

# THE SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARMENIAN NATIONAL RAION (DISTRICT) IN THE KUBAN AREA (1925-1953)\*

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## Introduction

In the 1920s, under the conditions of the New Economic Policy (NEP) liberalization, the Soviet government attempted to meet some of the demands of national minorities regardless of the size of the minority. In that period even small ethnic groups, as long as they resided in compact settlements, were given the opportunity to realise their right to self-determination through the creation of so-called “minor forms” of autonomy in the form of “national raions” (districts) consisting of a number of Village Soviets (village councils). Raions were created primarily for “national minorities,” which at that time denoted citizens who had settled outside their nation-state formations. Raions, national or otherwise, came under the regional governance of the *okrug*, followed by that of the broad geographic region, the *krai*.

The present article characterises the socio-political development of the Armenian raion in the Kuban area (Krasnodar *krai*), set up in 1925 and liquidated in 1953. The ancestors of the local Armenians came from the northeastern part of the Ottoman Empire, specifically the Armenian historical and cultural area of Hamshen. Fleeing the tyranny of the Turkish authorities and genocide, the Hamshen Armenians began to settle on the Caucasian coast of Russia from the second half of the nineteenth century.

In the second half of the 1930s, most national raions were liquidated. Those which kept their names lost their national status as a minor form of autonomy. Between then and the end of Soviet Union, the topic was unofficially banned and was not studied academically. Only in the post-Soviet

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period did the topic of national raions again attract the attention of researchers. It was first mentioned in the works of A. A. Rzhavin, and later discussed in the works of M. E. Ignatova, O. K. Kaikova, V. Z. Akopyan, and I. G. Ivantsov.<sup>1</sup>

However national raions have not yet been the primary object of an academic study. In an attempt to rectify this, this article studies the main stages of the development of the Armenian raion, examines the problems surrounding the relationship between the higher-level authorities and those of the raion and analyses the factors that led to its liquidation.

## Method

The research is based on materials from central and local archives, articles from the periodical press, memoirs written by contemporaries of that period and oral histories from the citizens of the raion, as well as drawing on works by modern researchers.

A number of methods were used when carrying out the research. Synchronous and diachronous analysis enabled the authors to trace the changes in the attitudes of central and local authorities to the national raion policy. The historical-genetic method helped identify the causes of the creation of the national raion and its liquidation.

## Results

Despite all the drawbacks of the Soviet regime, the sources explored for this study suggest that the very existence of the Armenian raion promoted the preservation of national self-awareness among that population, and that it was effective at holding back the pace of assimilation to which such dispersed ethnic groups are particularly vulnerable.

The implementation of administrative-territorial reform, accompanied by national state-building, started with the establishment of the Soviet power in the south of Russia (1920). The result of the reform was the creation of the North-Caucasus *krai* in 1924, with an area of 293,000 km<sup>2</sup> and consisting of 20 administrative units, namely 11 *okrug*s (Armavir, Donetsk, Don, Kuban, Maikop, Salsk, Stavropol, Taganrog, Tersk, Black Sea and Shakhtinsk); six autonomous *oblasts* (Adyghe, Ingush, Kabardian-Balkar, Karachai-Cherkessian, North Ossetian and Chechen), one autonomous Sunzhen *okrug* and two cities (Vladikavkaz and Grozny) which had the rights of autonomous *okrug*s. The population of these last three autonomous administrations was primarily Russian. To replace the 48 *uyezds* (counties), and 400 *volasts* (divisions) that were liquidated in this period, 149 raions and 1,809 Village Soviets were created. All the *okrug*s and autonomous *oblasts* (the Dagestan

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<sup>1</sup> Rzhavin 2000; Ignatova 2005; Kaikova 2007; Akopyan 2010; Akopyan 2013; Ivantsov 2013.

Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic became part of the *kerai* in 1931) were directly subordinated to Rostov-on-Don, the administrative centre of the *kerai*.<sup>2</sup>

The processes of state construction also took into account national minorities, such as members of ethnic minorities residing outside their historical mother country. Although it was not officially recognised, during the period of the New Economic Policy (NEP) liberalisation, the Soviet government used the idea of cultural-national autonomy, merging it with the concept of territorial autonomy. “Minor forms” of territorial autonomy - national raions, set up in areas that were home to a compact settlement of national minorities, including the Armenian population - were required to increase the number of representatives from ethnic groups in the government bodies.

According to the All-Union census of 1926, there were 170,000 Armenians the North-Caucasus *kerai* (1924-1934), making them inferior in number only to Russians, Ukrainians and Chechens.<sup>3</sup> However, this figure underestimates true numbers, as tens of thousands of refugees from Western Armenia had not been taken into account when compiling the census. In the areas densely settled by the rural Armenian population, two raions were set up in the mid-1920s - the Armenian raion in the Kuban area and Myasnikov in the Don area - along with 22 national Village Soviets. The first to be set up was the Armenian raion of the Maikop *okrug*, situated in the forest zone of the subdued and high mountains of the western extremity of the Greater Caucasus, along the Black Sea belt, on the territory of today's Tuapse, Apsheron and Goryachy Klyuch local districts in Krasnodar territory.

The local Armenians were descended from migrants from the northeastern part of the Ottoman Empire, specifically from the Armenian historical and cultural locii of Hamshen, Trapesund, Ordu and Dzhanik. From the second half of the nineteenth century, escaping from the tyranny of the Turkish authorities and genocide, the Hamshen Armenians were emigrating to the northwest Caucasus territory that had been integrated with the Russian Empire. Armenians quite often settled in villages that had been abandoned by the Circassians. After the end of the war with the Caucasian mountain dwellers, the Russian and the Ottoman Empires made a peculiar exchange: the Circassians emigrated to Portu, and the Armenians and Pontic Greeks to the Trans-Kuban and Black Sea areas. Apart from the Hamshen Armenians, the region was populated by other groups of Western Armenians who had settled there during World War I.

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<sup>2</sup> Akopyan 2010, p. 170.

<sup>3</sup> *Vsesojuznaja* 1926, p. 52-53.

In the process of implementing administrative-territorial reform in the Kuban-Black Sea region (1924), the compactly located Armenian villages were artificially divided, ending up split between two different raions, namely Khadyzhen of the Maikop *okrug* and Goryachy Klyuch in the Kuban *okrug*.

The administration of the Maikop *okrug*, set up in 1924, did not attend to the development of the economy and culture in the Armenian settlements. An inspection of the Armenian settlements revealed the inhabitants to be in a very poor situation. For example, land provision per head was the region's lowest: in 1926, the average allocation of land per capita amounted to 0.4 arpent.<sup>4</sup>

On 6 March 1925, at the sitting of the Bureau of the North-Caucasus *krai* committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) [RCP(B)], was followed by a discussion of the position of the Armenians in the Maikop *okrug*. As a result, a resolution was passed recommending that the *okrug* executive committee should comprehensively assess the feasibility of making the compactly located Armenian settlements in the Khadyzhen raion of Maikop *okrug* into a national raion.<sup>5</sup> On 10 March, the Presidium of the *krai* executive committee, having discussed the issue of “the formation of an independent Armenian raion in the Maikop *okrug*,” charged its organisation department with the task of clarifying in the shortest possible time whether such an entity could be formed.<sup>6</sup> On 5 April this decision was also seconded by the grand presidium of the *krai* executive committee.

The final legislation of the new national raion required solving the problem of incorporating the Armenian population of Sadovoe Village Soviet (1,259 men) which was part of a different *okrug*, which consisted of the settlements Sadovoe, Afanasiev Postik, Bolshaya and Malaya Sobachka, Kochkanov, Sosnovaya Shchel, Melkonov, Shirinka, Gryazny, Postadzhy and Takhmazov.

On 5 June, the bureau of the *krai* executive committee decided to commit to the practical realization of the formation of the Armenian raion.<sup>7</sup> On 7 August, the North-Caucasus *krai* executive committee made a final decision on the formation of the raion. At the end of September, the Village Soviet election campaigns for local council members finished, and in October the first conference of the Armenian raion elected its executive committee, with A. Airapetyan at the head.

