



## STALINIST TERROR IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

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Guest Editor: Giorgi Kldiashvili

## The “Great Terror” of 1937–1938 in Georgia: Between the Two Reports of Lavrentiy Beria

By Levan Avalishvili, Tbilisi

### Abstract

In implementing the “Great Terror” in Georgia, Beria used Stalin’s directives to serve his own personal needs as well. This article lays out the key events launching the repressions in Moscow and then shows how they were carried out on the ground in Georgia.

### Chronology of Events in the USSR

Historians use the term “Great Terror”<sup>1</sup> to unite a series of repressions and political persecutions that unfolded in the Soviet Union in the period between 1937 and 1938. This historical phenomenon is also known as the “Great Purge”, “Mass Terror”, and “Yezhovshchina”. Before examining the events in Georgia, it useful to recall a brief chronology of events in Moscow:

July 2, 1937: The Politburo passed a resolution “On anti-Soviet Elements” and on July 3 sent a telegram to secretaries of the regional organizations of the Party. The directive, signed by Stalin and Molotov declared: “The Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) orders all the secretaries of regional and territorial organizations and all regional, territorial and republican members of the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) to deal with all kulaks and criminals who returned to their residences so that the most hostile of them immediately be arrested and shot. These cases should be administratively handled through the NKVD Troika; whilst the remainder, the less active, but still hostile elements have to be resettled and sent to the districts designated by the NKVD. The CPSU requires the local authorities within five days to present to the Central Committee the composition of the Troika and the number to be shot as well as the number to be exiled”. This telegram, began preparations for the so-called “Kulak Operation.”

On July 16–20, 1937: The People’s Commissar for Internal Affairs of the USSR N. I. Yezhov and his deputy, M. P. Frinovsky held a meeting of heads of central and regional organs of the NKVD devoted to planning and implementing the “Kulak Operation.”<sup>2</sup>

On July 31, 1937, the Politburo approved NKVD USSR order No. 00447 “Concerning the operation for repressing former kulaks, criminals and other anti-Soviet elements”, which set out the objective of defeating “anti-

Soviet elements” and determined the composition of the “operational Troikas” for expediting the processing of these cases. The composition of the Troikas typically included: the Commissar, or head of the NKVD, the Secretary of the Party organization and the public prosecutor of the republic, state or province<sup>3</sup>.

### The USSR Terror Machine

Sentences were imposed in absentia, i.e. without calling the defendant, and without the participation of either a defense lawyer or prosecutor, and the sentences were not subject to appeal. The Troikas enforced death sentences with “the mandatory preservation of secrecy regarding time and place.”

For each region of the Soviet Union quotas were set for the “First Category”—to be shot—and the “Second Category” imprisonment in a camp for a period up to 8–10 years. According to the order, the operation had to last 4 months, during which the plan was to shoot 75,950 persons, and to imprison into camps 193,000 persons (for a total of 268,950 persons)<sup>4</sup>.

The duration of the operation was repeatedly extended. At the request of the regions, new and additional “quotas” were provided. The operation, which was supposed to last only four months, continued until the end of 1938. Until now the debate about the numbers of victims who suffered during “the Great Terror” continues. Official Soviet statistics, which were submitted to Khrushchev in the form of a memorandum by the Special Department Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR on the number of arrested and convicted by the OGPU-NKVD in 1930–1953 indicated a total figure of 1,344,923 prisoners, of whom 681,692 were executed.<sup>5</sup> Of course, these data cannot be considered com-

1 This term became widespread following the publication of British historian R. Conquest’s “The Great Terror” in 1968.

2 Bol’shoi terror: 1937–38. Kratkaya khronika [The Great Terror: 1937–1938. A Brief Chronicle], compiled by N.G. Okhotin and A.B. Roginsky. Journal “Index of Dossier on Censorship”, <http://index.org.ru/journal/26/ter26.html>

3 OPERATIONAL ORDER OF THE PEOPLE’S COMMISSARIAT FOR INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF THE UNION S.S.R. No. 00447. AP RF, 3-58-212, l. 55–78, <http://www.memo.ru/history/document/0447.htm>

4 OPERATIONAL ORDER OF THE PEOPLE’S COMMISSARIAT FOR INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF THE UNION S.S.R. No. 00447. AP RF, 3-58-212, l. 55–78, <http://www.memo.ru/history/document/0447.htm>

5 Memorandum of the Special Department Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR on the number of convicts for the NKVD

plete because they do not include the thousands who were deported, or killed in the process of investigation and during exile.

### The Nature of the Terror

In this quick overview, it is important to mention the different approaches and interpretations which are widespread in historical circles explaining the mechanisms and nature of “the Great Terror.” German researcher Manfred Hildermeier gives four different interpretations of the events. The first view emphasizes the relationship between communist ideology and the terror—this perspective implies that the terror was developed as a major part of communist ideology. The second view develops the concept of totalitarianism, in which the responsibility for carrying out the great purge falls on Stalin. Supporters of the third option (the revisionists) are inclined to the idea that the overall task of deporting millions of people and the mass terror could not be carried out by the will of one man, and suggest that an impulse for violence spread by inertia through the middle and lower layers of society, growing like a snowball. Finally, the fourth option assumes the compatibility of the “totalitarian” hypothesis about Stalin and the “revisionist” continuation of the logic of terror, in the dynamics of power struggles in the middle and lower levels of society<sup>6</sup>.

### Local Implementation in Georgia

“The Great Terror” is distinguished by the centralization of the mass repressions, but this does not mean that the repressive operations of 1937–1938 were not accompanied by a certain amount of spontaneity and local “initiatives”. In order to more holistically understand the real mechanism underlying the functioning of the “Great Purges” we must study not just the top (namely the main office of the Central Committee), but the bottom, where the criminal directives of the center and Stalin were actually implemented, and where the various social, human, nomenklatura and national characteristics of specific regions shaped how the directives from above were carried out. For us it is interesting to use this approach in studying the logic of developments in the Georgian SSR, where the “Great Terror” of the 1930s had its own “unique” features.

On May 15, 1937 the Tenth Congress of the Communist Party of Georgia discussed the report of the First

Secretary L. P. Beria. At the time of this discussion, the wheel of repressions was not yet fully turning.

Beria’s extensive report can be divided into two central parts. The first part of the report discloses the existence of a “Trotskyist-spy-wrecking-terrorist center.” Here the discussion focuses on the well-known case of Budu Mdivani (Chairman of the Supreme Economic Council, the People’s Commissariat of Light Industry, and First Deputy Chairman of People’s Commissars of Georgia) and other top party workers of Georgia—Mikhail Okudzhava, S. Kavtaradze, M. Toroshelidze N. Kiknadze, S. Chikhladze, and G. Eliava. This group of old Bolsheviks was accused of trying to restore the capitalist system in Georgia. Their case is linked with the Trotsky-Zinoviev bloc (center), and they are accused of trying to use “biological weapons”, among other charges. It should also be noted that the group of Mdivani was accused of attempting to murder Stalin, while Beria himself was not alleged to be “a target of the terrorists.” The case of B. Mdivani was a part of the larger campaign against the old party elite and there is reason to believe that in this case, Stalin and Ordzhonikidze had personal motives and interests.

It is also impossible not to notice one interesting excerpt from Beria’s report. Summarizing findings for the units of the Georgian Communist Party, the Secretary of the Central Committee pointed out that despite the fact that “we should fight all forms of counter-revolution, we must at the same time act wisely, in order to avoid falling from one extreme into another. A blanket approach to all former nationalist and Trotskyists, some of which by chance happened to be in their ranks but abandoned Trotskyism a long time ago, can only damage the cause of fighting with real Trotskyites, wreckers and spies.”<sup>7</sup> It is obvious that at this stage of building the repressive machine, Beria did not unconditionally accept one of the main ideas of the “Great Terror”—that there are no former opponents of the system.

