kingdoms) allies in 736. Leon I married Mirian's (Georgian principal) daughter, and a successor, Leon II exploited this dynastic union with Georgians. As a result, the capital of the new state on the territory of modern western Georgia (including Abkhazia) was Kutaisi³⁷. During this period, the Georgian language replaced Greek as the language of literacy and culture³⁸. The western Georgian kingdom flourished between 850 and 950 when it annexed significant parts of central Georgia. A period of unrest ensued, which ended as Abkhazia and eastern Georgian states were unified under a single Georgian monarchy, ruled by King Bagrat III (who was buried in the Monastery of Bedia in eastern Abkhazia) at the end of the 10th century and the beginning of the 11th century. Abkhazia was the part of unified Georgian Kingdom till the second half of the XV Century. This factor is recognized by Russian and Soviet sources. This historical documentation is noted in the Great Russian Encyclopedia from 2005 (Большая российская энциклопедия, 2005), (Authors: Арапов, Эрлих)³⁹, as well as the Soviet Short Encyclopedic Dictionary of 1987 (Советский краткий энциклопедический словарь,

³⁴ Stuart J. Kaufman. 2001. *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* (Cornell Studies in Security Affairs) 1st Edition

³⁵ "[BBC News – Regions and territories: Abkhazia](#)". BBC News. London: [BBC](#). 22 November 2011. [Archived](#) from the original on 3 March 2012. Retrieved 19 January 2012.

³⁶ Gregory, Timothy E (2005), *A History of Byzantium*. Wiley-Blackwell; 2 edition (January 11, 2010)

³⁷ Smith, Graham; Vivien Law (1998). [Nation-building in the post-Soviet borderlands](#). Cambridge University Press.

³⁸ Zverev, A. *Ethnic Conflicts in the Caucasus*; Graham Smith, Edward A Allworth, Vivien A Law et al..

³⁹ Арапов Д. Ю., Эрлих В. Р. Абхазия // Большая российская энциклопедия / С. Л. Кравец. — М: Большая Российская энциклопедия, 2005. — Т. 1. — С. 49. — 768 с. — 65 000 экз <https://grani-ru-org.appspot.com/Politics/Russia/d.172993.html>

1987)⁴⁰, including the Russian handbook of Countries in the World, 2005 (Страны Мира, 2005)⁴¹.

Here we can see the map of the unified Georgia, where it is clearly shown, that the modern territory of Abkhazia (North-Western part of Georgia) was one of the regions of Georgian Kingdom.



Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/530298924865643228/>

In the 12th century, the Georgian king David the Builder appointed the son of shah Shirvan Otago as an Eristavi of Abkhazia, who later became the founder of House of Shervashidze (also known as Sharvashidze, or Chachba). In the 1240s, after the occupation of Georgia by the Mongols, new rulers divided Georgia into eight military-administrative sectors (dumans), the territory of Abkhazia contemporary formed part of the duman administered by Tsothne Dadiani – principal of one of the oldest Georgian principality Mengrelia.

In the 16th century, after the disintegration of the unified Georgian Kingdom into small kingdoms and principalities, Principality of Abkhazia (nominally a vassal of the Georgian Kingdom of Imereti) emerged, ruled by the Shervashidze dynasty⁴². Since the 1570s, when the Ottoman navy occupied the fort of Tskhumi (modern Sukhumi), and Abkhazia

⁴⁰ Советский краткий энциклопедический словарь. 1987

⁴¹ Страны Мира, 2005. Справочник. Москва. Россия. 2005

⁴² Hoiberg, Dale H., ed. (2010). "Abkhazia". Encyclopedia Britannica. I: A-ak Bayes (15th ed.). Chicago, IL: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc

came under the influence of the Ottoman Empire and Islam. Under Ottoman rule, the majority of Abkhaz elite converted to Islam.