On 12 April 1926 the resolution of the All-Union Central Executive Committee “On the formation of the Armenian raion in the Maikop *okrug* of

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<sup>4</sup> *Izvestiya*, 13 august 1926.

<sup>5</sup> CDRHRR, fund R-7, opis 1, delo 105, l. 2.

<sup>6</sup> SARF, fund 1485, opis 1, unit 172, l. 13.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, unit 170, l. 23.

the North-Caucasus *krai*<sup>7</sup> was passed. This resolution included seven Village Soviets in the raion: Goitkh, Gunai, Elizavetpolsk, Kubano-Armenian, Kushinsk, Chernigov and Sadovoe. Later the raion created one more Village Soviet: Tubinsk. Its administrative centre was the village of Elizavetpolsk, renamed Shaumyan in 1936. The 7000-strong population of the raion (excluding Tubinsk Village Soviet) resided in 63 settlements.

In April 1932 the raion's population amounted to 9,142 men, 90% of whom were Armenians, making it the most mononational of all the national raions of the North-Caucasus *krai*. Initially the raion's area was 1,286 km<sup>2</sup>; this later expanded to 1,653 km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>8</sup> Around the beginning of the 1930s the population density was 31 residents per square kilometre of territory.<sup>9</sup>

The history of the Armenian raion can be divided into three periods. The first was from 1925 to 1930, when it was incorporated in the Maikop *okrug*. The second, from 1930 to 1937, came after the liquidation of the *okrug* division, when the raion was directly subordinated to Rostov-on-Don, the centre of the North Caucasus *krai* (known from 1934 as the Azov-Black Sea *krai*). The third period was from 1937 to 1953, when the raion became part of Krasnodar *krai*. This article examines the first two stages, when the raion had a national (in a number of sources - autonomous) status.

The Armenian raion, as all other national raions, was governed on the basis of "The Regulations on the raion national minorities incorporated in the *okrug* and autonomous regions of the North Caucasus *krai*" (1926). According to the regulations, national raions differed in principle from conventional ones. Being an integral part of the relevant *okrug*, they were governed by means of the Congress of Village Soviets and, in the periods in between, by the raion's executive committee. Any changes to the boundaries of the national raions could only be implemented with the permission of the Congress of Village Soviets and the raion executive committee. Businesses within the territory of the national raion were included in the *okrug*-level list of significant enterprises only with the permission of the territorial executive committee. The conference of delegates from the Village Soviets represented the supreme body of power within the raion. This body had the right to send a delegation to the *krai*-wide conference of the soviets, regardless of the relative size of the raion, thanks to "The Regulations on the North Caucasus *krai*," which stated that "when calculating the number of delegates which can be elected to the *krai* conference of the soviets of the appropriate *okrug* conference of the soviets, the population of the territory of the national minorities is to be excluded."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ivantsov 2013, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> *Doroga Sovetov*, 15 August 1931.

<sup>10</sup> SARF, fund 1485, opis 1, unit 172, l. 180-181.

National raion executive committees had the right to direct contact with the Presidium of the *krain* executive committee and its offices. If a national raion found itself in disagreement with instructions from the executive committee of the *okrug* to which it was subordinated, the raion's executive committee could enact a resolution suspending their compliance, as long as they provided "immediate notification to the presidiums of the appropriate executive committees of this and their considerations as regards the need for the revocation of the instructions received."<sup>11</sup> Any appeal against an order from the *okrug* was submitted to the presidium of the *krain* executive committee, notifying the appropriate *okrug* executive committee.

The national raion executive committee also had the right to make the majority of the key staff appointments, excluding the head of the military department, the people's judge and the coroner. Even in these three cases, the raion executive committee retained the right to reject candidates for these posts.

The freedom granted national raions came with certain responsibilities. Their governing bodies were charged with certain functions which fed into the pursuit of national state policy. They were to carry out:

- a) the supervision over the steadfast realization of the principles of national policy, full implementation of the interests of the national minorities; b) to take measures to raise the political, economic and cultural level of the national minorities; c) to take measures to assist the gradual switching of the clerical work of the Soviet and other organizations and institutions to local languages.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the national raions had the inherent characteristics of *autonomous formations*, owing to which they can be referred to as "minor forms" of autonomy.