The second part of the report is devoted to reviewing the situation among Georgian literary and theatrical groups. After briefly noting the fact of the self-imposed breakdown of various intellectual groups (“Blue horns”, “Academic”, “Lefovists”, “Arifioni” etc.—the elite of literary and academic circles in Georgia) Beria points out that “there are certain individuals among Georgian authors and artists who should reconsider their ties with the enemies of the Georgian people ... They should seriously think about it and draw all necessary conclusions for themselves. For example, Paulo Iashvili, who is now 40 years old, it’s time to mature ... Serious reconsid-

in 1937–1938. December 11, 1953 Copy. SARF, [http://www.rusarchives.ru/evants/exhibitions/xxconvention\\_exp.shtml](http://www.rusarchives.ru/evants/exhibitions/xxconvention_exp.shtml)

6 S. Kroitsberger [Creuzberger] et al. (eds.), *Kommunizm, terror, chelovek: diskussionnye stat'i na temu "Chernoj knigi kommunizma"* [Communism, Terror, Man: Articles on “The Black Book of Communism”], pp. 29–32, Izdatel'stvo “Optima”, Kiev 2001.

7 Former archive of the Communist Party of Georgia—Archive Administration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, 2nd Division. Fund no. 14, no. 11 Description, Case no. 21. pp. 113.

eration of their behavior would not hurt Gamsakhurdia, Javakhishvili, Mitsishvili, Shevardnadze, and even some others. I have listed the writers who should know that the attitude of our Party and Soviet power toward them depends on their future behavior and how quickly they change.<sup>8</sup>

In these threatening messages, Beria gives a final warning to the famous Georgian figures. Backing up his threat with real actions, Beria at the same time informs the audience that the director of Rustaveli Theatre, “the fascist wrecker”, Sandro Akhmeteli had been exposed. For all those who knew about the difficult relationship between Beria and Akhmeteli,<sup>9</sup> it was a clear signal that now Beria embodied Soviet power in Georgia, and that he alone had the right to decide over life and death. The events that unfolded later demonstrated that those persons who had been warned by the First Secretary did not have time “to consider” his “suggestions”—Iashvili was driven to suicide; M. Javakhishvili, N. Mitsishvili and D. Shevardnadze were shot, as were many others. This report clearly shows that Beria not only carried out the direct orders of the center, but also solved his personal problems—strengthening his internal position and achieving his personal goals<sup>10</sup>.

It is interesting that immediately after this report, the main party newspaper Pravda, in its issue for May 22, 1937, criticized the Tenth Congress of the Georgian Party Organizations due to its lack of sharpness and misunderstanding of the clarification concerning the importance of the March plenary session of the Central Committee and the report of Stalin. In his report to Stalin, Beria complained that the bad review for this Congress was ordered from Moscow: “T. Mezin (the correspondent) received a telegram from the editors of Pravda signed by T. Nikitina requiring him to prepare a sharply critical review of the Congress.” In his correspondence with Stalin, Beria, argues that the 10<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of Georgia had taken into account the importance of new policies and defied many enemies of the Party and the Trotskyists<sup>11</sup>.

It is difficult to say whether this negative article in the Pravda was a hint from Stalin himself on tightening repressions in the Georgian Soviet Social Republic, or the result of some backroom intrigue, but it is a fact that Beria prepared his second report more “thoroughly”.

### Carrying Out the Great Terror

Sixteen days after the May Congress in Moscow the first list of persons subject to trial by the Military Collegiums of the Supreme Court of the USSR were sent out to the regions. The first Georgian list, dated May 31, 1937 and signed by Stalin and Molotov, pointed out 139 people for the “First Category”—(to be shot) and 39 for the “Second Category” (10 years imprisonment). The list included defendants from the case of Budu Mdivani and Akhmeteli. Simply looking at these “Stalin lists”<sup>12</sup> makes the extent of the terror in Georgia clear. An examination of the lists for the USSR as a whole in 1937–1938 shows that out of the 38,679 names on them, 3,485 were from Georgia (the third largest number from all the union republics after the Russian SFSR and the Ukrainian SSR)<sup>13</sup>.

If “Stalin’s lists” were mainly focused on cleansing the party and the nomenklatura apparatus, as well as extinguishing people from the “free professions” (e.g. Titsian Tabidze), the allocation limits for Special Troikas primarily concentrated on repressing ordinary citizens. It should be noted that in this area, the Georgian leadership “showed its best side.”

Preparations for the realization of the main phase of the Great Purge began well in advance. Following up on the Politburo’s July 2 order entitled “On Anti-Soviet Elements”, on July 8, 1937 the Communist Party of Georgia sent for approval to Yezhov and Stalin the names of the Special Troika (Deputy People’s Commissar of Internal Affairs—Avksenti Rapava, the Prosecutor of the Republic—Ilarion Talakhadze and the Head of the Republican Militia—Shalva Tsereteli), as well as the preliminary lists of individuals who had been designated for the first (1,419 people) and second (1,562 people) categories. These figures do not include former members of the anti-Soviet parties (2,000 people)<sup>14</sup>.

8 Former archive of the Communist Party of Georgia—Archive Administration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, 2nd Division. Fund no. 14, no. 11 Description, Case no. 21, pp. 82–83.

9 Akhmeteli publicly offended L. Beria, placed his pictures with Stalin in the theater without agreeing with Beria, refused to return the favorites of Beria, Khorava and Vasadze, to the theatre and moved from Tbilisi to Moscow after being disgraced, etc.

10 We have a lot of information about the relationship between Beria and Akhmeteli, especially the case of rehabilitation of the group of the Rustaveli Theatre—“Akhmeteli Case”—L. Avalishvili, G. Kldiashvili—The Archival Bulletin no. 1, 2008 April. Journal of the Archive Administration of the MOIA.

11 Appendix to the Archival Bulletin no. 3, Fall 2008—correspondence between L. Beria and J. Stalin (1937). The Journal of Archive Administration of MOIA.

12 Lists of people convicted under the personal sanction of Stalin and his closest associates in the Politburo of the CPSU and sentenced to different types of punishment; the vast majority were shot. For the first time these lists were published in 2002 on CD, prepared by the Memorial Society and the Archives of the Russian President, <http://stalin.memo.ru/images/intro.htm>

13 Information on the number of people sentenced to death by Military Collegiums of the Supreme Court of the USSR in 1937–38 comes from lists which are stored in 11 volumes in a Special Sector of the Central Committee of the CPSU <http://stalin.memo.ru/images/note1957.htm>

14 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 166, d. 588, l. 36 (copy of the document provided by the society “Memorial”)

On July 31, 1937, an order from Yezhov established an official quota for Georgia for the first category—2,000 people, and the second category—3,000 persons<sup>15</sup>. We want to immediately point out that despite the fact that the order of Yezhov did not allow exceeding limits set without special permission from the center, it gave local leaders the opportunity to transfer prisoners from one category to another<sup>16</sup>.

Immediately upon the receipt of Order No. 00447, full-scale mass terror, touching all sectors of society, erupted in Soviet Georgia. From the correspondence of Stalin and Beria, it can be seen that the latter regularly informed the Center about the ongoing repressive actions. For example, in a memorandum dated August 29, 1937 describing the show trial of the party-leaders in the Sighnaghi District, Beria wrote to Stalin<sup>17</sup>: “The process played an exceptionally important role in raising the awareness of the broad masses of workers about counter-revolutionary, sabotage, and subversion by enemies of the people.” Mass terror in Georgia drove people to the extreme. Anticipating arrests, some people were not able to withstand persecution and chose to commit suicide. For example, Tengiz Zhghenti, the Secretary of Georgia’s Central Election Commission, or the former Secretary of the Adjarian Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia Artemije Geurkov (accused of “Lominadzevshchina” Geurkov followed the example of Beso Lominadze)<sup>18</sup>. Paulo Iashvili, a prominent Georgian poet, committed suicide. Regretting that he did not have a chance to execute him, Beria ordered that the poet be buried as an enemy of the people.

