

Revolution and Sovietization in the North Caucasus

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In 1895 P. P. Nadezhdin, a member of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, wrote: The Caucasus is one of the most interesting parts of the world, both in its geographical, ethnographical and historical aspects... So much has been written about the Caucasus that the numerous works published in Russia and abroad could, in Baron Uslar's expression, form a mountain. However, for the majority of the educated public this mountain contains no full and systematic description of the Caucasus.¹

¹ P. P. Nadezhdin *Kavkazsky krai—priroda i lyudi* (The Caucasus, Its Geography and People), Tula, 1895.

Baron Uslar, who died 70 years ago, was a scholar of Caucasian history and linguistics and had compiled alphabets for the Abazin, Chechen and other Caucasian languages. Since his time another “mountain” has been written about the Caucasus.

In view of the wealth of material available the aim of the present article is quite modest—to give a short history of the Revolution as it affected the North Caucasus, and of the forcible implementation there of the alien Soviet system and Communist principles.

As a result of the historical changes which have taken place in the last two centuries, the borders of the North Caucasus now run along the Kuban and Kuma Rivers in the north, and in the south approximately along the principal range of the Caucasian mountains. In the west and east the North Caucasus is bounded by the Black and Caspian Seas respectively. The present description will deal primarily with the events which took place in this region during the first years of the Revolution.

Sir George Buchanan, the English Ambassador in Petrograd during the Revolution, wrote the following in his memoirs: “It is not surprising that the fall of the old regime was met with a sigh of relief, and that the Revolution spread from Petrograd to Moscow, from Moscow to Kiev and from thence throughout the empire.”²)

The Revolution reached the Caucasus too. In the Russia of that time, with its many nationalities and tribes as well as numerous administrative regions and districts, and, most important, many different languages, varied historical backgrounds and cultures, the Revolution took many different forms according to the part of the country. One feature, however, was common to all regions all wished to profit by the Revolution as a sure remedy against the many ills of the old regime. Many peoples quite naturally strove to achieve unity on ethnic, linguistic or religious grounds and to readjust their borders in cases where injustice was believed to prevail.

War and revolution went hand in hand. The Russian nation, represented by a “progressive bloc” in the State Duma and the “right-thinking” elements of Russian society aimed principally at “bringing the war to a victorious conclusion and driving the haughty enemy outside the borders of the motherland.”

However, from the Kshesinskaya Palace, where Lenin headed his Bolshevik general staff, Lenin and *Okonnaya pravda* were disseminating completely different slogans throughout the country and in the trenches as well: “Down with Imperialist War! The Proletariat Has No Motherland. Fraternize with the Germans! Comrade Soldiers, Go Home with Your Rifles to Receive Land!”

The famous Order No. 1 of the Council of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies was signed and published by the Petrograd Soviet on March 2, 1917. This order abolished the disciplinary code, the authority of commanders and officers and the respect due to rank. It gave the Army various kinds of elective committees and completely achieved its primary purpose—it brought about the disintegration of the Army. According to a leading member of the Council of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies:

Order No. 1 was not a mistake—it was a necessity. It was not the work of Sokolov, but the expression of the unanimous will of the social revolutionaries and the social democrats. On the day we made the Revolution we realized that if we did not destroy the former Army it would, in its turn, crush the

² Sir George Buchanan *Moya missiya v Rossii. Vospominanya diplomata* (My Mission to Russia. Memoirs of a Diplomat), Berlin, 1924., II, 63 (Russian translation from English).

Revolution. We had to choose between the Army and the Revolution. We did not hesitate to choose the latter and applied the necessary measures in what was, I make hold to say, a way of genius.³)

This particular order is of importance because it caused incalculable harm to the Caucasus as a whole and to the North Caucasus in particular.

Since the Caucasus was conquered by Tsarist Russia there had been two sources of unrest among the peoples of that region. The first was military government and the second, the land. In accordance with the laws of military government there was always a military governor in Dagestan, and in the former Kuban and Terek districts an appointed ataman for the Cossacks. The latter had the rights of a governor-general as far as the North Caucasian tribes in the above districts were concerned. In many offenses of a criminal nature the accused persons if Russians or Cossacks were handed over to the civil authorities. For similar crimes North Caucasians, however, came under the sole jurisdiction of the military authorities and were judged by the military district courts. Quite often, cases concerning North Caucasians which came before these courts ended in death sentences. Sessions of the Caucasian Military District Court were often held in various towns of the North Caucasus.

Another, and no less acute problem facing the Revolution was the land question. This problem was the source of frequent disputes and even murders as a result of the tension between the indigenous North Caucasians and the Cossacks, principally those from the Terek district. During almost one hundred years of war in the Caucasus, Russia, many times stronger, gradually drove back the indigenous population to the mountain ravines of the North Caucasus. The war finally ended in the eastern part (Dagestan) in 1859, and in the West (Adyghe, home of the Circassian tribes) in 1864. Subsequently hundreds of thousands of hectares of the most fertile land and vast areas of the best wooded land were given by the Russian authorities to the Cossacks, as well as to retired soldiers and peasant settlers from Russia. Some of the latter were renamed "Cossacks," and treated officially as such.