In the Armenian raion, as well as in some of the other national autonomies, the policy of the "nationalization" (or "indigenization") - i.e. the switching of the clerical work of the bodies of power, cultural institutions into a native language - was undertaken.

The nationalization process faced some obstacles that had both objective and subjective causes. Firstly, the population of the raion in its overwhelming majority spoke the dialects of the Western-Armenian language, whereas the naturalization was to be carried out in the Eastern-Armenian dialect - the official language of the Soviet Armenia. The former was chiefly used in the Armenian diaspora abroad.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., l. 181-182, part/article 8.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Akopyan 2013, p. 31.

Secondly, the policy of nationalization was sabotaged by many officials at the *krai* and *okrug* levels, as well, the executives of the raion from the local Armenians who were dependent on the former. The latter in their mercenary interests, deliberately demonstrated their disregard of the national language in order “to please” the higher-level executives.<sup>14</sup> The former were acting on confidential orders from the Soviet authorities which were never formally recorded.

Finally, the leading positions were filled based on candidates’ loyalty to the higher-level authorities rather than on the degree of trust they were held in by the local population. At the head of various raion departments were either Russian employees or officials of Armenian origin from other regions. Some did not know their native language, others did not know the local dialect very well. In 1931, out of 311 men who were leaders and specialists within the raion and village organizations, 80 were newcomer Armenians and only 13 were locals.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, up to the mid-1930s the central government still expected the local authorities to attempt to realise the policy of indigenization.

The key figures in the Armenian raion were the Secretary of the raion executive committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) - (the AUCP(B)) and its Chairperson. The raion committee of the AUCP(B), headed by the Secretary I. P. Juriev, was a specific super-structure that rose above all the rest of the raion state bodies. However the raion committee, set up in 1926, had just got down to the organisation of their party cells. By the beginning of 1928, the number of communists in raion party organisations had been successfully brought up to 65 men.<sup>16</sup> This figure, however, testifies to the insignificant degree of the party’s influence on the population.

On the contrary, the raion executive committee could only claim the role of the “raion national authority.” The chairman of the raion executive committee found himself in an ambiguous situation, caught between the higher-ranking authorities who had appointed him and the population that expected the committee to fight for their socio-economic and national interests.

This was a dilemma the committee’s first chairman, Airapetyan (Airapet’ian), was evidently faced with. During the NEP period he was successful in balancing between the two extremes. The available information, scant though it is, evokes the aspiration of the raion authorities, headed by Airapetyan, to fully meet the land requirements of the population and resolve

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<sup>14</sup> Akopov 2003, p. 73.

<sup>15</sup> CDRHKK, fund 8003, opis 1, delo 22, l. 26; delo 19, l. 56-57.

<sup>16</sup> *Vestnik*, 23 December 1928.

conflicts which arose with neighbouring raions, relying on local cadres to achieve this.<sup>17</sup>

The authorities of the Maikop *okerug*, however, regarded the position of the raion leaders as unacceptable and waited for a suitable moment to remove them. Subsequently, A. Airapetyan was accused of nationalism, separatism and membership of the Dashnaktsyutyn Party - a standard line of attack for that period. A shorthand record of the sitting of the Bureau of the North Caucasus *krain* executive committee of 17 December 1925 on the issue “The report of the Maikop *okerug* committee and the co-report of the instructor of the *krain* executive committee on the inspection” provides eloquent evidence of this.<sup>18</sup>

In 1927, M. B. Arakelov (Arakelyan), a participant in the 1905-1907 revolution who had worked under the guidance of S. Shaumyan, was elected chairman of the Armenian raion executive committee.