Six months after the May Congress of the Communist Party of Georgia, and only three months after the start of the active phase of the “Great Terror”, on October 28, 1937, Beria presented a report at the plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia “about the wrecking of dangerous organizations in Georgia and activities to combat the effects of sabotage.” In this extensive report, he fairly scrupulously described all the “work” that Georgian security officers conducted in terms of fighting “anti-Soviet elements.” Beria informed in detail the surviving participants of the plenum about the scale of the purges, underlining that on the ideological front a “counter-revolutionary, spy, terrorist” group of famous Georgian

writers headed by M. Javakhishvili had been uncovered. During the resulting purge, the 61 NKVD officers were arrested. Almost all members of the former leadership of the autonomous republics were declared as malignant enemies of the people that “turned out to be spies, most of whom had gone abroad for study or for business trips.”<sup>19</sup> In addition some universities and schools were accused of being open to anti-Soviet elements among the teachers and students.

It is worth mentioning as well the part of the report in which Beria describes the actions of the so-called military center and preparations for an armed insurrection. Without going into detail, it is still necessary to highlight several pieces of evidence provided by Beria in his report. The first such evidence was given by N. Eliava who reported that “the number of insurgent organizations that are willing to speak out at the request of the nationalist center reached approximately 10,000 people.”<sup>20</sup> The second piece of evidence from S. Stepanov highlights that the rebel organization recruited 3,124 people. Afterwards, Beria reports that some of the people (129) had already been convicted and that their testimonies “confirmed the overall picture of the preparation of rebel units in these areas. The case is being investigated further.”<sup>21</sup> It is not difficult to understand that in a short time, the Central Committee of Georgia will require additional quotas from Moscow for a special Troika.”

In the final part of his report, the Secretary of the Central Committee informs the audience about the role of Sergo Ordzhonikidze in exposing the group of former party leaders of Georgia and the Caucasus, headed by Mamia Orakhelashvili. It is interesting that Beria, when speaking about connections between Ordzhonikidze and the “enemies of the people” refers only to the testimony of convicts and himself does not mention the mistakes of Ordzhonikidze. The report ends without providing the missing statistical data about the enemies of the people arrested on 1 September 1937 and a promise to bring the work already underway to an end.

### Overall Estimates

Unfortunately, even now it is difficult to judge the real scale of repressions in Georgia. According to preliminary estimates, during two years of the “Great Purges,” a Special Troika sentenced to death more than 10,000 persons. In Beria’s secret report to Stalin on October

15 OPERATIONAL ORDER OF THE PEOPLE’S COMMISSARIAT FOR INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF THE U.S.S.R. No. 00447. AP RF, 3-58-212, l. 55-78, <http://www.memo.ru/history/document/0447.htm>

16 Ibid.

17 Appendix to the Archival Bulletin no. 3, Fall 2008—Correspondence Between L. Beria and J. Stalin (1937). The Journal of Archive Administration of the MOIA.

18 Ibid.

19 Former archive of the Central Committee of Communist Party of Georgia—Archive Administration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, 2nd Division. Fund no. 14, no. 11 Description, Case no. 49. pp. 171

20 Ibid. page 43.

21 Ibid. page 146

30, 1937, he stated that in 1937 more than 12,000 people were arrested, of which 7,374 (5,236 people by the Troika) were convicted at the end of October 1937. In this report, complaining about overcrowding of prisons, Beria asked Stalin to resolve the issue with an acceleration of the process of repression and to delegate functions of the court of military collegiums to the local authorities (to the Troika or the Supreme Court of Georgian SSR)<sup>22</sup>.

It seems that Beria had taken into account lessons of the May Congress, and proved in the first order to Stalin his readiness to deal ruthlessly with his enemies, and to strictly abide by the orders of the senior management. Beria and his team (Goglidze, Kobulov, Mamulov, Tsereteli, Rapava and others) exceeded the plan for the “Great Terror.” They fought their way to the top and in this way, combined the interests of Moscow with their personal interests.

*About the Author:*

Levan Avalishvili is a doctoral student at Ivan Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Department of Humanities.

22 Appendix to the Archival Bulletin no. 3, Fall 2008—Correspondence Between L. Beria and J. Stalin (1937). The Journal of Archive Administration of MOIA.

## Repressions in 1930s Soviet Armenia

By Eduard Melkonian, Yerevan

### Abstract

One of the characteristics of Soviet history is the mass political repression that began in Russia in 1917 when the Bolsheviks came to power. Soviet power was established in Armenia at the end of 1920 following the collapse of the First Republic of Armenia (May 1918–November 1920). Where goals and implementation methods are concerned, Armenia’s repressions were generally conducted in accordance with standards developed and tested in Moscow.

### Three Waves of Repressions

Armenak Manukian, author of the first studies examining the history of repression in Soviet Armenia during the prewar years, identifies three basic stages in their development. The first wave of repressions took place in 1921–1922. At that time, 1,400 former officers who served during the First Republic, were arrested and deported to Ryazan, among them prominent generals like Tovmas Nazarbekov and Movses Silikov. The second wave took place in 1929–1933 during the process of forced collectivization: 5,615 people were repressed, mostly rural inhabitants, of whom 104 were sentenced to death. The beginning of the next mass campaign of repression is associated with the name of a famous political figure from those years, the director of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the Communist Party of Armenia, Nersik Stepanian, who was arrested in May 1936 on charges of counterrevolutionary nationalist-Trotskyite activity. This arrest marked a turning point: up to that

moment, the first secretary of the Communist Party of Armenia Aghassi Khanjian had been able to resist the demands of the Transcaucasian Regional Committee of the Communist Party (Zakkraykom), led since October 1932 by Lavrentiy Beria, to persecute intellectuals and political elite. A month later, on July 9, 1936 in Tbilisi at a meeting of the Bureau of the Zakkraykom it was Khanjian’s turn to be criticized for nationalism on the grounds that he did not fight against right-Trotskyite forces and protected N. Stepanian. On the same day, according to the official version, he committed suicide; but according to the rumor that was later confirmed by Nikita Khrushchev to the Twentieth Party Congress, Khanjian was shot either by Beria himself or by Beria’s henchman.

In terms of goals and methods, Beria’s policies as the first secretary of the Zakkraykom precisely copied Stalin’s policies that were implemented throughout the Soviet Union. In asserting his personal and abso-

lute power, he used all possible means to discredit and destroy all inconvenient state and party leaders in the three Transcaucasian republics. In order to increase his influence in Armenia, Beria skillfully took advantage of the Armenians who received his protection and were employed by the Transcaucasian Federation in Tbilisi. Beria occasionally moved them in small groups to Armenia, where as trusted subordinates, he employed them in senior government and party posts. Well-known figures from Beria's so-called "Tiflis" cadres included Communist Party of Armenia Central Committee secretaries Amatoun Amatouni and Stepan Akopov; People's Commissar of Internal Affairs Khachik Moughdousi, his deputies Ivan Gevorkov and Georgi Tsaturov. A. Amatuni became first secretary of the Central Committee of Communist Party of Armenia.