At the end of May 1864 a ukase by Tsar Alexander II was published stating that the "inviolability of their religion, adats (Moslem common law, as opposed to religious law. *Translator's note*), lands and woods is being preserved unshakeably and in perpetuum for the peoples of the North Caucasus." The Tsar's ukase was, however, soon violated. Instead of the "inviolability of the adats" the military government and military courts were introduced. Religious influence and freedom of conscience were sharply curtailed. "The inviolability of the lands and woods" also turned out to be an empty promise. Hundreds of thousands of hectares of fine land and vast stretches of untouched forest were either given to "highly-placed persons" and settlers or declared to be state property. Consequently, all the North Caucasian tribes lacked arable land. Most affected in this respect were Balkaria, Karachay, mountainous Ossetia, the Ingush regions, the former Chechen lands and Dagestan. Official figures state that the average plots of land are "from one and one-half to two desyatinas (one desyatina equals roughly 2.7 acres) per family" (a family consisting of 7 or 8 persons). In Dagestan the extent of a land plot was measured, as a rule, with felt cloaks. "My land is under my cloak" was a saying in highland Dagestan. The Sunzha line of Cossack settlements, created with a special aim and wedged between the villages of the Chechen-Ingush region, were very often the cause of quarrels with the Cossacks.

The peoples of the North Caucasus and the permanent Central National Committee they had created at the beginning of May 1917 to replace the Provisional Committee founded in March of that year, strove first and foremost to regain their recently lost land and freedom, which morally and historically belonged to them.

³ *Arkhiv russkoi revolyutsii* (Archives of the Russian Revolution), Berlin, 1922, VI, 75.

Confidence in the justice of their aspirations made these peoples the most devoted and steadfast supporters of democratic principles.

It appeared that, with the proclamation of liberty, equality and fraternity, with democratic elections to all responsible posts (from the village elders to the commissars of provinces) with elections of national councils and national centers, all survivals of Tsarist times were only a bad memory. However, in this all were mistaken, including the peoples of the North Caucasus. Difficult and bloody times lay ahead.

The Caucasian front began to disintegrate before all the others. Order No. 1 reached the distant front very soon. First there were deserters who fled in groups. Then whole units went off on their own. Armenia, which had a large number of soldiers on the Caucasian front, had organized national units out of them. They succeeded in expelling from their territory the unleashed horde of soldiers. The Georgians did the same. The army of deserters without any commanders did not particularly wish to stay in these regions where there was so little food. It tried to get to the North Caucasus where there were sufficient bread, cattle and other supplies. First they settled in the larger towns and then in the smaller places. They went from the front to the North Caucasus by rail and sea to Sukhum, Sochi, Tuapse and Anapa. The whole of the Black Sea coast swarmed with tens of thousands of wandering, armed soldiers and sailors, who declared they had come “to defend the gains of the Revolution.” The local population and people living in their summer houses suffered night robberies and attacks by bandits calling themselves the “guardians of the Revolution.” Large battles took place between organized local vigilantes and these “guardians.” Many people were killed and wounded. In the East of the North Caucasus the position was more serious. Here Cossack regiments who had returned, also as deserters from the Caucasian front, joined the “guardians of the Revolution.” The Cossacks came “to defend their settlements from the Chechens,” although until the beginning of summer 1917 not a single unfriendly act had been committed by the Chechens or any North Caucasian against the Cossacks.

The so-called Control Companies should be included with these “guardians.” The Control Companies were set up on the initiative of the front-line Council of the Caucasian Front which met in Tbilisi. A decree of this Council stated that part of the duties of the Control Companies were the “struggle with deserters and counter-revolutionaries..” The commanders of these companies were young, demagogic ensigns or noncommissioned officers. They acquired almost the same power as the former governor-general in the time of the “Military Government.” These companies did not fight deserters, nor could they do so in view of the mass nature of desertion. Their chief activity was fighting with the indigenous North Caucasians from whom they confiscated all arms. Every morning near railroad stations corpses of murdered North Caucasians who were supposed to be “counter-revolutionaries” were found. There was, of course, no ground for believing that counter-revolution existed among the North Caucasians. The regular development of the revolution in social, economic and agrarian questions could only have led to a solution of the painful problems of the North Caucasus. However, the Russian Revolution took such a crooked path that the people of the North Caucasus and their Committee had first to think of protecting the indigenous population. Moreover, a clear example of the need for action was provided during the first days of the Congress of authorized representatives of the North Caucasian peoples in Vladikavkaz. In Grozny on May 4, 1917, “organized deserters” (at that strange time there was such an organization) and Cossacks attacked the Chechens living in that town. Almost all the Chechen houses were burned. Many Chechens were killed, including women and children.

The Congress, alarmed by these events, sent the Chairman of its Central Committee, Abdul Mezhid Chermoev, as a delegate to Grozny. Chermoev was a Chechen and he went to Grozny together with a friend, the writer of the present article. They were accompanied by F. M.

Kirov, a friend of the Chairman of the Oblast Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, and many others. The whole population of the Chechen regions, comprising almost a million people, was moving in the direction of Grozny. When the delegates came up to the town it was surrounded by 10,000 Chechen horsemen. Combustible material was brought up to set the town on fire. Only the great influence of A. M. Chermoev with his fellow tribesmen was able to persuade the Chechens to abandon their plan for burning the town and to agree to negotiate with the inhabitants. A somewhat similar occurrence took place a month later in the town of Khasaf-Yurt. Here, however, the massacre of North Caucasians had more serious consequences. The "organized deserters" either fled or were shot, and the town of Khasaf-Yurt was burned to ashes. A similar thing happened to the Kabardinians in the town of Georgievsk. This incident too had an unhappy end. Parts of the town were burned out. A fourth attempt by the organized deserters, this time to sack Mineralnye Vody station, was beaten back by the Nagai and the Kabardinians, together with the workers of the Mineralnye Vody Depot. Here the attackers were completely wiped out. It was under such difficult conditions and in such troubled times that the North Caucasus had to organize its national life.

