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Mikołaj Jankowski

ORCID: 0000-0001-6425-2010

Cezary Smuniewski

ORCID: 0000-0002-8973-3539

The shaping of Abkhazian statehood in the post-revolution period 1917–1931

Abstract

The paper is aimed to show social and political changes taking place in the Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia and the Abkhaz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in the post-revolution period until its reabsorption by the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic and the death of the merited Abkhazian communist Nestor Lakoba, as well as to outline the process of formation of Abkhazian statehood. The analysis of sources and papers seen from the viewpoint of various sciences – history, politology, security and cultural studies - was employed as the research method. The results have been put through a synthesis and induction. An erudite approach has been adopted – when discussing a given topic the recognized facts and views of observers and researchers are quoted so that their clash and confrontation could be used to expand the research field and formulate conclusions that may prove useful in research on the shaping of statehood of various political communities.

Key words: Abkhazia, USSR, Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia, Abkhaz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, Sukhumi, Sukhum, Georgian SSR, Lakoba, Stalin, Beria, Caucasus, SRR Abchazia, Abkhaz ASRR, Tiflis, Tbilisi

Introduction

The overthrow of Tsar Nikolai II Romanov and taking over power by the Bolsheviks open up an opportunity for many nations inhabiting the Russian Empire to create their own statehood. After a long period of slavery many nations, e.g. Poles, or the people who never had an opportunity to establish their own sovereign state, e.g. Latvians, Lithuanian, or Estonians, took advantage of the world political situation and post-war chaos to create independent state. The independence moods were equally strong in a small Caucasian nation which, like Poland, had been repeatedly stigmatised, subject to tough repressions and attempts to deprive it from its national culture, language, values and national awareness. The Abkhaz people tried to take advantage of the collapse of Tsardom like many other nations inhabiting the Southern Caucasus. For example Georgians – the eternal enemy of Abkhazians – initially created an artificial national entity together with Azeris and Armenians called the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic which did not pass the test of time and after several months each of those three nations formed a separate state organism. Following a difficult period of *muhajirstvo*, forced georgianisation and russification as well as numerous relocations to various parts of Russia and Mingrelian settlement of indigenous Abkhazian lands, the Abkhazian nation stood the opportunity to mark their own statehood on the world map and become independent from Russians and Georgians. Unfortunately, as a result of a deceit, in less than three years Abkhazia found itself again in the Georgian sphere of influence, which left behind a significant imprint. Did the communist ideas carried by the Bolsheviks and the Red Army rightly proved to be a salvation for the Abkhazian nation

so painfully hit by history? Probably not, though if the initial Lenin's plans were properly continued by Stalin and his closest advisers numerous antagonisms and hatred between Georgians and Abkhazians could have been prevented.

The fall of the Russian Empire and a brief period of *apparent* autonomy within the Democratic Republic of Georgia

The time before Abkhazia was entirely incorporated into the USSR is described by Abkhazian historians as the interim period.¹ After the February 1917 Revolution the provisional government set up the Special Transcaucasian Committee. A meeting of representatives of the Sukhumi district took place on 10 March 1917 in Sukhumi, as a result of which a local interim authority was set up in Abkhazia under the leadership of Prince Alexander Shervashidze² and the militia headed by Prince Tatash Marshania was established.³ A union agreement was signed on 20 October 1917 in the capital of North Ossetia Vladikavkaz⁴ upon the initiative of Caucasian nations, one of the signatories of which was also the Abkhazian delegation. The alliance including Cossack soldiers, Caucasian mountaineers and steppe peoples was later transformed into a more formalized entity called the South-East Alliance. Each of the signatories was guaranteed equal rights and full

¹ Бгажба, Лакоба (2007): 131–132.

² Rus. Александр Константинович Шервашидзе; See more: Чиковани (2007): 46–47.