In order to raise the authority of the party within the raion, it was decided that an Armenian should be appointed to the top position to replace of I. P. Juriev, who had died in mysterious circumstances. In his memoirs, I. E. Akopov (1906-1989), a professor of medicine and an active member of the Armenian section of the Kuban *okerug* committee in the 1920s, reported that the role of Secretary of the raion committee was offered to him.<sup>19</sup> However, as his wish at that time was to go to the Kuban medical institute, G. B. Muratov (Muradyan) was appointed to the post instead.

The new campaign for indigenization within the raion started in 1931, coinciding with the period of collectivisation. It was intended as a kind of exchange: to satisfy Armenians’ needs as a national minority in order to win their support for central government policies, such as collectivization, being carried out at that time.

A 1931 article by A. Safyan in the *krain* newspaper *Molot* (The Hammer) reports that at that time the committee of the *krain* national council was working on the problems of introducing indigenization. It was noted, that

[...] the party’s instructions on the indigenization of the Soviet apparatus in the Armenian and Myasnikov raions are being realised unsatisfactorily. Despite the fact that Armenians make up 90% of the total population of the both raions, indigenization up to now has not been completed and practically all work is being done in Russian.<sup>20</sup>

The article also offered an extract from the resolution of the latest party conference of the Armenian raion, noting that “Up to now the raion

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<sup>17</sup> Akopov 2003, p. 86.

<sup>18</sup> CDRHRR, fund R-7, opis 1, delo 287, l. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Akopov 2003, p. 472.

<sup>20</sup> *Molot*, 9 April 1931.



organisation has been neglecting its duty to prepare the cadre.” The author complained, that

[...] while stating the obvious fact of the manifestation of the great-power chauvinism, the resolution then does not say a word about the need for the realisation of indigenization and does not even propose that the raion committee should without delay get down to the resolution of this most important task.<sup>21</sup>

In conformity with the directions of the *krui* administration, the executive committee of the Armenian raion made a decision to switch all the clerical work in the raion administration to the Armenian language without fail from 1 December 1931.<sup>22</sup> In concrete terms, without the provision of the necessary financing, the manifestations of the indigenization process tended to be just for show and sporadic in nature, intended for effect rather than representing a real attempt at implementation.

At the sitting of the presidium of the Armenian raion party commission, held on 11 September 1931, the resolution on “indigenization” saw open opposition from organizations at the raion level. The raion authorities were afraid to specify the true causes of the failure to implement the outlined plans (mainly a lack of funding from above) as the high-ranking bodies demanded that the culprits should be found among local “fall guys.” In other words, despite officially supporting indigenization, the *krui*- and *okrug*-level officials were covertly hostile to the plans, while the raion executive committee members were afraid to point the finger of blame up the ladder, lest the higher-level officials turned on them and used them as local scapegoats. Thus, for “failure to switch the clerical work in the raion to the Armenian language” the head of the raion executive committee’s financial body, A. M. Simonyan, first received a reprimand and was later expelled from the party and removed from his position. For the same reason, the executive secretary of the raion executive committee, Kh. A. Advandov, also received a reprimand.<sup>23</sup>

The following year (1932), the indigenization process in the raion slowed down. At the sitting of the bureau of the Armenian raion party on 8 August 1932 it was noted that the raion commission for indigenization had been dissolved and its functions had been turned over to the raion executive committee. The raion committee ordered the executives of various organizations to place their apparatus under indigenous authority in the shortest possible time by selecting the necessary cadres from among the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> CDRHKK, fund 11381, opis 1, delo 1, l. 26.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., delo 2, l. 4, revision, 4, l. 30-31.

Armenians and fully switching all clerical work to the Armenian language.<sup>24</sup> Two years later the situation had not substantially changed. On 27 November 1934 an extended plenum of the raion committee of the AUCP(B) stated that the staffing of Soviet and party bodies with national cadres and the switching of the clerical work to the native language had not been completed.<sup>25</sup>

The fulfilment of the concrete tasks of “socialist construction” required, if only for form’s sake, to bridge the gap between the central powers and the people, and the external manifestation of such unity was the national cadre. On 1 July 1935, the raion party organization numbered 186 people, 129 of which were members of the AUCP(B) and remaining 57 were candidates. A significant proportion of them were Armenians. Nineteen out of 23 heads of local party organizations were also representatives of the “title nation” of the Armenian raion.<sup>26</sup> By the end of the 1930s, when all the national raions had lost their autonomous status, national representation in the party leadership of the Armenian raion was no longer observed.