The situation at that time might be characterized in the words of the press—"War and revolution went side by side." All political parties, groups and individuals had their own ideas of the "welfare of Russia." The armies were finally breaking up. The North Caucasus had one volunteer division at the front, the Caucasian Cavalry Division. It, together with Cossacks and other cavalry regiments which had retained their discipline, was being frequently transferred from place to place in order to block gaps left in the front by deserters. The situation in the North Caucasus was becoming increasingly serious. In the beginning of June 1917 an infantry division came to Vladikavkaz. The commander was a general who called himself an "old revolutionary." A telegram had been sent by the High Command of the Caucasian Front on the desertion of this division from the front. During the same period there was a large unit in the town of Mozdok under the command of a certain "Comrade Nikitin" who was called the "nightingale-robber." Groups of bandits who arrived brought anarchy to the region, although they declared they had come to "preserve the gains of the Revolution." All groups of the population, without distinction of race, suffered from the presence of the deserters, who interfered in everything. The land was overburdened with tens of thousands of persons who produced nothing. The local working population, whose lives and property were threatened, had to be protected. The Vladikavkaz Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, which at that time had good relations with the North Caucasian Central Committee, had no authority over the newly-arrived deserters. Moreover, the Central Committee, which was responsible for the welfare of the population, had few armed forces. The two reserve squadrons of the Ossetian regiment, together with the poorly-armed and numerically small national militia, were quite inadequate, although they were overworked and sent everywhere.

The Central Committee was particularly concerned with the fate of the Caucasian Cavalry Division and kept in contact with it. Two officers who held high posts in this division were members of the Central Committee, having been elected by the North Caucasian General Congress.

While the Russian Army was breaking up, the Caucasian Cavalry Division remained a disciplined model unit. This admirable quality of the division was not always put to use by the high command for purely military operations against the external enemy. The division was often transferred from place to place to reestablish order or to replace soldiers who had deserted their positions. This led to much criticism among the soldiers, who accused the division of "counter-revolution." This fact, and the absence of adequate armed forces, led to the Central Committee's decision to withdraw the division from the front and bring it home.

Consequently, after a discussion of the problem, the Central Committee on June 30, 1917, unanimously decreed the following:

In view of the fact that North Caucasus is full of soldiers who have deserted the front with weapons and who have settled in our regions, that their number exceeds several tens of thousands, that there is a danger of famine occurring next year, that the indigenous population is threatened with extinction, that the People's Militia and the two-hundred-strong reserves of the Ossetian Squadron are able to maintain order only in Vladikavkaz, the Central Committee of the Union of North Caucasian Peoples has decreed that the War Ministry and the high command be urgently approached on the return of the Caucasian Cavalry Division to its homeland. The Central Committee of the Union of North Caucasian Peoples is utterly opposed to the Division's becoming a weapon in the hands of any groups or individuals and against its being involved in any internecine war.⁴⁾

Further, the Central Committee decided that the author of the present article, a friend of the chairman of the Central Committee, should present the decree to the proper persons. When he arrived in Petrograd he succeeded in contacting Prince Eristov; who was a secretary at A. F. Kerensky's War Ministry. The author's arrival in Petrograd coincided with the "small" Bolshevik uprising, which was led by Lenin from the Kseshinskaya Palace and suppressed by evening of July 17. The newspapers of July 18, 1917, wrote:

The uprising was suppressed by units of the Provisional Government. The Aurora did not fire a single shot even when Lenin's headquarters, the former Kseshinskaya Palace, was being assaulted. Lenin himself fled to Finland and many of his well-known Bolshevik friends were arrested.

On July 20, at 9:30 in the morning the author was at the War Ministry, in the reception room of the War Minister. Prince Eristov, who knew the purpose of the visit, announced the arrival to Kerensky. When the representative of the North Caucasus went into the study, the War Minister stood with his back to the large desk and was obviously about to leave. The meeting took place standing, and lasted only a few minutes.

Kerensky said: "Unfortunately I cannot give you much time. You are here to secure the return of the division. This is a question of troop, disposition and is within the competence of the high command. I know only of a plan to make a corps out of the division." Kerensky turned to Prince Eristov and said: "Please take Mr. Kosok to Savinkov."⁵⁾

Prince Eristov took the author to Savinkov's reception room, where he was handed over to a young officer who looked, like a Caucasian. The latter immediately announced the visitor's arrival. He was taken into Savinkov's study. Savinkov first looked very attentively at the author's national costume for a few seconds, and then said: "A few minutes ago A. F. Kerensky telephoned me and told me of your Central Committee's desire to withdraw the division from the front and send it back to the Caucasus. This was quite unexpected and is almost impossible. Our plan is quite the opposite. It is to make the division into a corps, for it is one of the most disciplined cavalry units we have. This is why we wish to enlarge it."⁶⁾ Savinkov added: "I cannot see why you ask for the Division's return to the Caucasus. In fact, recently it has been very difficult for us to understand the conduct, of peoples in the outlying regions. It seems the Ukraine has claims to make on Russia. The Don is not only sending no reinforcements but is even withdrawing units from the front. The Kuban is also going its own way."