³ Rus. Таташ Маршания. See also: Лакоба (2017), URL = <https://sputnik-abkhazia.ru/Abkhazia/20170227/1020484806/lakoba-fevral-skaya-revolyuciya-1917-goda-dala-abkazi-gosudarstvennost.html>, [access: 28.01.2020].

⁴ The capital of North Ossetia located within the borders of the Russian Federation, a large industrial centre at the foot of the Caucasus.

independence. The alliance comprised also the Mountainous Republic of the Northern Caucasus, a quasi-state, one of the members of which was also Abkhazia.⁵

According to Stanislav Lakoba and Oleg Bgazba an important moment from the viewpoint of Abkhazian statehood was the establishment of the Abkhaz National Council on 8 November 1917. The entity was considered to be a local authority within the framework of the Mountainous Republic of the Northern Caucasus and it was headed by Simon Basaria.⁶ As written by Rafał Czachor, the Abkhaz National Council adopted the Declaration of the Abkhaz Nation and the Constitution of the Abkhaz National Council, which articulated the right to self-determination as well as maintaining and nurturing own traditions and customs.⁷ Invited to the meeting was also a Georgian delegation headed by social-democrat Akaki Chenkeli.⁸ Totally taken by surprise by the ensuing situation the Georgian delegate spared no effort to thwart the independence plans of the Abkhazians. However, he failed to dissuade the Abkhazians from establishing an alliance with

⁵ Бгажба, Лакоба (2007): 132.

⁶ Rus. Симон Басария (1884–1942)– Abkhazian social and political activist, teacher, researcher of local culture, writer, expert in geography, ethnography and economy. Correspondent of the Petersburg Academy of Sciences. In his life he made a lot of foreign trips, among others to: Switzerland, Austria-Hungary, North Africa, Italy, Germany and Turkey, where he talked to the Abkhazian diaspora. More on this subject: Басария (1923).

⁷ Czachor (2014): 105.

⁸ Rus. Акакий Чхенкели (1874–1959)– Georgian Menshevik, politician, diplomat and Minister for Foreign Affairs in the government of Noe Ramishvili (April–November 1918). After the Red Army entered the Democratic Republic of Georgia, he was forced to emigrate and stayed abroad until death. He dies in Paris. More on this subject: Lityński (2018): 109–130; Materski (2010): 65–111.

the mountain nations of the Caucasus, which by the way did not last long. The influence of various political factions led to the change of an ally; according to historians, the culminating moment was the takeover of power by the Bolsheviks led by Nestor Lakoba.⁹ The appearance of a new player on the political arena forces some Abkhazian activists to conclude an agreement with Georgia. To this end, equipped with the authorization of the Abkhaz National Council the official Abkhazian delegation headed by Razhden Ivanovich Kakuba¹⁰ went to Tiflis – Tbilisi to strike an agreement with the Georgians.¹¹ As a result of intended measures the delegation was notoriously misled as to a planned Turkish attack against Abkhazia and a secret agreement concluded in Istanbul between Germany and Turkey in consequence of which the Abkhazian land was to be incorporated into the German sphere of influence. The deliberate disinformation quickly brought about the intended results. Fearing foreign intervention the head of the delegation himself assumed all responsibility and without consulting the Abkhaz National Council on 8 June 1918 an agreement was signed between Abkhazia and independent Georgia. The treaty was formulated in 8 points:

- a) The concluded agreement shall be reviewed by the National Assembly of Abkhazia which shall finally define

⁹ Janicki (2009): 156. A similar position is presented by: Бражба, Лакоба (2007): 132.

¹⁰ Rus. Какуба Ражден Иванович (1873–1941) – Representative of the first generation of the technical intelligentsia of Abkhazia (railway engineer). Known for his charitable activities. After the annexation of Georgia and Abkhazia by the USSR he withdrew from political life. Victim of Stalinist repressions. He spent the last years of his life in a death cell.

¹¹ Шамба, Непрошин (2004) URL = http://www.hrono.ru/libris/lib_sh/shamba00.php, [access; 29.01.2020].

