
Mass repressions in Adjara in 1951

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Abstract--- The scientific paper concerns the mass repressions carried out in Adjara in 1951, which were manifested in the deportation of the population to the countries of Central Asia. Repressions were by no means unfamiliar to the Soviet Union — they occurred throughout the country and also affected Georgia. Adjara experienced several waves of Stalinist repressions, particularly during the 1930s-1950s. Notably, the repressions of 1951 primarily targeted the ethnically Georgian population. This event represents a national tragedy that still requires thorough reflection today. The purpose of the research is to reveal the destructive aspects of the Soviet totalitarian system through the analysis of various literature, archival materials, and the memoirs of the deported individuals. In 1951, on fabricated charges, 656 families — totaling 3,762 people — were deported from Adjara. According to the recollections of the repressed, most of them were unaware of the reasons for their deportation. The injustice of the authorities' decision is highlighted by the fact that immediately after Joseph Stalin's death, the deportees were allowed to return to their homeland, and later they were rehabilitated. Nevertheless, the harsh and inhumane deportation process claimed many lives, while the survivors suffered severe psychological trauma that profoundly changed their lives.

Keywords--- repression, Soviet Union, Adjara.

Introduction

In the 20th century, Adjara experienced several waves of Stalinist repressions, among which the 1951 repressions were particularly severe. Unlike the repressions of previous years, which targeted not only Georgians but also other ethnic groups such as Turks, Armenians, Greeks, and Iranians, the 1951 repressions were directed primarily against the Georgian population.

A fundamental contribution to the study of Soviet repressions in Adjara was made by Otar Turmanidze, whose work *"The Soviet Regime and Mass Repressions in Adjara (1921-1952)"* serves as an invaluable source that reveals the brutality and other vices of Soviet rule. In addition to Turmanidze's research, the volume *"Adjara IV"* from the *Essays on the History of Southwestern Georgia* also addresses the issue of the 1951 repressions and presents several noteworthy details concerning this tragic process.

Unfortunately, a large portion of archival materials remains sealed and access to them is still restricted, which makes it impossible to study the topic in full. For this reason, the recollections of eyewitnesses of the repressions and their descendants play a crucial role, as they provide valuable additional information related to the events.

The 1951 repressions affected Georgians who had family members or relatives living in capitalist countries, families of former prisoners of war from the Second World

War, and those whose relatives were accused of attempting to evade participation at the front.

According to official data from the security organs, the number of former prisoners of war from the Second World War in Georgia amounted to 2,400 people. The so-called "emigrant Adjarians" and "traitors to the homeland" living in Turkey numbered 335 individuals.

In addition, 325 people (including family members) were suspected of illegally crossing the border. As a result, the initial list of deportees included 2,035 individuals against whom the authorities fabricated compromising materials, labeling them as "hostile elements."¹

They were accused of providing state secrets to agents allegedly sent from Turkey and of failing to deliver necessary information to the Georgian security services when traveling to Turkey for that purpose or of not bringing back intelligence upon return. For these reasons, the term "traitor Adjarian Georgians" appears frequently in the materials of the state security organs. It should be noted that these accusations were fabricated — a fact later officially confirmed.

Officials of the Ministry of State Security of Georgia prepared a proposal concerning the deportation of these so-called "hostile elements" from the republic. These materials were submitted to Kandid Charkviani, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, who supported the proposal of the Ministry of State Security. However, as he could not decide the matter independently, on November 12, 1951, he sent a letter to Joseph Stalin, in which he wrote:

"In Adjara live a significant number of emigrants and traitors to the homeland who have previously participated in anti-Soviet activities (armed uprisings against the state), smuggling (illegal border crossings with Turkey), and are involved in the anti-Soviet pan-Islamic organization *Sedai Millati* ('Voice of the People'). They also maintain connections with the Turkish consulate in Batumi."

Kandid Charkviani requested the deportation of 6,300 people from Georgia.²

Stalin became convinced that the presence of this category of population in Georgia's border regions posed a threat to the country's security. As a result, on November 29, 1951, the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union issued a decree on the deportation

¹ Essays on the History of Southwestern Georgia, "Adjara IV", p. 391, Publisher - Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi, 2012.

² Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Fund 31, Inventory 1, Case 80, Case "Groza", p. 1-7.

of "hostile elements" from Georgia's border areas. This was followed by the identification of "new hostile elements" by the security organs, which increased the number of people to be deported to 8,615 in total.³

In 1951, those deported included men, children, women, and the elderly. Certain privileges applied to participants of the Second World War, laureates of state prizes, and distinguished workers in science and the arts. These privileges were valid only if no compromising materials existed against them.⁴

The deportees were allowed to take personal and household belongings weighing up to 1,500 kg. All remaining property had to be handed over to the local authorities.⁵

The actions of the military were unbearably harsh. They would unexpectedly arrive at the homes of families targeted for deportation at dawn in winter, surround the house, and announce that the family was being deported. In cases of disobedience, the soldiers were authorized to open fire.⁶

We located one of the deported individuals, Zaur Mzhavanadze, a resident of the village of Zemo Khevi, who was 6 years old at the time of the deportation. However, he experienced such extreme stress due to the repression that he remembers in detail everything that happened in December 1951.