⁴ Arkhiv russkoi revolyutsii (Archives of the Russian Revolution), Berlin, 1922, VI, 75.

⁵ Boris Savinkov, a member of the Social Revolutionary Party, was an aide of the War Minister.

⁶ The conversation was noted down by the author on July 20, 1917, an hour after it took place. The notes are in the author's archives.

Savinkov, in mentioning the Ukraine, the Don and Kuban, had extended the sphere of the conversation. The author pointed out to him, referring to the decree of the Central Committee, that the neighbors of the North Caucasians, the Terek, Kuban and Don Cossacks, had first-class, second-class and even third-class armed regiments at their disposition, and that they were consequently able to preserve and defend the life and property of the inhabitants of their regions. The southern neighbors of the North Caucasians, Armenia and Georgia, were in a similar favorable position. They had national military units at their disposition. However, the North Caucasus was in an exceptionally difficult and unfavorable position. For this reason the Central Committee was forced to insist categorically upon the return of the cavalry division to the North Caucasus. Apart from this the Committee had to emphasize the inadmissibility of using the division as a political weapon in the hands of parties and individuals. Moreover, the peoples of the North Caucasus were unable and did not desire to give a single ruble or horseman to make a corps of the division. Savinkov answered that the War Ministry knew the division had originally been formed at the expense of the Caucasian peoples. However, the Ministry, in expanding the division into a corps, did not intend to burden the North Caucasians. All expenses would be borne by the War Ministry. Very few new soldiers would be required, since the corps would include the First Dagestan Regiment and Ossetian units. Moreover, Savinkov found “worthy of attention” the desire of the North Caucasian Central Committee that the division take no part in the civil conflict. However, he did insist that the “division must be made into a corps” and that its return to its homeland “depends on the High Command.” While this conversation was going on a change in the government took place in Petrograd. Prince Lvov resigned as Prime Minister and proposed that the post be given to Kerensky, “a younger and more active man, who is, moreover, in close contact with democracy.”⁷) The change in government did not lead to any significant alterations in policy.

The country was approaching anarchy at an alarming rate. Moreover, there was considerable friction between the new prime minister and General Kornilov, the commander in chief of the Army. Kerensky believed Kornilov desired to establish a military dictatorship, while Kornilov called Kerensky “an ambitious man” who was inclined to support “protégés of the Germans and spies, headed by Lenin.”

At the state conference in Moscow on August 26—27, 1917, when both the opponents spoke, the contradictions became even more pronounced and brought the country closer to disaster. At the same time the North Caucasus, which was inundated with innumerable disorganized bands of soldiers and Bolshevik propagandists, was making one last effort to maintain order in its regions. No information had yet been received about the return of the Caucasian Cavalry Division from the front. Telegraphed requests remained unanswered. Officers specially sent to the division returned with the verbal answer: “The Cavalry Corps will soon be going to the Caucasus by train.”

Finally, on the morning of September 8 the Central Committee received a telegram from its representative and the chairman of the All-Russian Moslem Council in Petrograd. The telegram stated that the cavalry division, as part of a special cavalry group, was at the approaches of Petrograd, and that the divisional staff was at Dno station. The telegram requested the Committee's intervention. This turn of events disturbed the Central Committee considerably. On the day it received the telegram it decreed unanimously at a special session that the head of government and the commander in chief be sent once more the Committee's resolution of June 30, 1917, on the division's return and on the inadmissibility of its becoming involved in the civil conflict. A telegram was sent to a representative of the Central Committee in Petrograd, telling him to meet the division and order it to halt its march towards Petrograd.

⁷ Sir George Buchanan, *op. cit.*, pp. 110—11.

The so-called Kornilov epic ended in failure, and General Krymov committed suicide. The Caucasian Cavalry Division, which was re-formed and made a corps, under the command of General P. Polovtsev, finally arrived in the North Caucasus from the Petrograd region towards the end of October 1917.

By the time the “Caucasian Cavalry Corps” returned to the Caucasus the Provisional Government in Petrograd had lost almost all its power; centrifugal tendencies clearly emerged in all the outlying parts of the empire.

Poland, Belorussia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had been occupied by Germany and as the war was obviously drawing to a close they sought in some way to lay the groundwork for protecting their national interests.

The Ukraine had already promulgated the First Universal in which the issue of secession from Russia had been unequivocally formulated. The “Commissariat of the Trans Caucasus” which represented the Provisional Government in Tiflis lacked vitality and was an institution remote from the interests of the Caucasian peoples; it gradually disappeared from the political scene. The peoples of the Caucasus and of other countries were preoccupied with the elections to the Constituent Assembly but the Bolsheviki raised an outcry at meetings everywhere about “widening and deepening the revolution” and it was felt that the Empire was heading for collapse.

The peoples of the Northern Caucasus, who for centuries had joined forces to defend their lands, organized a “Union of the United Peoples of the Northern Caucasus” according to a resolution of the first authorized congress (at the beginning of May 1917), and a Central Committee was elected as the direction organ of the “Union of the United Peoples of the Northern Caucasus.”

This Constituent Congress resolved to call a second congress which would meet on September 18 (new style) 1917 in Andi, Daghestan.

An extraordinary session of the Central Committee took place as early as July 28, 1917, and those invited to attend included several high North Caucasian officers and also Akhmet Dudarov, chairman of the Military and Industrial Committee of the Northern Caucasus.