In the context of the policy of indigenization, special attention was attached to the participation of the population in elections and re-elections to the councils. The active participation of villagers in the elections was essential, as it represented a form of legitimization of power - perhaps the most important indicator of trust in the central powers and of support for the policies the government conducted. The loyalty of the Armenians was attributed to the fact that the USSR had been traditionally perceived as Russia and, unlike Turkey, regarded as a fraternal country. In this connection, the authorities’ appeal for the local Armenian population to take an active part in the election campaign received a positive response.

The citizens of the Armenian raion were highly active in the elections to the Village Soviets, although year after year these elections were becoming a mere formality. But the Armenians were demonstrating their loyalty not to the regime but to the country, which had first become for them a place of temporary refuge, and then their country of permanent residence, as the homeland of Western Armenians remained in the territory of East Turkey, where they were at risk of genocide.

The national (i.e. Armenian) periodical press was one of the most important aspects of ethnic nationalist life at this time, though it was more nationalist in form than in content. The raion occasionally received newspapers from Soviet Armenia, and more regularly the *kraini* newspaper *Murch-Mangakb*. The Armenian raion administration had repeatedly raised the question of the publication of its own newspaper, but it was not until 1931

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., fund 1415, delo 27, l. 14.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., opis 1, delo 40, l. 24; opis 1, delo 41, l. 57.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., delo 75, l. 45.

the decision was made to establish the newspaper *Berki amar* (For a good harvest), the organ of the raion Committee of the AUCP(B) and the raion's Village Soviets of the Working People's Deputies, published in the Armenian and Russian languages.<sup>27</sup> From July 1940 the newspaper was called *Kommunar* (The Communist).

One very important aspect of indigenization within the raion was the development of education in the native language. There were a number of clear achievements in this direction. Within a decade, there had been a substantial increase in the network of schools. In the second five-year plan, enrolment in the raion's 45 schools (42 of which were from the first stage) stood at 1,766 pupils, out of a total of 1,948, 7 to 10-year-olds, meaning that 92% were covered by universal education. Further measures were taken to increase the number of secondary school pupils (aged 11 to 17).<sup>28</sup> There were also well-documented cultural and infrastructural achievements, such as in health care and road building.

At the same time, the majority of the population of the raion consisted of households of poor peasants and, to a lesser degree, of peasants of average means. The living standards of its population were the lowest among all other national raions. The greater part of the population of the Armenian raion supported the Soviet state power.

However the administration and the power structures of the raion were required to carry out the Soviet government's plans to limit the power of the *kulaks* (affluent peasants) and "enemies" of collective farm construction, even if the former were non-existent within the raion. Industrialization required the GULAG (Chief Administration of the Labour Camps) be supplied with hardworking peasants, and there were quite a lot of these in the Armenian raion. There were many ways of subjecting them to repression by branding them as *podkulachniks*, i.e. the supporters of the *kulaks*.

The April 1931 edition of the *krui* newspaper *Molot* reported that:

The lack in the resolution of the Armenian raion party conference of any mobilization of resources for the struggle with the *kulak* should be recognised as a gross political blunder. Despite the fact that in the past the Armenian party organization has completely "overlooked" the *kulak*, the latest party conference in its resolutions has again not mentioned a word about the struggle with the *kulak*. Such neglect of the most important political question must be qualified as the manifestation of right-wing opportunism in practice. This flagrant political blunder committed by the Armenian organization should be immediately corrected by calling the collective farm masses and the masses of poor peasants and peasants of average means to the resolute

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., delo 23, l. 29.