Whether by design or coincidence remains unclear, but twenty days after the assassination of Khanjian, a new campaign of repressions was announced. On July 29, 1936, the Central Committee of the Communist Party sent all republican and other major party organizations a "Closed letter describing the terrorist activities of the Trotsky-Zinoviev counter-revolutionary block"; the letter listed the "crimes" of the group and demanded efforts to strengthen the fight against any kind of anti-Soviet elements in order to identify hidden enemies in state and party bodies. The new Armenian government reacted immediately. An "Informational Letter" addressed to the Head of the Department of the Leading Party Organs of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b) Georgi Malenkov and the Zakkraykom Secretary of Sergey Kudryavtsev explained in detail the work done to identify the "enemies" in Armenia, even listing the ones who had been defeated. Yet this letter did not impress its intended audience since it listed only three senior officials—the above mentioned A. Stepanian, Drastamat Ter-Simonian (the Head of the Department for Arts at the Council of People's Commissars) and Aghassi Galoyan (the Secretary of the Party Collegium of the Supervisory Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia). The main problem was the fact that no enemy groups, units, centers or similar structures had been identified in Armenia.

So the new government of Armenia, guided by the leadership of the Zakkraykom, began to create a fictitious organization to satisfy their superiors. Acting efficiently, they primarily used individuals who had already been arrested, extracting from them testimony about the members and activities of nonexistent groups. Simultaneously, in the middle of 1936, mass arrests began among various social strata, principally targeting government and political figures and intellectuals. This method of identifying "enemies" made it possible to

quickly "reveal" a "Trotskyite-nationalist" group, whose members were N. Stepanian, Sahak Ter-Gabrielian (former chairman of the Council of People's Commissars), Arsen Yesayan and Danoush Shahverdian (Chairmen of the Relief Committee of Armenia, called HOK in Armenian), Aramayis Yertzinkian (former People's Commissar of Agriculture), and Artavazd Yeghiazarian (former People's Commissar of Education), among others. These people were selected for a reason. As committed communists, prominent statesmen and party leaders, they had served as protectors of the national interests of Armenia and the Armenian people. The political goals and means of implementation adopted by Stalin in the Soviet Union and Beria in the Transcaucasus were unacceptable to them. Naturally, they were the first to fall victim to the political terror. In the following months virtually all of the party-state elite of the republic was repressed, in particular, in various years, the secretaries of the Communist Party Gevork Alikhanian (father of the prominent human rights defender Elena Bonner), Haikaz Kostanian, Sarkis Lukashin (Srapionian), the Chairmen of the Council of People's Commissars and Central Executive Committee Moushegh Danielyan, Sarkis Kassian, Sergo Martikian, People's Commissars Stepanian, Vahan Yeremian, Garegin Goumedin (Melik-Dadayan), and many others, almost all of whom were shot.

### Attacking Ties to the Diaspora

It is worthwhile to note that an important part of the standard accusation of nationalism in Armenia was cooperation with the "anti-Soviet" organizations of the Armenian Diaspora, even though this co-operation was sanctioned by the Soviet authorities; and moreover, in the case of the Relief Committee of Armenia (HOK), even initiated by them. Beginning from 1921, HOK branches in various countries provided various forms of assistance to Soviet Armenians, including about 300,000 refugees who escaped the 1915 Armenian genocide in Turkey. The second channel of communication between Soviet Armenia and the Diaspora had become the large charitable organization founded in Cairo in 1906, the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU). A cooperation agreement with the AGBU was concluded in late 1923, and in subsequent years it carried out a number of major programs in the fields of health, education and culture. Both these organizations, with the consent of the Armenian authorities, also took active part in organizing mass immigration into the country in 1921–1936, bringing more than 40,000 Armenian exiles from various countries in Asia and Europe. In this new phase of eliminating their real or imaginary political opponents, the authorities began to consider any connections with the Arme-

nian Diaspora, irrespective of form and content, as a political crime.

In June 1937 the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs Mugdusi in a memo to the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia Amatuni writes about Ter-Gabrielian: "In 1931 S. M. Ter-Gabrielian together with Erzinkian, Yesayan, Ter-Simonian, and others established an anti-Soviet, Armenian nationalist-Trotskyite Center. The Center and the core of leadership include 14 people, among them 10 former members of the Communist Party of Armenia". According to Mugdusi, the anti-Soviet activities of the Center were carried out as follows: "anti-Soviet, nationalist work in foreign Armenian colonies; connections with the capitalists and the bourgeois parties of the Ramkavars and Dashnaks; collecting funds through them for Armenia in exchange for adopting policy positions that were identical to those of these parties, the disorientation of Armenians workers abroad, drowning out their fight against a local national bourgeoisie, squashing the struggle against the Dashnaks inside the country, stopping the fight against Ramkavar here and abroad, declaring them to be friends of the Armenian people".

However, the case of Ter-Gabrielian took a completely unexpected turn for its instigators Amatuni, Mugdusi and their "godfather" Beria. Arrested in Moscow and delivered to Armenia in August 1937, during his interrogation Ter-Gabrielian either jumped or was thrown from the window of the second floor of the NKVD. Whether it was suicide or murder, in the light of subsequent events, it is important that the local government decided not to inform Moscow about it. Of course, Stalin soon learned about the incident and on September 8 sent a letter to Malenkov and A. Mikoyan. With his usual skill, Stalin plays on the absurd miscalculation of the Armenian leaders: "It's hard to imagine that Ter-Gabrielian jumped out of the window, it is totally incompatible with his timid and pragmatic mind. Most likely he was thrown out to shut his mouth so that he could not expose the enemies of Soviet power. Oddly enough, the Armenian leadership has not informed the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR or the Communist Party. Apparently, they wanted to hide this glaring fact and naively assumed that it would be possible to hide it". And the most important part – "The Central Committee of the Communist Party and Council of People's Commissars cannot allow patrons of the enemies of the Armenian people to hide from the people the failure of the leadership and in order to hide these failures – to sell the murder of the enemy of the nation as a 'suicide'". Such a clever interpretation of the incident made the enemy of the people not only Ter-Gabrielian, but the existing leaders of the republic, including those who

with such zeal previously carried out the repressions of their party colleagues. The first two names were written by Stalin himself, in a letter announcing the arrest of the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs Mougdousi and Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars Abraham Gouloyan. At a plenary Session of the Communist Party of Armenia that included the participation of Mikoyan, Malenkov and Beria, a discussion of Stalin's letter led to the expulsion from the party of the Central Committee secretaries Amatuni and Akopov, as well as a number of party and government officials; they immediately found themselves in the prison of the NKVD – no one needed them any longer.

In Yerevan, the trials were held along scenarios developed during the Moscow trials – the former leaders of the Soviet Union were accused of collaborating with the secret services of foreign countries, with the only difference being that in the Armenian version intelligence services were replaced with the political parties Dashnaktsutyun and Ramkavar Azatakan active in the Armenian Diaspora. With this very purpose, the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs invented the myth that the overseas center of the Dashnak-Ramkavar parties supposedly cooperated with the Trotskyite-nationalist center in Armenia. Now, all that was required was to exert the right testimony from the accused. Under torture, the defendants supplied more and more "information" about the anti-Soviet activities of Armenian Diaspora organizations. On November 13, 1937, at a regular meeting of the Bureau of the Communist Party of Armenia, a resolution was adopted to shut down the Armenian branches of the HOK and the AGBU, which led to the cessation of all contacts with the Armenian Diaspora. By that time, the chairmen of HOK during all previous years, including Grigor Vardanian, Shahverdian, Yesayan, Aram Manoucharian, as well as an AGBU representative in Armenia Haikaz Karagheusian had already been arrested and shot.

### Going After the Intellectuals

As is known, the victims of the 1930s repressions were intellectuals as well as political figures. One of the worst blows was dealt to Armenian literature and science: victims included poets and writers Yeghishe Charents, Axel Bakounts, Zabel Yessayan, Vahan Totovents; professors Poghos Makintsian, Tigran Djr bashian, Hovhannes Hagopian, Tatevos Avdalbekian. In 1939 as a result of the so-called "professors' case," Karo Melik-Ohandjanian, Hovhannes Navakatikian, Levon Rotinian and Ashot Hovhannissian were sentenced to various jail terms and Papa Kalantarian was shot.