At this meeting it was unanimously decided:

1. To set up a military commission of senior officers to discuss and decide upon the creation of a National Army before the Andi Congress met.
2. To halt the shipment to the front of all forms of grain products, cattle, horses and manufactured articles, and to allow the exchange of specific basic consumer goods needed by the local population.
3. To organize counter-propaganda groups for the fight against advancing Bolshevism. This task was assigned to the young people of the “League of Unity and Progress of the Caucasian Mountaineers,” which set as its primary goal the “creation of an independent, united, democratic state of the mountain peoples of the Northern Caucasus.”⁸

⁸ Minutes of the conferences of the Central Committee. Author’s archives.

This kind of resolution was dictated by the situation that had arisen in the Northern Caucasus. There was an increase in the number of deserters from the Caucasian front; most of these soldiers settled in the rich, food-producing area of the Northern Caucasus.

Military and Industrial Committees, with subcommittees such as “Bread-Army,” “Horse-Army,” “Cattle-Army,” etc, were formed at the beginning of the war and they kept on pumping scores of thousands of tons of grain products and thousands of heads of large and small cattle out of the region.

Wool, sheepskins for army coats, homespun cloth and Caucasian felt cloaks, which in prewar times had been sold for gold, were sent out in trainloads. In 1917 goods were shipped to the “front.” At the same time the Northern Caucasus had no large stockpiles of weapons, no military equipment nor financial resources, because all the wealth of the Caucasian front was concentrated in the Southern Caucasus, chiefly in Tiflis.

Basic consumer goods—sugar, tea, articles of peasant manufacture, leather goods, roofing iron, nails, horseshoes, etc. — all became black market commodities or disappeared entirely from the market.

The abnormal situation could be brought under control only by the use of extraordinary measures and resources which, owing to the difficult conditions of the times, the Central Committee did not have at its disposal.

The Congress of the Northern Caucasus, scheduled to convene on September 18 at Andi, was preceded by local meetings in August 1917. The Central Committee decided to assign its members to these meetings. The chairman of the Central Committee, Abdul Medzhid Chermoyev, and a Committee member, Tau-Sultan Shakman, attended the Kabardino-Balkarian meeting at Nalchik. Vassan-Girei Dzabagi and Tugan Alkhaz, attended Ingushetia and Chechnya congresses, Gappo Bayati who was subsequently to become a professor at the University of Berlin, and T. Penzulai were assigned to Odessa. The meeting at Daghestan was attended by members of the Daghestan section of the Central Committee: Zubair Temirkhan, Gaidar Bammatt, Ibragim Gaidar and Mekhmet-Kadi Debir.

The meeting of the Batalpashin Circassians and the Karachaevy in the Kuban was attended by the noted Ossetian playwright Elbyzdyko Britati, by the author of the present article as vice-chairman of the Central Committee, and by Simon Basariya, a member of the Central Committee from Abkhazia.

The meeting of the Kuban Circassians which took place in Khakurino-khable was attended not only by Circassian delegates but also by representatives of the Armavirian Armenians from the village of Urupsk and Jews, from the mountain village of Dzhekhanas; they spoke Circassian since these Armenians and Jews had been assimilated, losing their own language and regarding themselves as native North Caucasians. The Circassian (*Cherkess*) delegates included: Sultan Shakim Girey, Murat Khatagogy, Hamid Traho, Aydamir Namitok and Sijukh. At all these local meetings delegates were elected for the Ail-Union congress in Andi in September. Before the congress convened, local Communist elements headed by Dzhelal Korkmasov began to get active. Korkmasov, who had been living for a long time in Paris, considered himself an anarchist. During the war he moved to Geneva where he became a close friend of Lenin and was converted to Bolshevism, although for quite some time he did not enroll in the Communist Party. He followed Lenin to Russia and came from Petrograd to the Caucasus.

In Daghestan, his birthplace, Korkmasov set up a so-called “Socialist group” which attracted several members of the local intelligentsia. Rumors began to spread that Korkhmasov and his group intended to prevent the Andi congress from meeting, although neither Korkmasov himself nor his small, “socialist group” had any influence on the population of the Northern Caucasus and, of course, they were unable to prevent the convocation of the congress.

At the same time Korkmasov wished to draw into his work the Russian garrisons of the fortresses at Khunzakh, Botlikh and Gunib. Hearing about Korkmasov’s plan, the Central Committee hastily gave instructions to send the soldiers of the above-mentioned garrisons north-ward by train to Russia. This task was carried out successfully and without bloodshed.

On September 17 the members of the Central Committee of the Northern Caucasus arrived at the fortress of Vedeno, in Chechnya, on their way to the Andi Congress. At Vedeno it was learned that in addition to the delegates, 20,000 people had assembled in Andi and were bivouacking in the Kurket valley near Andi. This mass had gathered there under the influence of propaganda of the Moslem clergy, particularly of Nazhmuddin Gotsinsky and Uzunkhadzhi, in order to demand that the independence of the Northern Caucasus be immediately proclaimed. The members of the Central Committee held a meeting and concluded that with such a crowd it would be impossible to discuss issues and in general it would be impossible for the congress of accredited delegates to meet. Nevertheless, the Central Committee decided to go to Andi in order to explain the political situation to the people. It was decided that the congress itself would be held in Vedeno and the delegates would return there from Andi.