- the political structure of Abkhazia as well as its relations with Georgia;
- b) A plenipotentiary representative of the Abkhazian National Council shall be functioning at the government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia with whom the Georgian government will be consulting the affairs of Abkhazia;
 - c) The internal affairs of Abkhazia will be dealt with by the Abkhazian National Council;
 - d) In foreign policy matters Georgia shall be playing the role of an official representative of both sides, actually representing the country together with Abkhazia;
 - e) Loans and funds needed for the administration of Abkhazia shall be allocated from the funds of the Democratic Republic of Georgia which shall be put at the disposal of the Abkhazian National Council;
 - f) In order to quickly establish the revolutionary order and organize tough power, the Democratic Republic of Georgia shall dispatch a unit of the Red Guards to help the Abkhazian National Council and to be at its disposal;
 - g) In Abkhazia, the Abkhazian National Council shall organize military units, while the necessary equipment, uniforms and funds shall be allocated by the Democratic Republic of Georgia to the disposal of the Council;
 - h) Social reforms shall be carried out by the Abkhazian National Council under the general regulations passed by the Transcaucasian Sejm in accordance with the local conditions.¹²

¹² Бгажба, Лакоба (2007): 139. More on this subject: Шамба, Непрошин (2004).

According to Kamil Janicki, the signing of the treaty was associated with the loss of political importance by Abkhazia. Shortly after the document had been ratified, Georgian troops backed by German units entered Abkhazia thus showing its domination. Historian and political scientists consider the broad autonomy guaranteed by the treaty is considered to be just a smokescreen. According to the preserved accounts, even the political representative of Georgia to Abkhazia, social-democrat Isidor Ramishvili¹³ did not believe in the political independence Abkhazia received from Georgia. Along the strengthening of the Georgian position in the Abkhaz territory the level of liberties was restricted. As follows from a review of literature and what is reported by Kamil Janicki in the publication entitled *Źródła Nienawiści [Sources of Hatred]* the Georgian began *georgianization* with a fight against the national language. Abkhazian was denied the status of an official language, while children at school were instructed exclusively in Georgian. The authorities in Tiflis even saw to changing fonts in all typewriters. The use of any language other than the official one was strictly forbidden. Also the issue of mass-scale resettlements of the Georgian population to the Abkhazian territories should not be overlooked. The inhabitants of borderland areas were purposefully ascribed a different nationality, while the Turks who sympathised with communism were repressed. The authorities also waged a large-scale propaganda campaign belittling

¹³ Rus. Исидор Рамишвили (1859–1937) – Georgian Menshevik; during the functioning of the Democratic Republic of Georgia member of the government in the years 1919–1921. After the annexation of Georgia, he was several times arrested. He spent the last years of his life in exile. See also: Vakhtangishvili, Simashvili (2014): 1450.

the historical role of Abkhazia.¹⁴ The Abkhazian National Council, mentioned in the eight-point treaty and constituting a form of a local parliament, was dissolved because of apparently pro-Turk leanings. The new members were mostly Georgians and other nationalities, while the Abkhazians lost their position. As noted by the Abkhazian historians, Stanislav Lakoba and Oleg Bgaghba, the measures introduced by the authorities in Tiflis were not even supported by the local Georgian population – mostly Mingrellian.¹⁵

The three-year period of the Georgian authority over Abkhazia is assessed by Abkhazian historian as the time of civil war and occupation. Until today, the Abkhazians have been holding a grudge against the Georgians for lies and deceit they were guilty of by not keeping the terms of the treaty. Two times, namely on 15 August and 10 October 1918, the authorities in Tiflis tried to forcefully block the legitimate body of local authority, that is the Abkhazian National Council. It is not only the Abkhazian historians that present a negative view of the 1918–1921 period.¹⁶ An English journalist, writer and lawyer, Carl Eric Bechhofer Roberts, in his publication entitled *In Denikin's Russia and The Caucasus*, describes the Georgians as a classical example of a small imperialist nation with regard to grabbing the land outside of their borders.¹⁷

Summing up the hitherto discussion it may be stated that the aggressive and nationalistic policy of Georgia caused enormous social discontent, not only among the Abkhazians.