Communist ideology's rejection of religion led to the constant persecution of priests across the coun-



try, including within Soviet Armenia. And if at first the authorities only confiscated church property and arrested priests from rural areas, starting in 1937 they began repressing the top leadership of the Armenian Apostolic Church with its Mother See of Holy Ecmiadzin. In the 1930–1940s, more than 160 priests were arrested, including seven from the Armenian Catholic Church and one from the Armenian Protestant church; 91 of them were shot. According to some reports, in 1938 the head of the Armenian Church, Catholicos of All Armenians Khoren I Mouradbekian was strangled by the secret agents of the NKVD.

*About the Author:*

Dr Eduard Melkonian, holds PhD and DA degrees in History and is Senior Researcher at the Armenian Institute of History.

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## 1937: “Great Terror” in Azerbaijan

By Eldar Ismailov, Baku

### Abstract

This article describes the “Great Terror” in Azerbaijan. It began with Beria’s order and proceeded to kill thousands of individuals. There is ample evidence of the brutal methods used to kill and torture innocent people. Posterity will remember these events for the crimes that they were.

### The Significance of the Terror

The phenomenon of “1937” is one of the most horrible pages in Soviet history. Chronologically, it is broader than its one-year dimension. The mass repressions associated with “1937” encompass more than two years—from summer 1936 to autumn 1938. It is understandable that this period has a particular place in the history and in the historical memories of the peoples of the former Soviet republics. In this relatively short historical period of time, the Soviet totalitarian system systematically used the methods of state terror in order to achieve its goals and objectives, going even farther than before in openly violating the rights of its citizens, including their personal security. This was a period of outright lawlessness, which led to heavy casualties and

According to Manukian, a total of 14,904 individuals fell victim to the purges in 1930–1938 in Soviet Armenia, 8,837 of them in 1937–1938. Out of the 4,639 people who were executed, the vast majority (4,530) were shot in 1937–1938. Only one person was shot in 1936. This brutal repression campaign waged by Stalin and later called the “Great Terror of 1937–1938,” resulted in the death of the young elite and has largely predetermined the country’s future history.

the denial of rights and freedoms to the great mass of people. These events are properly called “The Great Terror.”

Azerbaijan has not yet attempted a comprehensive study of this phenomenon. Meanwhile, a study of this topic could provide a better understanding of the origins of many contemporary national problems and contribute to the elimination of many obstacles that stand in the way of historical progress for the independent state of Azerbaijan and its people, the Azerbaijani nation.

### Beginnings

In Azerbaijan, as throughout the entire South Caucasus, the signal for the beginning of the “Great Terror” was an article written by Lavrentiy Beria—First Secre-

tary of the Trans-Caucasus Regional Committee of the Communist Party, published on August 21, 1936, in all the central newspapers under the title "Turn the enemies of socialism to dust."

In the autumn of 1936 the first powerful wave of arrests swept Azerbaijan. Initially, they arrested the former oppositionists within the Bolshevik Party, anyone suspected of disloyalty to the Stalinist leadership and the former members of the non-Bolshevik parties. The process of identifying the "insurgent" groups among the peasantry also began.

In Azerbaijan, at the VI plenary session (March 1937) of the Central Committee of the Communist Party the officials with nomenklatura ranking lost their immunity from the repressions. This was followed by mass expulsions from the party and the arrests of party, government and executive leaders.

### 1937

In June 1937 a new phase in the repressive campaign began in the USSR. At the plenary session of the CPSU (b) in late June 1937, it became clear that Stalin had no intention of slowing down the pace of repressions; indeed, he was convinced about the need to expand them. Decisions were made to create the so-called "Troikas" and to set the quantitative indicators for the number of individuals who would be subject to repressions.

The "Troikas" were established in the republics, in autonomous republics, territories and regions. As a rule the members of the "Troikas" were the head of the local organ of internal affairs, the representative of the prosecutor's office or the court, and the local party leader. Each "troika" had a quota for the number of people to be shot within the next four months, subject to long-term imprisonment, or banishment. On July 10, 1937 the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b) adopted its decision on the repressions, including instructions for Azerbaijan. The section on Azerbaijan approved: "To be shot 500 kulaks and 500 criminals; subject to expulsion 1,300 kulaks and 1,700 criminals." Additionally it allowed Troikas "to consider the cases of counter-revolutionary insurgent organizations, with the execution of 500 people, deportation of 750 people and eviction of 150 families of bandit groups to the camps of the NKVD". Thus, the decision was made to shoot 1,500 people, to imprison in camps 3,750 people, and to evict 150 families.

Simultaneously with the creation of the "Troikas," the Visiting Sessions of the Military Collegiums of the Supreme Court became very active. The "Troikas" and Collegiums had approximately equal powers. They were empowered to consider cases on a list provided by the security organs, to hold meetings without the involve-

ment of representatives of the public prosecutors and lawyers, and to convict and determine punishments, including the use of the death penalty. Accordingly, the capacity for prosecutions rose sharply.

With the creation of the "Troikas" and the enhanced framework of the Visiting Collegiums the bloody orgy reached its peak. The most ominous period of the "Great Terror" began. It continued until the fall of 1938. The repressive machine decimated the ranks of the nomenklatura officials regardless of their personality or ethnicity. Over the course of 1937 in Azerbaijan 22 People's Commissars, 49 secretaries of district committees, 29 chairmen of district executive committees, 57 directors of factories and industries, 95 engineers, 110 soldiers, 207 council and trade unionists, and 8 professors were arrested. Almost all of them were shot. As a result, for political crimes in 1937 only by the decisions of the Troika 2,792 people were sentenced to death and 4,435 people to long terms of imprisonment.

### 1938

Although the repressive machine slowed down in the next year, up to November 1938 it continued its destruction. On January 31, 1938 the Politburo of the CPSU (b) adopted its ruling "On the anti-Soviet Elements," which approved additional quotas allowing more individuals to be subject to repression. As a result of this decision, in the Azerbaijan SSR, 2,000 people were condemned to the maximum penalty. During the entire year of 1938 at least 10,000 cases were reviewed in total. Troikas alone considered the cases of 7,241 people; 5,061 people were accused of political crimes and 2,180 were branded criminals. 1,108 people were sentenced to be shot for anti-Soviet agitation. People were condemned for intent to commit terrorism, for espionage, for sabotage.

Additionally, people were convicted by the Military Collegiums, military tribunals, and by ordinary court proceedings. But there was a large group of arrested people who were not condemned by the "Troikas" or Visiting Collegiums, and whose fate was resolved only in 1939–1940, by the Special Collegium of the NKVD of the USSR. They were in most cases condemned, however, most were not sentenced to be shot. But even if the accused were sentenced to one year of imprisonment, regardless of the sentence, the accused person was held in prison indefinitely. When he was due to be released, older charges were used to re-imprison him.

Many of the convicts did not survive to be rehabilitated. People who were arrested and sentenced to confinement in the camps in 1937–1939 who lived to see the post-Stalin rehabilitation in 1954–1956, spent 16–19 years in the camps.

## The Victims

Recently, Moscow's "Memorial" group published the so-called "Stalin's Lists". These lists contain the names of people sentenced to death. Stalin and several other members of the country's leadership handed down a final verdict for the people on these lists. Usually the lists contained the names of officials with nomenclatura ranking. In other words, it was only necessary to gain permission from the country's leaders to punish leading Party and Soviet officials, People's Commissars, persons holding senior positions in the areas of governance and the economic and ideological life of the society. These lists of executives from the Azerbaijan SSR have been preserved; they contain the names of 870 people.

Mostly, however, ordinary citizens became victims of the terror. The peasants were the most affected since it was easiest to carry out punishments against them. And these punishments were implemented. Each district of the NKVD put together a plan of repression grouped by the "First" (shot) and the "Second" Categories, and then made schedules for the villages.