<sup>28</sup> RSASPH, fund 17, opis 16, delo 958, l. 200.

struggle with the *kulak* and its implementation in the indissoluble connection with the collectivization of the raion.<sup>29</sup>

After such a warning, the raion authorities were compelled to develop collective farm construction on a far greater scale than before. By 1935, 97.2% of the farms had been assimilated into 12 large-scale collectives, down from the 41 that had existed previously.<sup>30</sup>

In the second half of the 1930s there were changes in the policy regarding national minorities. The indigenization of national raions came to an end, clerical work was switched to Russian, and a campaign against national minority educational institutions was launched. The Stalinist leadership saw the solution of the “problem” of national minorities to lie in accelerating their assimilation through administrative methods, with the intention of creating a “single unity” with a common language for all the nations. Any resistance to this was interpreted as the manifestation of “bourgeois nationalism” and resulted in large-scale repression against national public figures.

On 1 December 1937, the Organizational Bureau of the Central Committee considered the question of “The liquidation of the national raions and Village Soviets” and recognised their further existence as “inexpedient.” In the substantiation of this decision, it was pointed out that

[...] in a number of *oblasts* and *krais* various national raions and Village Soviets have been artificially created and whose existence is not justified by the national composition of their population. Moreover, as a result of a special inspection it was revealed that many of those raions had been created by the enemies of the people with the harmful intentions. The bourgeois nationalists and spies who had filled the leading positions in those raions conducted anti-Soviet work among the population, banned the teaching of the Russian language in schools, delayed the issue of newspapers in the Russian language, etc.<sup>31</sup>

The resolution ordered that the local party committees should “by 1 January 1938 submit to the AUCP(B) Central Committee their proposals for the liquidation of the national raions by reorganizing them into conventional raions and Village Soviets.”<sup>32</sup>

Local authorities were given the right to determine the future of the national raions, but it was directly proposed that they should be liquidated or renamed, or have their boundaries changed, or be combined with other raions so as to change the ethnic composition of the population. After this the

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<sup>29</sup> *Molot*, 22 April 1931.

<sup>30</sup> Kaikova 2007, p. 56.

<sup>31</sup> RSASPH, fund 17, opis 114, delo 633, l. 3-4.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

national raion could be regarded as “artificially created” with all the consequences stemming thereof.

On 6 March 1939, the Bureau of the Krasnodar *kerai* committee of the AUCP(B) passed a resolution “On the transformation of the national raions and Village Soviets of the *kerai*,” according to which the German and Greek raions were liquidated.<sup>33</sup>

Whether or not the Armenian raion was liquidated in the period under study is less clear-cut. In terms of its status as a national raion, it was. However, in terms of its name, the composition of the population and the ongoing limited teaching of the native language in school, it was not. If any secret plan for the liquidation of the Armenian raion at the end of the 1930s existed at all, its realisation was hindered by the war.

During the Great Patriotic War the residents of the raion fought and sacrificed a great deal for the Soviet “Motherland,” suffering great hardship and huge loss of life in the process. Occupied by the Germans, the raion found itself in the epicentre of military operations, but even prior to its occupation, quite a lot of its residents went voluntarily to the front. Practically the entire adult male population was mobilised for the Red Army and sent to war. The valiant sons of the Armenian raion heroically fought against the enemy. Many were recognised officially for their actions: A. Snabian, A. Melkonyan and M. M. Shaldzhyan were awarded the title of Hero of the USSR;<sup>34</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Melik Zakharovich Karmiryman from Altubinal received the first Order of the Red Combat Banner; Major K. K. Partalyan, Commander of the Battalion Guards, was awarded the Order of Alexander; and Nevsky Boris Avdzhyan, the first pilot to come from the raion, was awarded the Order of Lenin, the Red Combat Banner and other honours.<sup>35</sup>

The Armenian raion was at the centre of the Tuapse defensive operation that started on 25 September and lasted to 20 December 1942.<sup>36</sup> Here the fiercest defensive battles were fought by the soldiers of the 408th Armenian infantry division, who were blocking the enemy the road to Tuapse.<sup>37</sup> On the morning of 4 October, Ivan (Ovanes) Stepanovich Isakov, (Vice-Commander-in-Chief and member of the Military Council of the North Caucasus direction, Admiral of the Fleet 1941-1943, honoured as a Hero of the USSR), who was in the Armenian raion at that time, was seriously wounded and as a result had to have his leg amputated.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Rzhavin 2000, p. 72.