¹⁴ Janicki (2009):158–159. A similar position is presented by: Бгажба, Лакоба (2007): 140–142.

¹⁵ Бгажба, Лакоба (2007): 152.

¹⁶ Ibidem:153. More on this subject: Шамба, Непрошин (2004).

¹⁷ Roberts (1971): 14.

Repressed were also the Russians, Armenians and Greeks. In the opinion of Abkhazian historians, the behaviour presented by the Georgian for three years caused that other peoples living in Georgia awaited the Red Army as a liberator from tyranny.¹⁸ Comparing the political moods in Abkhazia at the time of signing the treaty with Georgia in 1918 and in 1921 Rafał Czachor draws very interesting conclusions. While in 1918 the communist sentiments in the Abkhazian society had not been very frequent, after three years the situation dramatically changed. The attitude of Abkhazian Bolsheviks also assumed a totally different format. They started to promote independence ideas and tried to look for support from former members of the Abkhazian National Council promising them the reconstruction of their own independent statehood in the form of a separate Soviet Republic.¹⁹

The period after the fall of the Democratic Republic of Georgia

The brief period of Georgian statehood ended upon the entering of the Red Army. The indigenous inhabitants of Abkhazia saw the approach of the army as the beginning of the new stage of their statehood. On 31 March 1921, Abkhazia was granted the status of a Soviet Republic that is the highest possible form of autonomy possible within the USSR, though the Soviet authority was established somewhat earlier, on 4 March 1921. On the day the troops of the Abkhazian Insurgent Army with the assistance of the 9th Red Army captured Sukhumi. Historians consider 31 March 1921 as the date which finally sealed the fate of Abkhazia since the Abkhazian

¹⁸ Бгажба, Лакоба (2007): 153. More on this subject: Шамба, Непрошин (2004).

¹⁹ Czachor (2014): 107.

military command, in this case the Revolutionary Committee informed other Soviet Republics and the most important person in the state – Lenin, who was responsible for the final decision, about the establishment of a new Soviet Republic. Abkhazian politician faced the challenge of organizing central and local structures from scratch, as well and reconstructing destroyed national economy.²⁰

Many historians and political scientists believe that the granting of such a high status (republic) in the state was incomprehensible. As compared with other Soviet Republics Abkhazia was very small, and what is more – the percentage of the native Abkhazians was smaller than the Georgians.²¹ Therefore a question arises what had that small state done to deserve this? According to Kamil Janicki, the Bolsheviks wanted to reward the Abkhazians for their effort and support for the revolution. The historian sees a hidden agenda in this case. The newly established republic could be an ideal example of the policy of “rootinization”, the is the return to the roots, which was implemented at that time. With its own language, alphabet, culture, history and the political base Abkhazia was a textbook example for the multinational Soviet Union.²²

The autonomy and the possibility to exercise self-determination obtained from the leader of the revolution²³ did not last long. Over one month after the proclamation of the new republic, on 5 July 1921, there was a plenary conference

²⁰ Бгажба, Лакоба (2007): 153. More on this subject: Шамба, Непрошин (2004), Прицкер (1981): 5.

²¹ Шанава (2015): 6–32. A similar position is presented by: Janicki (2009): 161; Materski (2010): 121.

²² Janicki (2009): 160–162. More on this subject: Fedorowicz (2015): 174.