With regards to the realities of the second half of the 18th century, it should be noted that after the weakening of the influence of the Ottoman Empire in Western Georgia, the Principality of Abkhazia was controlled by the Kingdom of Imereti (Georgian Kingdom in the western part of Georgia). After the annexation of the Kingdom of Imereti by Russia in 1804⁴³, it became Abkhazia's turn. On February 17 of 1810, the Russian emperor Alexander I approved the so-called "demand points" for the Abkhazian prince, however, it was not seen as enough to annex Abkhazia⁴⁴. The Ottoman Empire also had its own interests, and Russia had to use military force to attain its objectives. The occupation of Abkhazia was ultimately completed by the Russian troops that captured the Sukhumi-Kale fortress. However, the introduction of Russian rule in Abkhazia was not greeted with popular joy. The rebellion of the Abkhazians against the Russian Empire in 1824 was overshadowed by a bloody expedition led by General Gorchakov. Such brutal actions of Russia are recognized by Abkhazian historical sources⁴⁵. Russia is accused of committing a genocide of Abkhazian people, when thousands of ethnic Abkhazians (together with Circassians and representatives of the other nationalities from North Caucasus) were exiled from Abkhazia to the Ottoman Empire. In historical literature, this process was referred to as the "Muhajirstvo". For example, up to 50,000 Abkhazians were forced in 1877 to abandon their homeland and relocate in Turkey⁴⁶. Within the period between 1877 and 1907, the Abkhazian nation had the status of "Guilty Nation" within the Russian Empire⁴⁷.

⁴³ Barthold, W. 2000. W. The Encyclopedia of Islam; The Georgian-Abkhaz State (summary), by George Anchabadze, in: Paul Garb, Arda Inal-Ipa, Paata Zakareishvili, editors, Aspects of the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict: Cultural Continuity in the Context of State-building, Volume 5, 26–28 August 2000.

⁴⁴ Русская идея. 2019. Манифест Императора Александра I о присоединении Абхазского княжества к Российской империи. <https://rusidea.org/25030206>

⁴⁵ О. Х. Бгажба, С. З. Лакоба. 2007. История Абхазии с древнейших времен до наших дней. http://apsnyteka.org/106-lakoba_history_of_abkhazia.html

⁴⁶ Lakoba, S. 2013. Thirty years of "guilt" (1877-1907). Retrieved from: <https://abkhazworld.com/aw/history/617-thirty-years-of-guilt-1877-1907-by-stanislaw-lakoba>

⁴⁷ Same source

Returning to the statements quoted above by Russian President Putin, it is noteworthy to mention that he also recounts more recent Abkhazian history in the following way: when the Russian Empire collapsed, after the First World War, Georgia tried to absorb Abkhazia. An independent state of Georgia was created, and with the help of German troops in 1918, Georgia occupied Abkhazia. According to President Putin, the occupants were very cruel toward the local population⁴⁸. This misconception of history largely states that in 1918 the Democratic Republic of Georgia forcibly annexed Abkhazia. On the contrary, the legal process was in most ways opposite to annexation. On June 11, 1918, as a result of the agreement between the National Council of Georgia and the People's Council of Abkhazia, Abkhazia was included in the Democratic Republic of Georgia. According to the request of the People's Council of Abkhazia, the Georgian army was on the territory of Abkhazia before signing this agreement⁴⁹. This army fought both against the Bolsheviks and the Russian General Denikin's "White Guard". Elections of the Constituent Assembly of Georgia were held in 1919 on the territory of Abkhazia, as well as throughout Georgia. Later, according to the agreement of May 7, 1920, Bolshevik Russia recognized independence of Georgia and Abkhazia during this period was part of Georgia⁵⁰. In accordance with the 1921 constitution, Abkhazia received autonomy within the Democratic Republic of Georgia, which was mentioned in the 107-th article of the supreme document of the Georgian Democratic Republic⁵¹. Concerning the history of German troops, these specific troops were deployed in other regions of Georgia and did not participate in the same campaign against Denikin's Russia.