But, we must ask, are the only victims of the "Great Terror" those who were arrested and condemned? Of course not. The framework of the repressions was much wider. It embraced the inhabitants of the border zone from Astara to Julfa, who were considered to be "suspicious elements" and deported to Kazakhstan. The victims of the "Great Terror" were the wives of the "enemies of the nation" who were exiled to remote areas, predominantly in northern and central Asia without any judicial proceedings just for being married to a convicted "enemy". The children of repressed parents are to be considered as the victims of the "Great Terror"; their fate was terrible. As a rule, children of the repressed families were sent to orphanages. For many years they were condemned to live in deprivation, were branded "children of the enemies of the people" and, therefore had limitations in terms of educational and employment opportunities, and establishing their own personal life. Quite often the close and distant relatives of the "enemies" became the victims of repressive policies. Thus, in general, the figure given by many authors including myself, for the number of victims of mass repressions in Azerbaijan in 1937–1938 is 80,000–100,000 people. The Soviet government as a whole was extremely severe towards the residents of the republic.

## The Use of Fear and Torture

The nightmare of the "Great Terror" can be explained, but difficult and even impossible to justify. This phenomenon was caused by the leadership's desire to instill fear in people's souls, to demonstrate the impotence of man before the omnipotence of the state monster. At the

same time the state tried to include additional amplifiers to expand the general chorus of approval for its foreign and domestic policy. Through the use of fear, the state sought to stop not only protests but also the usual activeness; and that's why part of the population was condemned and sentenced. And to show how "nice" the government was, it accelerated the speed of its attack on the population; but not forever, just for a while, making it clear that if it is necessary they would not be too soft in reacting. The government applied all purely criminal methods to prove its lack of accountability. If a person is arrested, he must admit his guilt; and not balk. It was quite appropriate to use physical force. Torture was, in fact, legalized. Whoever was arrested must admit that he was an enemy. And if he refused, physical force was used; he was forced to admit his crime. There is plenty of evidence preserved documenting such facts.

Vasily Churashov worked in the state security bodies of Azerbaijan from 1932 to 1954. He recalls that in 1936–1938 arrests were made on the basis of the untested evidence provided by prisoners. The evidence was extracted by severe beatings and torture. He testified that the "stand" was used on detainees, an interrogation that lasted for several days during which the arrested man was not allowed to sit. In such a way the interrogated person had blood circulation problems and swollen feet; only a few endured this torture and many fainted.

One of the surviving defendants in the case of Ali Bayramli, a former chairman of a collective farm village, Garatugay Aliaga Safarov, in 1956 testified: "I was arrested on August 5, 1936 by the NKVD. Indeed, I signed these protocols during the investigation, because I was beaten until I lost consciousness. When I was unconscious, the investigators forced me to sign these protocols."

A former employee of the Traffic Police, Ganiev, in his complaint reported: "I was subjected to frequent beatings. I was thrown to the floor and the three of them were beating me with a rubber truncheon". The witness testified that when he persisted, he was again beaten. In the end he was forced to sign the protocol.

The former chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the republic, S.M. Efendiyev, had a tragic fate. One witness testified that his interrogation was conducted in the presence of a People's Commissar named Sumbatov-Topuridze. The former investigator H. Haldybanov said: "I personally watched with my own eyes, as Zinman and detective Nick Musatov questioned Chairman of the Supreme Council S.M. Efendiyev, beat him, and abused him. Zinman, derisively calling him "president," humiliated him".

In 1954 a former employee of the NKVD Azerbaijan S. Zykov said: "I witnessed the beating of the

former People's Commissar for Education Dzhubarlinsky". Another former officer of the same Commissariat I. Krotkov reported: "One day, by order of the investigator, 5–6 investigators "circled" Sher Dzhubarlinsky and beat him with rubber truncheons and a wet doormat. Dzhubarlinsky fell, but was raised and again kicked and punched".

And this is what the investigator Agha Rahim Aliyev testified in 1939: "Working in the Bailov Prison together with Garushyan and Maksimov, I attended and participated in the beatings of arrested Iranians. At the same time Perelman was questioned, and he said: "Due to the strong beatings of Gendzhali Yusuf Oghlu, the latter died". Then, according to Perelman, they decided to draw up a statement in which the death was to be presented as a result of natural causes. In this case, an employee of the NKVD said: "Khentov beat to death a man right in his office, and nothing happened to him."

Thus, it is clear how and in what circumstances the evidence and statements were fabricated. And it is obvious that whoever authorized the executors understood that their level of professional training would inevitably lead to an orgy of lawlessness. It was about solving the political issues as quickly as possible. The actions of the executors were ruled by the bureaucratic psychology of the official who has to accomplish the command of the chief without thinking.

### **Conclusion**

In 1955, the Prosecutor of the Azerbaijan SSR Salmanovich Adil Babayev wrote a memo to the first secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan I.D. Mustafayev

about his impressions from analyzing the investigation files of the times of the "Great Terror". He wrote that "It seems that all sectors of the Azerbaijani population were active in counter-revolutionary activities and were members of a variety of counter-revolutionary organizations. Old party members were declared enemies of Soviet power, the governing party and government workers literally recruited each other into various counter-revolutionary organizations, the Armenians became the Musavat, Russian workers fought for the establishment of a bourgeois-nationalist government in Azerbaijan, and old professors became militants in terrorist groups." He claimed that the reason for this was the political and cultural backwardness, "which led to the fact that those arrested were presented the most absurd accusations, such as sabotage by using poor quality paper, wrecking wagon wheels, rejection of Azerbaijan's ZSFSR (Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) status to become a union republic and, finally, the separation of Azerbaijan State University from the state".

The time came when the repressions of the "Great Terror" were judged to be wrong. It was recognized that the repressions in most cases were without any base, accompanied by massive violations of the law, and truly brutal methods of punishing the innocent. This period can be called a black spot on the relatively short history of Soviet society. A spot that was impossible to wash away with the Soviet propaganda machine's words or declarations of the great achievements of socialism. The crime was committed. And it will be remembered as such by posterity for ever.

#### *About the Author:*

Eldar Ismailov, a Doctor of Historical Sciences, is a Professor at Baku State University.

## Mass Terror in the USSR: The Story of One Family

By George Anchabadze, Tbilisi

### Abstract

Much has been written about the mass terror as a system of government in Soviet Russia and the Soviet Union, though key questions remain unanswered and will be a topic for future research. The unprecedented repressions that began in 1917, after the Bolsheviks came to power, lasted until 1953, and touched (in both the literal and figurative meanings of this word) almost the entire population of the Soviet Union. Behind the statistics describing the huge number of those executed or imprisoned for political reasons, who died during transportation, in the camps or in exile from abuse, hunger and dispossession, stand the fates of concrete individuals and families. Stories about the tragic fates of individual victims during the period of Soviet state terrorism help us to understand the nature of political repression no less than “dry” statistics. The author of this article describes the history of the mass terror in the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, and in its autonomous republic of Abkhazia during the 1930s, drawing on the experiences of his own family.

### A Large Family in Sukhumi

I was born in Tbilisi in 1949. My parents both were from illegally repressed families (later both families were rehabilitated) and, probably, this is why from an early age I knew about the dark year of 1937, heard about nighttime incursions by security officers, arrests, and the sufferings of prisoners. Punitive authorities across Georgia and Abkhazia acted with extreme cruelty, in fact, destroying the best strata of the population, especially the intelligentsia. The situation was similar in other parts of the Soviet Union. The damage inflicted by the state on its people in the 1920s and 1930s had an extremely negative impact on the future development of society. Its consequences affect us even in this post-Soviet period.