Mr. Zaur Mzhavanadze recounts that on December 1, 1951, at 6 a.m., Soviet soldiers unexpectedly arrived at his family's home and informed them that the entire family was to be deported. They did not even know the reason for their deportation or where they were being taken.

After an unbearable two-week journey, they discovered that they were in Central Asia, where they had to live for a certain period in isolation from one another. As Zaur Mzhavanadze recalls, many could not endure the long journey, including his uncle, who soon passed away. In October 1953, a few months after Stalin's death, Georgy Malenkov, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, granted the deportees the right to return home. This fact confirms that the deportees had been removed from their homeland completely without justification.

³ Ibid., p. 33-34.

⁴ Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Fund 31, Inventory 1, Case 80, p. 174-177.

⁵ Otar Turmanidze, "The Soviet Regime and Mass Repressions in Adjara (1921-1952)", p. 558, Publisher - Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi, 2019.

⁶ Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Fund 31, Inventory 1, Case 80, p. 174-177.

In 1951, 2,581 families, totaling 11,450 people, were deported from Georgia.⁷ According to the Council of Ministers of the USSR decree of November 29, 1951, 8,615 people were designated for deportation.

Although the Soviet authorities allowed the deportees to take up to 1,500 kg of personal belongings, the element of surprise and the limited time made it impossible for them to pack their belongings properly, leaving them virtually doomed to death.

The deportation from Adjara took place simultaneously on the night of December 1, 1951. The situation was further worsened by the fact that automobile transport was available only in the district centers of the mountainous regions of Adjara, forcing the residents of highland areas to carry their belongings manually on their backs to the district centers.

The deportees did not have warm clothing or proper shoes. They were loaded onto freight trucks and transported to Batumi in this condition. From there, they were placed into cargo train wagons, where they endured hunger, cold, and unsanitary conditions for about a month. Many people died along the way, and their bodies were either thrown outside or buried in the snow at train stops.⁸

In 1951, 656 families, totaling 3,762 people, were deported from Adjara to Central Asia, specifically to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. From Batumi, 40 families (140 people) were deported; from Kobuleti, 49 families (219 people); from Khelvachauri, 203 families (1,235 people); from Keda, 134 families (860 people); and from Khulo, 230 families (1,308 people).⁹

As the data show, the majority of the deportees came from the mountainous regions of Adjara. Among the deportees were 1,360 women and 1,212 children.¹⁰ A large portion of the repressed came from the border villages of Batumi, Keda, and Khulo districts. From Akhalsofla in Batumi district, 67 people were deported; from Gonio, 51; and from Sarf, 31 people. Families among the deportees included the Kokholadze, Narakidze, Baramidze, Mikeladze, Chanidze, Kakhidze, and others.

It should also be noted that some families were deported for a second time. Families of prisoners of war who had been deported to Siberia and the Far East in 1943 and

⁷ Ibid., p. 220.

⁸ Otar Turmanidze, "The Soviet Regime and Mass Repressions in Adjara (1921-1952)", p. 560, Publisher - Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi, 2019

⁹ Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Fund 31, Inventory 1, Case 80, p. 220.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 302.

relatives of "deserter" soldiers who returned to their homes in 1945 were again deported in 1951 as so-called "hostile elements."¹¹

It will be interesting to examine the specific reasons for the deportation of individual people. From the village of Kolotauri in Keda district, Nodar Saladze was deported because his father registered him as Turkish to avoid military service. The deportation of Nukhri Khatamadze's family involved Sardion Bajelidze, a local government representative. According to him, the reason for Nukhri Khatamadze's deportation was that border guards had sent him to Turkey to collect information, and apparently, he failed to fulfill this task.¹²

In 1951, Shukri Gogitidze's family was deported because he had served in the Vlasov Army during the Second World War and had been captured by the Germans. He returned to his village in 1947, but four years later, he and his family were deported to Kazakhstan.

From Keda district, the Turmanidze, Surmanidze, Diasamidze, and Devadze families were deported. Ishigh Turmanidze's family was deported before the war due to a family member's smuggling activities. The Devadze and Surmanidze families were deported because their family members and relatives had moved to live in Turkey. Hussein Surmanidze had been held as a prisoner by the fascists, which became the reason for his family's deportation. As we can see, the reasons were almost always the same: smuggling, military captivity, relatives living in Turkey, and so on.