Another historical misconception, promoted by President Putin on various occasions, is linked to the Sovietization of Georgia, including the Socialist Republic of Abkhazia⁵². The Abkhazian Socialist Republic was created by Bolshevik movements artificially and illegally after the occupation of Georgia, but, despite its formal existence, it was largely

⁴⁸ Газета. Ру. 2019. «Не море, а болото»: грузины испытывают терпение России. Retrieved from: <https://www.gazeta.ru/business/2019/07/09/12487033.shtml>

⁴⁹ Наша Абхазия 2019. Договор между правительством Грузинской Демократической Республики и Абхазским Народным Советом. <http://abkhazeti.info/history/20050617451514626297.php>

⁵⁰ Beichman, A. (1991). The Long Pretense: Soviet Treaty Diplomacy from Lenin to Gorbachev. P. 165.

⁵¹ Концепция Конституции Грузии 1921 года /Некоторые вопросы/.-В сборн.: "Вопросы политологии", К? I /3/, Тбилиси, 1993, с. 23-27

⁵² Same source.

dependent on Tbilisi, which is also confirmed by the union agreement, having been signed between Georgia and Abkhazia in December of 1921⁵³. In 1931, the Bolsheviks themselves abolished the status of Socialist republic of Abkhazia as an artificial formation⁵⁴. From this period onwards, Abkhazia received the status of an Autonomous Republic and was part of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, where the rights of Abkhazian people were protected. For example, there was no nation in USSR with a population of around 80.000 inhabitants that had its own television, university, newspapers etc.⁵⁵.

Conclusion

It's important to mention that the process of separation of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region is so deeply rooted that their voluntary and painless return to the unified Georgian legal space under official Tbilisi jurisdiction is very difficult. Georgia today has very limited opportunities to solve this problem and the situation is complicated by the fact that one of the main goals of the Kremlin is to convince the international community that neither Abkhazia nor South Ossetia (historic Samachablo) were historically part of Georgia.

The official policy of the Russian government has tried to justify its imperialist actions by stating that it has moral and legal rights to “protect the rights of the Abkhaz and Ossetian people” (including through military force). Yet the opposite facts – surrounding Russia's illegal actions. At the same time, the international community has recognized the cleansing of Georgian population on the territory of Abkhazia during the 1992-1993 period, when Russia supporting the illegal band formations and terrorist groups while encouraging separatism in Abkhazia. As a result, more than 300.000 people were forcefully exiled from Abkhazia. Particularly, ethnic cleansings was directly recognized by the Budapest⁵⁶ and Lisbon⁵⁷ Summits of the OSCE. The process of genocide was so

⁵³ Салакая: договор с Грузией 1921 года – судьбоносное событие для Абхазии. Спутник Абхазий. <https://sputnik-abkhazia.ru/interview/20161216/1020078421/salakaya-dogovor-s-gruziej-1921-godasudbonosnoe-sobytie-dlya-abxazii.html>

⁵⁴ О. Х. Бражба, С. З. Лакоба. 2007. История Абхазии с древнейших времен до наших дней. http://apsnyteka.org/106-lakoba_history_of_abkhazia.html

⁵⁵ Pipinashvili . 2009. Conflicts in South Caucasus and Regional Stability Problems (In Georgian). P. 116 https://iuristebi.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/cigni_d-pipinashvili_2009.pdf

⁵⁶ OSCE Summit 1994 <https://www.osce.org/mc/39554?download=true>

⁵⁷ OSCE Summit 1996. <https://www.osce.org/mc/39539?download=true>

clear that even Russia itself was forced to support the OSCE resolutions. In 2008, after the military aggression of Russia against Georgia, more than 15.000 of ethnic Georgians were exiled from the territory of former South Ossetian Autonomous District and Upper part of Abkhazia⁵⁸.

In conclusion, it is important to put an emphasis on the Russian government's constant disinformation and 'fake news' tactics, which incorrectly recounts Georgian history, while also underplaying the atrocities and divisions which have been committed. The Kremlin propaganda machine, with President Putin's statements as testament to this asymmetrical policy, must be challenged by both the Georgian government and the Georgian public, based on historical documentation and verifiable information to provide a transparent and objective recounting of the history of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Samachablo).

⁵⁸ OSCE. October, 2008. Ethnic Cleansing of Georgians Resulted from Russian Invasion and Occupation since August 8, 2008. <https://www.osce.org/odihr/34091?download=true>

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