The large family of my great-grandfather Taras Anchabadze, who was a retired lieutenant colonel of the tsarist army, lived in the Abkhazian capital of Sukhumi. Taras Zurabovich and his wife, Maria Nikolaevna Dadiani, who was a public figure well-known for her work as the chairperson of the Sukhumi branch of the philanthropic organization “Society for Spreading Literacy among Georgians,” had six sons and one daughter. The eldest son, Valerian, a graduate of the Elisavetgrad Cavalry School, served in the Russian army and was promoted to the position of captain. He served in the First World War, after which he continued to serve in the newly-established Georgian army. The youngest sons—Varlam (Chych), Vladimir (Ladi) and Nikolai Anchabadze also served in the Georgian army.

### Vianor Anchabadze’s Medical Service

My grandfather, Vianor Tarasovich Anchabadze, graduated with distinction from the first male gymnasium of Tbilisi in 1908, and received higher education in St. Petersburg at the Imperial Military Medical Academy. After graduating from the Academy (in 1914), he was drafted into the army and participated in various military campaigns until 1918. During the First World War

Vianor Anchabadze began to practice medicine. As a senior regimental doctor and the chief doctor of the joint hospital, he provided exemplary medical service for soldiers and officers and distinguished himself with his attentive and caring attitude toward sick soldiers. His personal courage served as an example to others. He was wounded and later received three military orders.

After the collapse of the Caucasian Front, the regiment, where my grandfather served was moved to Azerbaijan, where cholera was raging in the summer of 1918. Vianor Anchabadze helped combat the epidemic. He received an official award of gratitude from Azerbaijan’s Musavat government for setting up the cholera barracks in Karabakh. At the end of that year Vianor Tarasovich returned to Abkhazia, and immediately became involved in the fight against the Spanish influenza epidemic in the Gudauta area.

In February of 1919, he was appointed as the District Doctor of the Sukhumi District, and in April of the same year as Head of the Health Department of the Commissariat of Abkhazia. During this period he married a noblewoman Vera Andreyevna Shengelaya. They had two children—a son, Zurab (my father) and a daughter, Irina.

In addition to his professional practice, my grandfather participated in social and political activities: he was a member of the Abkhazian National Council and the Popular Council of Abkhazia, and sympathized with the Georgian Socialist Revolutionary Party. As a member of the Abkhazian Constitutional Committee, he was delegated to Tbilisi, where he met Noe Jordania, the head of the independent Georgian state in 1918–1921 and other government officials.

### Sovietization of Abkhazia

In February 1921, Soviet Russia invaded the Georgian republic. Four sons of Taras Anchabadze participated in the military operations against the Bolshe-

viks. Among Taras' sons, Valerian Anchabadze, who was a Deputy Commander of the Georgian Group in Abkhazia, deserves special mention. In the rearguard battles to the west of Sukhumi, he led the resistance to the attacks of the 9th Unit of the Red Army, enabling the main force of the Group to withdraw to the east. He died near the Gumist Bridge, where afterwards, in the 1992–1993 post-Soviet period, the main front of the Georgian–Abkhazian armed conflict ran.



*The Anchabadze family in 1919. Standing, left to right: Nikolai, Valerian, Tatiana, Vianor, Georgi; sitting: Mariya Nikolayevna, Taras Zurasovich, Vera Shengelaya; in front: Varlam, Vladimir.*  
Photo: George Anchabadze

After the Sovietization of Abkhazia, an independent Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia was proclaimed, which a few months later joined the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic on the basis of a treaty. In 1931, however, Abkhazia lost its “treaty” status and became an autonomous republic within the Georgian SSR, a status that did not change until the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The first years of Soviet power in Abkhazia were not overshadowed by big dramatic events. The authorities implemented a “reasonably prudent” policy towards the non-proletarian strata of the society. Abkhaz leaders, led by Nestor Lakoba, protected Abkhazian villages from collectivization and “expropriation” as much as they could. Against the backdrop of the New Economic Policy (NEP), life in Abkhazia gradually improved. Under such conditions, almost all of the Abkhaz intellectuals began to cooperate with the new government, hoping for a better future. Vianor Anchabadze, as the Head of the Senior Spa Control Unit of Abkhazia, led efforts to revive Abkhazia’s resorts. “It was a time collapse,” Prof. Kuprava notes in his book, “marked by a lack of medical personnel, equipment, and medicine, and in this difficult period, V. Anchabadze demonstrated efficiency and tre-

mendous energy in the reconstruction and development of the sanatorium and resort business. Through his tireless work in a short time, he achieved considerable success”. In the later period, Vianor Tarasovich continued his professional career at the post of the People’s Commissar of Health of Abkhazia, which he held twice, in 1928–1930 and 1932–1937, respectively. He was then the only non-party People’s Commissar in Georgia.

The house, where Vianor Anchabadze lived with his family, stood next to the house of Nestor Apollonovich Lakoba, the chairman of the Central Executive Committee of Abkhazia. Between Lakoba and Anchabadze, there was no special affinity (one was “an old revolutionary” and the other a representative of the former elites), but their relations were quite normal. Vianor Anchabadze was a member of the government, led by Nestor Lakoba. In addition, their children—Zurab Anchabadze and Rauf Lakoba—were inseparable friends: they attended the same school and spent most of the day together in a big company of Sukhumi youth.

The younger brothers of Vianor Anchabadze also started to cooperate with the Soviet government. In particular, the already mentioned Varlam and Vladimir served in “the Abkhaz Red Army” (the “treaty republic” had its own militia). In the 1920s in the Soviet Union, as we know, there still were no professional military personnel and armed forces recruited former military officers and generals as military experts. Incidentally, the Abkhaz Cavalry Regiment of the Red Army was commanded by the brother of my grandmother—Varlam Shengelaya, a former Guards officer, who at one time fought against the Bolsheviks in the ranks of the Volunteer Army of Denikin, and then in the Georgian army.

### The Approaching Terror

But, such a peaceful atmosphere did not last long. At the end of the 1920s, clear signs of the approaching danger appeared. The USSR’s “Great terror”, as Western researchers describe the bloody events of 1937–1938, when the Stalinist repressions reached their peak, started at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s, with the decision to implement forceful collectivization and speedy industrialization.

During this period, the brutality of the regime was visible in Abkhazia and from the beginning of 1937 political repressions in the autonomous republic became systematic and regular. Everything started after the demise of Nestor Lakoba, who died in Tbilisi under unclear circumstances in December 1936.

Lakoba was buried in Sukhumi with full honors. But after approximately one month, he was declared an enemy of people. His body was removed from his tomb and destroyed. People who were close to Nestor were

also repressed—the members of his family (mother, wife and son) and relatives, colleagues and friends... The wheel of the Great Terror was gathering momentum in Abkhazia.

### Interrogations and Arrests

The children of the repressed “Lakobists” comprised a special group of arrested minors. Rauf, the son of Nestor and also other friends and acquaintances of my father—Tengiz and Kukusha Lakoba, Koka Inal-ipa... Boys, who in the beginning of 1937 were from 14 to 16 years old, were accused of establishing a counterrevolutionary, terrorist youth group, which had the goal of organizing terrorist attacks against one of the leaders of the Communist party.

Regarding the case of the “young terrorists,” their friends, school mates, teachers and others were summoned to the People’s Commissariat of the Internal Affairs (NKVD). Zurab Anchabadze was also called in for an interrogation.

Professor Djulietta Rukhadze in her memoirs about my father describes this fact: “Before the interrogation, the interrogator pulled a revolver from a drawer, pointedly shook it in his hand, laid it on the table and started asking questions. Zurab surprisingly bravely answered the questions, told the security officers that the accused young men were his friends and that he could not say anything about their anti-Soviet activities. Zurab emphasized that he considered the idea of the existence of an anti-Soviet youth organization to be misleading. Such behavior from a 17-year-old boy, in the walls of the NKVD, was tantamount to heroism. The Investigator meticulously recorded everything and the minutes of the interrogation consisted of several pages. A few lines were written on the last page. The interrogator suggested that Zurab sign at the end of the page. Zurab understood that to put his signature on the place indicated by the investigator would have meant that they could have later filled the page as they wanted. This is why he put his signature on the entire page. The investigator sarcastically smiled and asked: “What? Are you very experienced?”