On October 20 the congress convened at Vedeno and passed a number of concrete and important resolutions:

1. All lands and forests which had been proclaimed tsarist property during the conquest of the Caucasus are returned to the nations from which they had been taken away.
2. All mineral wealth and waters are proclaimed the national property of the Northern Caucasus.
3. To carry out the above measures quickly and justly a Land and Control Commission is to be organized.

A temporary constitution was also approved. It had the following basic provisions:

1. The peoples of the Northern Caucasus form a Political Union.
2. Within the borders of the Union each people is autonomous.
3. To decide on problems of common interest to the Union, a legislative body is organized, consisting of two houses: the lower house symbolizes the conception of free peoples and has deputies elected on the basis of 1 for every 30,000 population. The upper house exemplifies the idea of the unity of the peoples: each people is represented by three delegates.
4. Both houses jointly elect the government

The Central Committee will constitute the first national government. It will apportion the necessary functions to each of its members.

5. In view of the deteriorating political situation, the Congress invests the Central Committee with exceptional power, the right to organize a National Army; to prohibit the export of basic consumer goods from the country; and finally, the right to proclaim the independence of the North Caucasian Republic at the most opportune moment. Having approved these resolutions, the Second North Caucasian Congress dispersed.

After General Kornilov's movements had been liquidated the Provisional Government in Petrograd existed in name only. In the regions of the Northern Caucasus populated by Cossacks there appeared unmistakable signs of an impending civil war. In the Kuban and Don, relations between the Cossacks and the Russian population became strained: most of the Russians sided with the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks were also supported by the multitudes of unruly soldiers stationed at densely populated centers. Under these conditions the leaders of the Cossacks in the Kuban and Don regions thought about the possibility of forming a so-called South-Eastern Union which would unite the Don, Kuban, Terek, and Astrakhan Cossacks, and also the Kalmyks and the peoples of the entire Caucasus.

But while conferences were being held on the subject of the South-Eastern Union, the Bolshevik coup occurred in Petrograd on November 7, 1917. The Russian soldiers in the North Caucasian garrisons openly sided with Lenin's government. Relations between the members of the proposed South-Eastern Union were almost completely isolated.

Civil war broke out on the Don and the Ataman of the Don Cossacks, General Kaledin, experienced great difficulties (he later committed suicide) and refused to defend their government. In this situation the notion of forming a South-Eastern Union was, of course, dropped.

The wave of anarchy that had originated in the North rolled over the Don and threatened to flood the Caucasus. Consequently a Terek-Daghestan government was hastily formed under the chairmanship of the vice-chairman of the Central Committee, R. Kaplanov; this government also included Terek Cossacks.

The governmental proclamation stated:

The first task of the Terek-Daghestan government, which subscribes to the principle of the right of peoples to complete self-determination, is to convoke as soon as possible the territorial Constituent Seim which will set up a definitive organization that will ensure a strong regime.⁹

However, this government did not last long because the majority of Terek Cossacks, fearing that they would have to cede part of their land to the Northern Caucasus, began to support the Bolsheviks. The ataman of the Terek Cossacks, M. A. Karaulov, who had signed the agreement providing for the inclusion of Cossacks in the Terek-Daghestan government, was accused of "treachery to the Cossacks" and was killed shortly thereafter.

In March 1918 the Bolsheviks set up a "People's Congress" in Pyatigorsk and formed a "Terek Oblast People's Soviet," with Soviet commissars functioning as the executive organ. Since the Civil war had broken out in the Kuban at this time the Central Committee, reorganized as the Northern Caucasian government, transferred its offices to Daghestan in the oblast capital Temir-khan-shura (now Buinaksk); it did this because part of the population in Vladikavkaz, which consisted of Russians, and also the entire garrison which had once belonged to demoralized sections of the old Russian Army, joined the Bolsheviks and seized control of the city.

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On March 8, 1918 the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty was signed between the Soviet government and the governments of Germany, Austro-Hungary, Turkey, and Bulgaria.

⁹ *Organ of the Terek-Daghestan Government*, Vladikavkaz, No.2 (December 1917).

According to this treaty, part of the territory of the Transcaucasus (Kars, Ardahan and Artvin) was to be handed over to Turkey, which had previously offered to enter into peace negotiations with the Transcaucasian government and had received an evasive reply, now demanded that the provisions of the Brest-Litovsk treaty be enforced, and it advanced additional claims of a territorial and political nature, allegedly dictated by the exigencies of war.

Negotiations got under way in Trapezunde between Turkey and representatives of the Transcaucasus, including delegates from the Northern Caucasus. Making use of the power which it had received at the Venedo Congress, the Northern Caucasian government proclaimed the independence of the Northern Caucasus on May 11, 1918.

The declaration of independence reads follows:¹⁰

The undersigned, who are the authorized representatives of the peoples of the Northern Caucasus, have the honor to inform all governments that:

The peoples of the Northern Caucasus duly elected a national assembly which in May and September 1917 promulgated a declaration regarding the formation of a republic of the Northern Caucasian peoples and empowered the present government to act in an executive capacity.

The government of the Peoples of the Northern Caucasus makes the following announcement:

1. The Union of the Peoples of the Northern Caucasus proclaims its secession from Russia and the formation of an independent state.
2. The territorial boundaries of the new state are: in the North, the geographical boundaries which formerly defined the oblasts and provinces of Daghestan, Stavropol, Kuban and the Black Sea region in the Russian Empire; in the West, the Black Sea; in the East, the Caspian Sea; in the South, the boundaries will be fixed by agreement with the Transcaucasian government.