The memories of those deported in 1951 are also striking. Nazi Beridze, a resident of the village of Tskhlakhvi in Shuakhevi, recalls the deportation process:

"I cannot erase from my memory that horrifying night operation that took place on December 1, 1951. At that time, our village had no electricity, and we lived in darkness. It must have been around 3-4 a.m. when there was a loud knock on the door. My father got out of bed and opened the door. Upon seeing the soldiers, he told my mother:

'Perhaps something has happened to our son Mikheil.' He was serving in the Soviet Army at the time. There were three soldiers, one of whom spoke Georgian, while the other two spoke Russian. The Georgian soldier informed us: 'You are being deported from the territory of Georgia effective immediately.' The soldiers searched our entire household. They did not allow us to put on clothing. Six of us were deported,

¹¹ Essays on the History of Southwestern Georgia, "Adjara IV", p. 393, Publisher - Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi, 2012.

¹² Otar Turmanidze, "The Soviet Regime and Mass Repressions in Adjara (1921-1952)", p. 562, Publisher - Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi, 2019.

and we barely managed to take three beds. They also did not allow us to take any corn or other food supplies."¹³

Life for the population in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan was extremely difficult. They had to spend the nights in basements, sheds, and tents, where there was not even a proper floor. The deportees were registered and placed under police supervision, and they were forbidden to move freely.¹⁴

Two years later, by the decree of April 11, 1953, those deported in 1951 were released from special settlement and freed from police supervision. However, the deportees endured such severe suffering that many could not survive the ordeal and found their final resting place far from their homeland. In the autumn of 1953, after two years of deportation, the survivors returned to their homeland.

An interesting recollection comes from Archil Beridze, a deportee in 1951, professor at Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University and Candidate of Psychological Sciences. He recalls that he and his family, consisting of eight members, were deported from the village of Tskhlakhvi on December 1, 1951. The reason for his deportation was the fact that his uncle had moved to Turkey in 1931. According to him, the family had no information about the uncle, why he went to Turkey, or where he was and what he was doing.

As Archil Beridze recalls, after arriving in Central Asia, his eight-member family was housed in a single small room of only 10 square meters.

Despite this, they still managed to survive. Returning home, however, proved equally difficult, as many of their houses and properties had been destroyed. Additionally, during the deportation, they had lost eight head of livestock, of which only two were returned upon their return. The suffering endured during the deportation took its toll, and shortly thereafter, his parents, siblings, and sister-in-law passed away.¹⁵

The returning deportees faced new challenges, as much of their property had been destroyed, requiring immense effort to rebuild their lives. For example, the Kakabadze family, upon returning, found that three other families had moved into their home, and significant effort was required to reclaim it.¹⁶

¹³ Otar Turmanidze, "Deportation of the Population from Adjara in 1951", Publisher - Niko Berdzenishvili Institute, Works V, p. 124, Batumi, 2007.

¹⁴ Essays on the History of Southwestern Georgia, "Adjara IV", p. 395, Publisher - Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi, 2012.

¹⁵ Otar Turmanidze, "The Soviet Regime and Mass Repressions in Adjara (1921-1952)", p. 592, Publisher - Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi, 2019.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 588.

In a 2024 interview with the newspaper *Batumelebi*, Sonia Beridze, a descendant of those deported in 1951 from the village of Lomanuri, recalls:

"Some families returning to the village found their houses destroyed by the state. The materials from the demolished houses were taken to neighboring villages for use by state institutions. The neighboring villagers carried the materials on their shoulders and helped rebuild the homes for those returning from deportation."

Immediately after Stalin's death, the deportees were granted the right to return to their homeland. An important step in their rehabilitation was the decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on January 16, 1989, which annulled the decisions and verdicts of unconstitutional bodies (such as the "triads," "duos," "special meetings," and others), thereby officially rehabilitating the deported individuals.

Conclusion

The repressions carried out in Adjara in 1951 were extremely severe, affecting 651 families and a total of 3,762 people, who were deported to Central Asia, specifically to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. As we have seen, the Soviet authorities leveled fabricated accusations against the population. They were accused of spying for Turkey, smuggling, and other alleged crimes, and even having relatives living in Turkey was considered a reason for deportation. During the repression, the vast majority of people did not know the reason for their deportation, nor were they informed about where they were being taken.

The inhuman conditions of the journey added to their suffering and claimed the lives of many. The cruelty of Soviet rule is further illustrated by the fact that, immediately after Stalin's death, the deportees were allowed to return home, and later, in 1989, they were officially rehabilitated, which represents the Soviet system's acknowledgment of the crimes committed in 1951.

The population returning from deportation found their homes and property destroyed, and they had to rebuild their lives through their own efforts. These events once again demonstrate the vices and crimes of the Soviet totalitarian system against the Georgian people—crimes for which no one was held accountable, leaving yet another dark stain in the history of the Soviet Union.

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