

POLITICAL REPRESSION IN GEORGIA FOLLOWING THE FAILURE OF THE 1924 UPRISING (Deportation to Russia)

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ABSTRACT: *The goal of the 1924 uprising was to restore the lost national statehood of Georgia. Unfortunately, the rebellion failed to achieve its objective, resulting in defeat, after which the Soviet government employed unprecedented political repressions. One of the common methods was deportation to Russia, a practice well-tested in Soviet Georgia both before and after the 1924 uprising. This form of repression was no less severe than others, as Georgians were exiled to remote Russian provinces and concentration camps, where they were imprisoned alongside those convicted of serious crimes. Harsh climatic conditions worsened their situation, leading to widespread illness. Consequently, although many Georgians were sentenced to 2-3 years of exile in Russia, the majority perished in the remote Russian provinces.*

Keywords: *Uprising, 1924, political repression, Russia, exile, concentration camp.*

In February-March of 1921, Soviet Russia occupied the Democratic Republic of Georgia. From that point, an anti-Soviet national movement emerged in Georgia, taking various forms: peaceful demonstrations, delegations to Soviet authorities, the presentation of political demands, calls for referendums, local uprisings, and more. However, none of these efforts yielded tangible results. Consequently, the idea arose to organize a large-scale anti-Soviet national uprising across the entire Caucasus, involving not only Georgians but also Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and North Caucasians. The Georgian Independence Committee, formed for this purpose, sought to establish connections with each of these groups. Armenians initially refused to participate in the uprising, while Azerbaijanis and North Caucasians expressed readiness to rebel against Soviet rule.

While ties with North Caucasians and Azerbaijanis remained, on February 2, 1924, Noe Ramishvili sent a letter to the Georgian Independence Committee discussing the idea of a Caucasus-wide anti-Soviet national uprising. Ramishvili argued that the rebellion would only be justified if both North Caucasians and Azerbaijanis joined, as this would compel the Armenians to participate as well. In his view, if the Azerbaijanis rebelled, the Ottoman Empire would defend them, forcing the Ottomans to act against Soviet Russia. However, due to the work of the Extraordinary Commission's (Cheka) agent network, organizing a pan-Caucasian anti-Soviet uprising proved impossible. Georgia ended up rebelling alone against Soviet power, which

made it easier for the authorities to suppress the movement (further complicated by the premature start of the uprising in Chiatura).

The 1924 uprising in Georgia occurred in various locations, including: Zugdidi district (Tsalenjikha, Lia, Darcheli, Khobi, Chkhorotsku, Khibula), Senaki district (Akhali Senaki, Abasha, Martvili), Kutaisi district (Kutaisi), Shorapani district (Chiatura, Shorapani, Chkhari, Vani, Bagdati), Ozurgeti district (Chokhatauri, Nagomari, Khidistavi, Surebi, Sachamiaseri, Lanchkhuti, Shemokmedi, Likhauri), Lechkhumi district (Choluri, Mekveni, Tsageri, Becho), Kodori district (Tsebelda), Samurzakano district (Saberio), Adjara (Gorjomi, Kvabgha, Zoti, Chkhakoura), Gori district (Kavtiskhevi, Tsinarekhi), Tianeti district (Tianeti), Dusheti district (Dusheti) and Tbilisi district (Manglisi).

The 1924 uprising ended in defeat, after which the Soviet government implemented unprecedented political repressions, including executions without trial, imprisonment, property confiscation, exile, deportation to Russia, beatings, destruction of livelihoods, and other brutal measures. Among these methods, exile to Russia was frequently employed. This method of repression, though in practice before the 1924 uprising, became widespread afterward. The harsh conditions faced by those exiled are well-documented in records preserved in the Central Archive of the National Archives of Georgia.

One such account is provided by Kakhaber Imnadze in his work „*In the Kingdom of Sadists (Impressions)*“ written in Paris in 1925. Imnadze traveled through Soviet Russia and Soviet Ukraine in 1923-1924, offering insightful observations on various issues, including the deportation of Georgians to Russia following the defeat of the 1924 uprising. According to Imnadze, 200-300 people from Georgia were brought daily to Moscow’s Taganka distribution prison, where they were then sent to concentration camps in northern Russian provinces, alongside criminals convicted of serious offenses.

Eremia Mechekhia, a native of the Chokhatauri region in the Ozurgeti district, played a leading role during the 1924 uprising in Chokhatauri. For this, on September 3, 1925, the Special Collegium of Georgia sentenced him to three years of exile on Solovetsky Island, a place where criminals served their sentences. A year and a half into his exile, Eremia’s wife, Maro Mechekhia, wrote to the Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of Soviet Georgia, requesting that her husband either be fully pardoned or transferred to a different city in Russia. In her letter, Maro emphasized the family’s extreme poverty, noting that they owned only a small house, a hut, and a small plot of land. She also detailed that the family consisted of six people: herself, elderly parents, three young children, and an orphaned nephew.