The undersigned accredited representatives are authorized to inform all governments of this proclamation and, in view of the changes that have taken place, to announce the formation of the independent state of the Union of the Peoples of the Northern Caucasus. In consequence, thereof, the undersigned proclaim that as of this date the independent state of the Union of the Peoples of the Northern Caucasus has been duly established.

Abdul Medzhid Chermoyev
(President of the Government)

Gaidar Bammate
(Minister of Foreign Affairs)

Meanwhile conditions had grown worse in the Transcaucasus. The Turkish demands put the Trans Caucasian government in a difficult position and it was decided not to accept these demands. This crisis culminated in the breakup of the Transcaucasus into three component parts and the proclamation of the independence of Georgia (May 26), Azerbaidzhan and Armenia (May 28, 1918). All three states then concluded independent treaties with Turkey

¹⁰ Haidar Bammate, *Le problème du Caucase*, Paris, p. 15.

which similarly acknowledged the independence of the Northern Caucasus and concluded a treaty of friendship with it on June 8, 1918. An exchange of diplomatic notes then took place between the head of the German Extraordinary Delegation, General von Lossov, and the North Caucasian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bammat, resulting in the de facto recognition by Germany of the independence of the Northern Caucasus.

There was a similar exchange of notes with the representatives of Austro-Hungary and Bulgaria.

By this time the German forces had occupied the Ukraine and had seized Rostov-on-Don. - In the Kuban, General Denikin's army and the Kuban Cossacks fought successfully against the Bolshevik armies. In the Don region, the Don Cossacks, led by their Ataman, General Krasnov, were likewise successful. In the Terek, part of the Terek Cossacks deserted the Bolsheviks and revolted against them around Mozdok. The Northern Caucasians mopped up the Bolsheviks in the cities of Daghestan and prepared to drive out the Bolsheviks who had entrenched themselves in Vladikavkaz.

The lack of weapons seriously handicapped the armed forces of the Northern Caucasus. The government, therefore, decided that its deputy in the Kuban and Don, the author of the present article, be given the task of obtaining weapons and military equipment there.

Unfortunately, weapons were not to be had either in the Kuban or the Don regions. Hence the Northern Caucasian representative met with representatives of the white Army in Novocherkassk and explained the situation in the Northern Caucasus and the aims of the North Caucasian government. The question of a common stand against Bolshevism also came up for discussion; in this connection, at the insistence of the representative of the Northern Caucasus, a stipulation was introduced into the minutes of the meeting, according to which "military units belonging to one side can cross the territory of the other side only by agreement with the latter."

The author of the present article went from Novocherkassk to Kiev, hoping to find weapons there. And as a matter of fact, on meeting with Field Marshal Eichorn, chief commander of the eastern occupational forces of the Central States, he obtained a consignment of weapons from old Russian stockpiles. It turned out that in Kiev there were several officers and about 60 soldiers of the Caucasian cavalry corps which, owing to illness, could not proceed further into the Caucasus. A guard was made up from these persons and it accompanied the arms transport.

Several days after the order had been given to deliver the weapons to the Northern Caucasus, Field Marshal Eichorn was assassinated in Kiev. The ship unloaded in Poti and the weapons were sent to Daghestan without any hindrance. It turned out that this shipment sufficed to arm one brigade.

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In accordance with the treaty of June 8, 1918 between the Ottoman Empire and the Northern Caucasus, 77 officers and 500 other ranks of the Turkish Army arrived in Daghestan. They were all North Caucasians by origin and came from the million North Caucasians who had been moved to Turkey after the conquest of the Caucasus.

This cadre of instructors was headed by Colonel General of the Turkish Army Ismail Berkuk, a Circassian by origin. With the help of these instructors, three infantry battalions and about three cavalry regiments were organized. These formations had not yet been perfected when

units of General Bicherakhov's army came from Baku, retreating under the onslaught of the Turkish divisions that had captured Baku. General Bicherakhov's troops were the remnants of Russian army units from Persia and numbered more than 10,000 men. This force was supported by ships of the Russian Caspian fleet. The superior forces of General Bicherakhov captured Petrovsk, declaring that they were under the authority of the government of the Constituent Assembly which had been formed beyond the Volga; Bicherakhov himself was the commander of the so-called Caspian government, subordinate to the above-mentioned government. Fifteen Turkish divisions, commanded by Yusuf-Izzet Pasha (a Circassian) came to the assistance of the Northern Caucasians. After 17 days of fighting, Petrovsk was recaptured. General Bicherakhov suffered heavy losses and the remainder of his forces embarked on ships and headed seaward.¹¹

This unexpected clash with the forces of the "Commander-in-chief of the Caspian regime" inflicted irreparable harm on the Northern Caucasus. Instead of properly organizing its armed forces to drive the Bolsheviks completely out of its territory, the Northern Caucasus had to exert all its forces to liquidate Bicherakhov and his group.