Rauf Lakoba and the other boys accused of terrorism were held in prison until adulthood, and then were tried for belonging to a defunct organization. Later all were shot.

### Repressions in Abkhazia

The repressions, meanwhile, took a terrible shape in Abkhazia. In 1951, in Munich, the Gazette 1 of “The Institute for the Study of the History and Culture of the USSR” published the memoirs of S. Danilov on events in Abkhazia that took place during a 20 year period (from

the late 1910s to the end of 1930s), which described the situation of the 1937–38 period: “After the arrest of the head of an institution it ‘became clear’ that the entire organization he led was ‘clogged with enemies of the people.’ It was obvious that immediately a ruthless purge of ‘pests’ and ‘enemies of the people’ would begin. Absolutely everybody was subject to arrest: members of the party, Komsomol members, independents, specialists, researchers, journalists, trade professionals (including the sales clerks). All the local intellectuals in the villages were subjected to arrest—former landlords, rich farmers and those who had something to do with members of the former Abkhaz government; they were all arrested and, at best, exiled to the north, where they were held in a concentration camp, incommunicado.

The detention building and the prison in the city of Sukhumi was overcrowded. Prisoners, after the ‘biased’ interrogations following their ‘confessions’ to crimes were sent in mass to Tbilisi, where they were kept in appalling conditions in the infamous Metekhi castle. However, most of those arrested were shot in Abkhazia itself. The monastery in Dranda was rebuilt to accommodate a large quantity of prisoners”.

Afterwards, Danilov describes the fate of the Abkhaz intellectuals, matching it with the personal fate of my grandfather: “Repressions especially affected the small young Abkhazian intelligentsia,” he wrote. “Almost all of them were killed. The story of Dr. Anchabadze is particularly indicative of this whole era... “

### The Fate of My Grandfather

Vianor Anchabadze was arrested by the NKVD on December 10, 1937. The search, which was committed by the secret police in the apartment, resulted in theft. They packed their bags with valuable things (including household items such as sewing machines), placed them in one room and sealed it. Then a car came and took away all the “booty.” As far as I know, the confiscated items were sold at discount prices to employees of the security forces. However, the investigators stole some things for themselves. Zurab noticed how the security officer Kishmishev in the kitchen pulled out the silver spoon from the honey cup, held it over the glass watching as the honey flowed down, then wiped the spoon on a scrap of newspaper and put it in his pocket.

Soon Vera Andreyevna was also arrested and the children were evicted from their large apartment in the city center, and were given a room in an old house in the suburbs.

My aunt Irina shortly before her death in 2005 wrote memoirs about her experiences: “Our childhood ended in 1937, in December.” she writes. They took our father and a few days later arrested our mother. We never saw

our father again. My mother was sent with a group of women prisoners on an extensive journey. Surprisingly we found out on which date she would be transferred so a large group of relatives gathered at the building of the NKVD. The doors opened. The prisoners were brought out into the street. There was a van, in which all were loaded, and it proceeded to the station. These were the last few minutes when they could see their loved ones. Zurab, standing behind the cordon, began jumping up and shouting: 'mother, mother!'

There were no tears in my mother's eyes, but what was going on in her heart, when the iron door shut her in, and when she left with her son calling out to her, I do not want to imagine and I cannot imagine. Pointless, but I often ask myself the questions—Why? For what? By what right? Why did they have to shoot my father, why did they kill so many of my relatives, and separate us from our mother for so many years? Our life was crushed, we were shaken out from our own biographies—these words of Osip Mandelstam relate to all of us, those who one way or another, has come under the blade of the "Great Terror".

Vianor Anchabadze was shot by the decision of the Troyka (a three-man group that ordered executions) in January 1938. Until then, according to information gathered from witnesses who survived, he was subjected to horrific torture and torment in the dungeons of the NKVD.

S. Danilov describes this: "Once I met a friend of mine, recently released after 7 months of detention in the NKVD. I asked him if he knew anything about the fate of my brother who was arrested. The acquaintance anxiously looked around, shook his head (no), offered to go to the boulevard, where away from people, he could tell me about their experiences. We went ... He knew that I was acquainted with Dr. Anchabadze, and that's why he told me the following:

"One night, two security guards opened the door of their chamber, carried in a man who was unconscious, put him in the corner of the cell, and left, locking the door. We rushed to our new comrade in misfortune, but he was so disfigured by beatings and torture, we were unable to distinguish his features. His clothes, however, suggested that he was neither a worker nor a farmer. His face had been beaten into a terrible mess. He unhappily opened his eyes and moaned something (he could not speak). We could not understand him. With great difficulty he managed to explain to us that he wanted water. Writhing in pain, with great difficulty, he slowly drank

the water we offered him. After quenching his thirst, the poor man lay on the floor ... Gradually, we learned from him that he was Doctor Anchabadze. Soon he was taken away from us. Where—I do not know ... probably 'written off'. At a certain hour of the night, we heard the hum of machines in the courtyard of the NKVD".

However, officially the execution had not been reported. Questions asked by relatives in such cases were usually followed by the typical reply: "Your husband (son, brother, father) was convicted under Article 58, as an enemy of the people, and was sentenced to 10 years in the camps without the right of correspondence". Meanwhile, the remains of these people had long been lying in unmarked graves.

Various crooks (often ex-convicts) were taking advantage of the misfortune of cheated relatives. They found out addresses of people whose relatives were deported incommunicado, came and told them that they had met their relatives in camps, who had requested information about their relatives and also said that they would soon return home. The joyful relatives rewarded these crooks with what they had, and invited them to stay with them. And these guests quite often robbed their hosts and disappeared.

Vera Andreyevna spent seven years in the women's camp "ALJIR", which was an acronym for the "Akmo-linsk camp for the wives of traitors to the Motherland." This enormous camp held poor women, whose only fault was to be the wives and daughters of repressed people. Maybe my grandmother survived because prisoners worked according to their professions in the camp, and she worked as the doctor. However, her health was greatly damaged and she died a few years after her release.

All the sons of Taras Anchabadze (my great-grandfather died in 1935), except Vianor were killed in 1937–1938. Varlam and George (the youngest of the brothers) were also shot dead. Vladimir and Nikolai were able to flee from Abkhazia. For several years they hid from the authorities in different parts of the Soviet Union. Nikolai Akirtava, the husband of Tatiana Anchabadze, my father's aunt, a famous statesman and a political figure, a member of the CPSU with pre-revolutionary experience, was also shot dead. In Tbilisi, the only brother of my grandmother, Varlam Shengelaya was dismissed from the armed forces, arrested and shot dead.

I could also describe the misadventures of my mother's family during the Great Terror, but I will leave it for another story.

#### *About the Author:*

George Anchabadze, a Doctor of Historical Sciences, is a Professor at Ilia State University in Tbilisi.



**ABOUT THE RUSSIAN ANALYTICAL DIGEST**

Editors: Iris Kempe, Matthias Neumann, Robert Orttung, Jeronim Perović, Lili Di Pippo

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Editors: Lili Di Pippo, Iris Kempe, Matthias Neumann, Robert Orttung, Jeronim Perović

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Research Centre for East European Studies • Publications Department • Klagenfurter Str. 3 • 28359 Bremen • Germany

Phone: +49 421-218-69600 • Telefax: +49 421-218-69607 • e-mail: [fsopr@uni-bremen.de](mailto:fsopr@uni-bremen.de) • Internet: [www.res.ethz.ch/analysis/cad](http://www.res.ethz.ch/analysis/cad)