²³ Vladimir Il'ich Ulyanov / Rus. Владимир Ильич Ульянов / Lenin.

of the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee attended by Stalin, who during the meeting pressed for depriving Abkhazia of the status of a Soviet Republic and incorporating it in the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic as an autonomy. The plans were not so quickly brought into effect and according to Abkhazian historians the time from gaining the highest position in the USSR to 17 February 1922 was a unique time in the history of Abkhazia. In fact, the newly established Republic was dependent neither on the central authority nor the Georgia SSR.²⁴ The slow process of absorption of Abkhazia by Georgia began on 12 February 1922 when the first congress of Abkhazian communists was organized.²⁵ According to Stanislav Lakoba and Oleg Bgaghba a large pressure on the majority of decisions adopted during the talks was exerted by Stalin and the Georgian communist Sergo Ordzhonikidze.²⁶ Also a special agreement between Georgia and

²⁴ Materski (2010): 131–133. More on this subject: Furier (2000): 108–109; Świątochowski (2006): 117.

²⁵ In this place it is worth noting a popular science publication: Салакая (2017), URL = <https://sputnik-abkhazia.ru/Abkhazia/20170212/1020402862/pervyj-sezd-sovetov-abxazii-unikalnyj-status-i-zemelnaya-reforma.html>, [access: 1.02.2020].

²⁶ Actually Rus. Григорий Константинович Орджоникидзе (1886–1937) - prominent Soviet party and state activist of Georgian origin. Born in a landowner's family he attended a paramedic school in Tiflis. In 1903, he joined the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party and two years later took part in the 1905 revolution. Arrested (on suspicion of arms smuggling), after release went to Germany. Upon return he settled in Baku, where he was a co-worker of Stalin. From 1930 a member of the Political Bureau, and from 1932 Commissar of Heavy Industry. He dies on 18 February, according to the (then) official version of a heart attack. At the 20th Congress of the CPSU Nikita Khrushchev revealed that Ordzhonikidze had been forced to commit suicide. More on this subject: Materski (2010): 130–133; Pipes (2005): 170–172; Кузина, URL = <http://rostov-region.ru/books/item/f00/s00/z0000023/st023.shtml>, [access: 1.02.2020].

Abkhazia was ratified. The following years marked a period of apparent independence for the Abkhazian communists.²⁷ Despite the fact that the position of the Abkhazian SSR had been gradually lowered, for which Abkhazian historians blame Stalin, in December 1922 a representative of Abkhazia was one of the signatories of the document establishing the USSR. In the years 1924–1925, the official coat-of-arms and the flag were created and many legal regulations, including the Constitution, were passed. The first basic law of the Abkhazian SSR was announced during the third congress of the Abkhazian communists against Stalin's will. Historians regard merited Nestor Lakoba to be the father of this success.²⁸ The Constitution comprised a very interesting provision in the form of Article 5, which stipulated an option for the state to quit the Soviet Union.²⁹ Aggression and numerous protests of the Georgian side were raised by Article 6 of the abovementioned basic law. According to its provisions the official language in the state was exclusively Russian. However, the Abkhazian legislator introduced an annotation that every person living in the Republic is free to use their own national language.³⁰ A question arises why were not two languages introduced, or just only the Abkhazian language?

²⁷ Бгажба, Лакоба (2007): 121, 155, 179.

²⁸ Rus. Нестор Аполлонович Лакоба (1893–1936)– Abkhazian socialist activist, according to Stalin himself regarded as his close friend. Poisoned in Tbilisi probably on Beria's order. More on this subject:

Авидзба (2013): 99–113; Лакоба (1936).

²⁹ Конституция Социалистической Советской Республики Абхазии 1925 года, Принята третьим Всеабхазским съездом Советов (26 марта–1 апреля 1925 г.), Art. 5. More on this subject: Бгажба, Лакоба (2007): 155. Шамба, Непрошин (2004).

³⁰ Конституция Социалистической Советской Республики Абхазии 1925 года, Принята третьим Всеабхазским съездом Советов (26 марта–1 апреля 1925 г.), Art. 6.