Meanwhile World War I had ended. On November 17, 1918 a British force commanded by General Thomson entered Baku. To establish contact with General Thomson a special delegation of the Northern Caucasian government made its way to Baku. General Thomson informed the delegation that "the question of independence will be resolved at the peace conference ...Until then, the Northern Caucasian Republic will have the opportunity of governing itself on the basis of the same principles that are already in effect in Azerbaidzhan."¹²

In accordance with the provisions of the armistice in the main theaters of war, the Turkish forces moved out of the Caucasus. Turkish units also left the Northern Caucasus. And in November the Bolsheviks inflicted a decisive defeat on the Terek Cossacks in the region of Mozdok. With the permission of the North Caucasian government the Terek Cossacks withdrew to Daghestan where they were granted asylum. On December 10, 1918 an agreement was reached between the authorized representatives of the Terek Cossacks—Kireyev, Kapronov and Vertepov—and the government of the republic of the Union of the United Peoples of the Northern Caucasus, represented by Abdul Medzhid Chermoyev and the author of this article.

The first provision of the agreement was as follows:

The Terek Cossacks, recognizing that they share common economic, political and state interests with the Caucasian mountain peoples, join the Union of these peoples as an equal member and will participate on the basis of proportionality in the organs of national representation and administration of the Union republic. The whole territory of the Union, both that part which is now free as well as the part which is to be liberated, is under the jurisdiction of the government of the Union, reorganized on the basis of a coalition and consisting of individuals who have won a vote of confidence. The contracting parties regard as their chief task the establishing of stable, internal peace among the peoples of the Union. To achieve this aim, after the struggle with the Bolsheviks is over, the coalition government must move quickly to solve the land problem on the basis of social justice.¹³

¹¹ *Askeri Mecmua* Büyük harple 15 Firkanin Şimali Kafkasya hareketi (Activities of 15 Turkish divisions in World War I in the Northern Caucasus), 1934. İstanbul.

¹² Correspondence with General Thomson. Author's archives

¹³ Copy of the treaty with the Cossack-peasant government. Author's archives.

On December 16, 1918 Colonel Rawlinson arrived in Temir-Khan-Shura. He had been appointed diplomatic representative of the British government and was assigned to work with the government of the North Caucasian republic. Colonel Rawlinson commented:

Despite the fact that your government is waging a two-front war, complete order prevails among you. You are concerned about the freedom and independence of your country. The solution to this problem does not depend on me. It depends on the Peace Conference. I regard it as my duty to report to my government everything that I myself have seen and have discussed with your government, and I will speak in your favor.¹⁴

At that time the delegation to the Peace Conference was already in Paris, It consisted of A. Chermoev, G. Bammat, I. Gaidar and Dr. Kh. Khadzarag.

However, the Northern Caucasus was not fated to lead a peaceful existence. The White Army of General Denikin, which had defeated the Reds, seized Pyatigorsk and moved farther south, violating the Novocherkassk agreement, according to which it had pledged itself not to enter the territory of the Northern Caucasus without prior approval of the latter's government. Personal talks between the members of the North Caucasian government and General Denikin proved to be of no avail. The advance continued. The population of Kabarda, Ossetia and Ingushetia began to resist the White Army.

On February 9, 1919 the President of the Northern Caucasian government personally visited General Thomson in Baku and requested him to intervene to halt the advance of the Whites. Thomson promised to communicate with Ekaterinodar, which was Denikin's main headquarters, at the time.

Talks proved absolutely futile and General Denikin continued his offensive. The Northern Caucasian government then decided to offer resistance and sent notes to that affect to General Thomson, and also to the governments of Azerbaidzhan, Georgia and Armenia. An infantry battalion, two cavalry regiments and artillery were quickly despatched to the front at Chechnya. The fighting continued all through February, March and April. In these battles in Chechnya the Whites threw in 13 infantry battalions, 49 cavalry squadrons, 26 cannon and an air force unit.

The White Army succeeded in advancing and in May 1919 it seized Petrovsk and the railroad line up to the Azerbaidzhan border. In the North Caucasian government a split occurred, because several members considered that further resistance was useless. Those who wanted to resist retreated to the mountains, continuing the struggle.

An August, they joined with several prominent North Caucasian citizens to organize the Defense Council of the Northern Caucasus. The Defense Council assumed all responsibility for leading the national resistance movement. A Red divisional commander, A. Todorsky, in describing the conquest of Daghestan by the Red Army in 1920—21, writes as follows about this period of struggle against the White Army:

In September and October 1919 the volunteers suffered a number of major defeats, especially in the region of Dishlagar, Kasumkent and the Saltynsk bridge. The result was that the volunteers lost several thousand men who were slain or captured, scores of cannon and machine guns and several thousand rifles.¹⁵

¹⁴ Extract from the minutes of the Union Council, meeting, December 19, 1918. Author's archives.

¹⁵ Al. Todorsky, *Krasnaya armiya v goiakh Dagestana* (The Red Army in the Mountains of Dagestan), Moscow, 1925.

Denikin himself states: “The Northern Caucasus, as before, showed itself to be a boiling cauldron. Chechnya and Daghestan became a new arena of military action that diverted large forces.”¹⁶

Indeed, the Northern Caucasus engaged more than one-third of Denikin’s Volunteer Army, which was commanded first by General Shatilov and then by General Dratsenko. General Denikin’s army was unable to proceed farther than the railroad line in the Northern Caucasus.

The war against Denikin had scarcely ended when the Whites were replaced by the Reds who likewise violated their promise to recognize the independence of the Northern Caucasus and their 11th Red Army invaded the country. Soviet occupation had begun.

¹⁶ I. A. Denikin, *Ocherki russkoi smuty* (Sketches of Turmoil in Russia), Paris, 1921, I. 116.