Attached to the letter was a certificate from the chairman of the Chokhatauri regional executive committee, confirming Eremia’s poverty and the composition of his family. However, Maro’s plea was forwarded to the Special Commission of Georgia, where Eremia’s Anti-Soviet activities were re-examined. The commission concluded that Eremia had engaged in counter-revolutionary activities since the Bolshevik takeover, continuing with illegal actions against the Soviet government and leading a Menshevik group during the August uprising. With these charges confirmed, the Special Collegium upheld his three-year exile sentence in a concentration camp, rejecting Maro Mechekhi’s request.

The Special Commission arrested Viktor Zhghenti, a resident of the village Uchkhobi in the Dvabzu district of Ozurgeti. He was held in prison in Tbilisi for nine months and was prepared for deportation to Russia. However, his family was not informed of this decision. Viktor's father, Giorgi Zhghenti, traveled to Tbilisi to visit his son and learned of the deportation order only upon arrival. He barely managed to reach Viktor before his deportation to the Yaroslavl political isolation camp.

Giorgi Zhghenti submitted an appeal to the Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of Georgia, requesting clemency for his son. His letter was forwarded to the Special Commission, but the request was denied, and Viktor's deportation proceeded as planned.

Leo Rukhadze, along with other Georgians, was transferred from Metekhi prison to the former katorga prison in Yaroslavl and later to prisons in Moscow and Suzdal. He spent three years in Russian prisons (not including his time in the Special Commission and Metekhi prison). After this period, he was exiled for three years to the city of Oryol.

While in Suzdal, Rukhadze's health deteriorated, and he, along with other Georgian prisoners, requested either release and return to Georgia or a transfer to a Georgian prison to serve their sentences. However, this request was denied.

After being transferred to Oryol, Rukhadze found work at the Central Bureau for Translation Control but soon contracted tuberculosis, leaving him bedridden. Based on doctors' recommendations, he needed a change of climate, so in 1926, Rukhadze requested permission to return to Georgia for treatment. If this was not granted, he asked to be transferred to a Georgian prison, such as Metekhi, Akhaltsikhe, or another facility in Georgia, to serve the remainder of his sentence. Despite his appeals, his requests were not granted.

Varlam Mogheladze was arrested by the Special Commission for organizing an illegal Menshevik group and for actively working against Soviet authority. On March 15, 1926, the Georgian Special Commission sentenced him to three years of exile from Georgia.

Mogheladze's wife, Mariam Mogheladze, wrote a letter to Filippe Makhardze, informing him that she waited daily outside his office but was not allowed to meet him. She expressed her readiness to prove her husband's innocence, stating that he had been imprisoned without a proper investigation. Mariam also described her desperate situation, indicating that she was on the verge of taking her own life due to the unbearable circumstances.

Despite her plea, the Special Commission denied the request for Varlam Mogheladze's release. Ilia Sarjveladze, a third-year student at Tbilisi State University, was arrested for allegedly participating in an illegal Marxist organization. The Georgian Special Commission sentenced him to three years in the Upper Ural political isolation prison.

Ilia's brother, Gramiton Sarjveladze, appealed to the chairman of the All-Georgian Central Executive Committee, describing Ilia's deteriorating health condition, including pneumonia, anemia, and neurasthenia. Gramiton requested a reduction in his brother's sentence and his transfer to a less harsh environment, such as Transcaucasia or a southern Russian province,

to preserve his life. At the time, Ilia was in the correctional facility's hospital. However, the Special Commission denied the request for leniency.

The Emergency Commission arrested Kharum Taliashvili, who was accused of counter-revolutionary activities. Kharum Taliashvili was sentenced to three years of exile in a concentration camp. Kharum Taliashvili's father, Zakro Taliashvili, wrote a letter to the Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of All Georgia and the Head of the Political Administration of Georgia, requesting his release based on the guarantees of the entire family and local party workers; however, this was unsuccessful.

As seen from these examples, the Soviet government of Georgia actively resorted to the exile of defendants to Russia. This form of repression was implemented both before and after the 1924 uprising. Exile to Russia was considered one of the harsher forms of repression, as Georgians were placed in concentration camps in the northern provinces of Russia, where those accused of serious crimes served their sentences, and conflicts with them were frequent. Additionally, the harsh climatic conditions led to illness among Georgians. As we can see, the government did not satisfy the requests of the exiles or their family members to be transferred to the southern provinces of Russia. Therefore, despite the fact that the defendants were sentenced to exile for 2-3 years, most of them perished in the distant provinces of Russia.

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