The answer is simple - practically nobody in the Republic spoke the native language forced out as a result of *georgianization* and *russification* of the Abkhazian land. According to historian Kamil Janicki Article 6 led even to holding a debate in 1926, during which the Georgian side tried to exert pressure on the Abkhazian delegates to eliminate the provision about the Russian language. As a result of a compromise, three official languages began to function in Abkhazia: Abkhazian, Georgian and Russian.³¹

The time of collectivization was one of the gloomiest periods in the history of the USSR, which led to economic collapse famine and in consequence death of many people.³² Historians frequently debated how the smallest republic within the Soviet Union had for many years defended itself against the policy initiated by Lenin and with great impetus continued by his successor.³³ Nestor Lakoba, recognized as the most energetically acting politician in the Caucasus and in fact the forefront figure on the Abkhazian political arena, known for his insubordination to Stalin, was very sceptical to mass collectivisation introduced in 1922. In many public statements Lakoba denied the existence of kulaks in Abkhazia³⁴ maintaining that the society was characterized by social

³¹ Janicki (2009): 164–165. A similar position is presented by: Бражба, Лакоба (2007): 155.

³² Kuśnierz (2005): 336. More on this subject: Kuśnierz (2004): 29–46.

³³ Бражба, Лакоба (2007): 155. More on this subject: Авидзба (2013): 106; Шамба, Непрошин (2004).

³⁴ In Russia, a rich peasant. The word has a pejorative meaning. The propaganda image of a kulak as an oppressor of poor peasant and a political enemy of the communist party was extensively used in the period of war communism (*red terror*) and during force collectivization in the USSR and in the early 1950s in its dependent countries (also in Poland). Apart from kulaks, the victims of the anti-kulak policy in the countryside were mid-income peasants (*serednyaks*) as well as *bednyaks*

equality. With such policy he fell into disfavour with Moscow. In his letter of 1929, Stalin fiercely criticized Lakoba's activities, emphasizing his insubordination in fulfilling party directives.³⁵ Stanislav Lakoba and Oleg Bgaghba emphasize, Nestor Lakoba actually took steps that were contrary to the idea of communism and financially supported local princes and courtiers which was unthinkable in the Soviet Union.³⁶ As it turns out, the relations between communist politicians were correct, and some historians even call them friendly.³⁷ In the early 1930s Stalin expected a clear declaration of Abkhazia with respect to implementing collectivization. It put the Abkhazian leader in a very dire situation because he knew the intentions of the leader. Abkhazia has only two ways out of the situation: to implement collectivization and avoid being incorporated into the Georgian SSR (at least Stalin gave such promises) or join Georgia as an autonomy without carrying out collectivization. In this way the status of Abkhazia would deteriorate.³⁸ Seeing the strong pressure from the Kremlin and discontent of some Abkhazian communists who wanted to fully yield to the will of Moscow, Lakoba chose to join the Georgian SSR. That decision of the Abkhazian politician and his efforts aimed at the unification with Georgia are positively assessed by contemporary historians

who had nothing but opposed collectivization. They were collectively called *podkulachniki* (sub-kulaks) and were treated the same as kulaks (victims of consecutive waves of fatal famine, deportations and gulags). See also: Sołżenicyn (2015): 52; Żurawski (2015): 260.

³⁵ Бражба, Лакоба (2007): 155.

³⁶ Ibidem. More on this subject: Куправа (2015): 79.

³⁷ Лакоба (2004): 101–112. More on this subject: Перевозкин (2011): 1–15; Шнирельман (2003): 267; Лакоба (1990).

³⁸ Шнирельман (2003): 267. More on this subject: Лакоба (1990): 94.

and politologists.³⁹ Seen the negative effects of collectivization Lakoba made a right decision being guided by the well-being of his compatriots. The politician knew well what did the Stalinist collectivization involve and being a good observer he saw what did Stalin's brutal moves did to Russian peasants.⁴⁰ According to the historian from the University in Sukhumi the population of Abkhazia would not have survived mass collectivization while the peasants would have been subject to repressions. Eventually, on 19 February 1931, the Abkhazian SSR cease to exist and was incorporated by the Georgian SSR. It took place during the 6th Georgian communist congress. The status of the former Soviet Republic was reduced to the level of an autonomous republic functioning within the Georgian SSR. Lakoba, regarded as a very active politician and a patriot, could not accept the fact that his homeland had been deprived of the highest status with the USSR and had been subordinated to the Georgians that were hated by the people. To this end he staged a plot which was meant to scare Moscow and dissuade it from collectivization and incorporation into Georgia. Upon his instruction, the Abkhazian peasants roused a number of riots and strikes the largest of which took place between 18 and 26 February 1931 in the village of Duripsh.⁴¹ According to Abkhazian historians, an active participant in the anti-Georgian rebellions was Lakoba's mother. Finally, the peasants gave up having been informed about the approaching armed units under

³⁹ Шамба, Непрошин (2004). More on this subject: Janicki (2009): 165–167; Czachor (2014): 109; Шнирельман (2003): 267; Hewitt (2013): 85.

⁴⁰ Бгажба, Лакоба (2007): 155–156.

⁴¹ Rus. Дурипш.

the command of Lavrentiy Beria.⁴² According to Rafał Czachor depriving the Abkhazians of the possibility of self-determination was a hotbed of conflict in the Caucasus which was present in the history of the currently unrecognized state until the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Abkhazians were deprived of the possibility to decide about their homeland and exert influence on the demographic, economic and cultural situation. The scholar notes that the local population put all the blame not on the central authorities in Moscow, but on the Georgians, for whom the receiving of the Abkhazian land was a sign of historical justice.⁴³

Conclusions

In light of many events in the history of Abkhazia and its road to self-determination, the figure of Nestor Lakoba is positively assessed by contemporary historians and politologists. Despite the fact of being a member of the communist apparatus of power, that politician was guided primarily by the wellbeing of his nation and homeland. He was aware that the Stalinist policy had many shortcomings, brutality and no respect for many nationalities living in the USSR.⁴⁴ In the opinion of politologist Rafał Czachor, it was thanks to Nestor Lakoba that Abkhazia for such a long time withstood the pressure from the Kremlin, collectivization and incorporation into the Georgian SRR. Most probably, a significant role was also played by the fact that the politician knew well

⁴² Ibidem: 156. More on this subject: Куправа (2015): 586.

⁴³ Czachor (2014): 109.

⁴⁴ Шнирельман (2003): 267. More on this subject: Hewitt (2013): 86; Бгажба, Лакоба (2007): 155.

Joseph Stalin.⁴⁵ The finally unexplained death of the head of the Abkhazian Republic in December 1926 in Tbilisi marked the beginning of a subsequent black period of Abkhazian history. Lakoba was most probably poisoned during a meeting with Beria, ordered by the leader of the USSR.⁴⁶ According to historian Kamil Janicki the murder sealed the end of the era initiated by Lenin – *rootinization* and marked the beginning of mass Stalinist cleansing, which were seen by the Abkhazian as a return of *muhajirstvo*.⁴⁷

Undoubtedly, the political situation turned to the worse after the death of the leader of Abkhazian communists. Buried with honours, shortly after his funeral Lakoba was branded as the enemy of the nation. His death was followed by an unexpected wave of mass repressions which hit politicians associated with Lakoba, the intelligentsia and representatives of broadly conceived culture. It was but another attempt at robbing the indigenous population from its cultural heritage starting with the national language.

⁴⁵ Czachor (2104): 110. More on this subject: Бражба, Лакоба (2007): 109–110.

⁴⁶ Czachor (2014): 110. A similar position is presented by: Бражба, Лакоба (2007): 180.

⁴⁷ Janicki (2009): 166. A similar position is presented by: В. Шнирельман (2003): 268.

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