<sup>34</sup> Grechko 1967, p. 424.

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.nt.am/ru/news/147360/>, accessed 20 August 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Grechko 1975, p. 208.

<sup>37</sup> Sarkisyan 1985, p. 86.

<sup>38</sup> Arzumanyan 1976, p. 302.

The residents of the raion took upon themselves much of the burden of the military operations. The Armenians clearly bore no affection for their invaders: whilst awaiting liberation they did all they could to help the soldiers and partisans trapped there. Five partisan detachments chiefly consisting of local residents fought against the Hitlerites. Information about the Shaumyan partisan detachment lead by the Chairman of the raion executive committee, A. M. Malkhasyan, is the most extensive. In November 1942, the detachment was encircled by the Germans in the southeast of Kotlovina village, and Malkhasyan, along with the majority of the soldiers in the detachment, perished during the battle.<sup>39</sup>

Among the raions of the Kuban area, the Armenian raion was among the worst-affected by the destruction of war. The newspaper *Sovetskaya Kuban* wrote: “The Armenian raion suffered especially from the outrages of the German invaders. The bloody traces of their ‘new order,’ sites of fires and ruins, were left in every settlement.”<sup>40</sup>

Many residents who had been forced to leave their settlements during the military operations returned to smouldering remains. A considerable number of families lost their main breadwinner, and many survivors were left permanently disabled. The raion executive committee (under Secretary S. B. Vartanyan and Chairman P. F. Remizov) mobilised the population for reconstruction work, and the resurgent Shaumyan village once again became the administrative centre.

The fact that the Armenian raion was not liquidated right after the war can be directly linked to this period of war. Many Armenian soldiers and officers, together with Russians and representatives of other nationalities, died a heroic death in the territory of the raion in the defence of Tuapse. During its occupation, the residents demonstrated such patriotism and hatred of the invaders that the raion’s liquidation right after the war would have been seen as a vivid and undisguised demonstration of the hypocrisy of the Stalinist regime.

Then there were economic considerations connected with the need to use the hardworking population to reconstruct the totally destroyed raion. The liquidation of its national status would have been unlikely to add to the residents’ enthusiasm, but rather aroused feelings of offence and disappointment.

Perhaps the former West Armenian refugees were to a certain degree to have played a role in attempts by the Soviet government to reanimate “the Armenian question” in the context of post-war Soviet-Turkish relations. In the second half of July 1945, at the Conference of the Allies in Potsdam, the

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<sup>39</sup> Shakhnazaryan et al. 2013, p. 47.

<sup>40</sup> *Sovetskaya Kuban*, 26 September 1945.

Soviet leadership proposed a discussion on the issue of restoring the 1878 borders between the Russian and the Osmanli Empire. The ceding to the USSR of the Armenian territories that had formally been governed by Russia was justified by the need to repatriate Armenians dispersed around the world.<sup>41</sup>

The Armenian raion was liquidated in 1953, at the start of the Khrushchev “thaw.”

By order of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Russian Federative Socialist Republic (SFSR), on 22 August 1953, 24 raions of Krasnodar *krui*, including the Armenian raion, were liquidated. Its territory was distributed between the Tuapse and Apsheron raions. The greater part of the Armenian raion, including the administrative centre of Shaumyan, were incorporated into the Tuapse raion, while the southeastern part - including the Village Soviets of Kuban-Armenian, Rezhetsk, Tubinsk and Chernigov - were joined to Apsheron.<sup>42</sup>

On the pretext of the “unprofitability,” settlements which were in fact economically viable were liquidated and their residents were recommended to resettle in the “profitable” communist-run villages. Under this formation, the intention was that all minority nations would merge into one community. The separate existence of an Armenian raion could have hindered the realization of this goal.

## Conclusions

The study of the national raions of the 1920s and 1930s holds relevance when considering the development of local self-governance systems in the multinational regions of Russia today. The positive aspects of these historical minor forms of autonomy can provide inspiration for creating a favourable environment for overcoming conflict situations, offering a model that allows small national groups within the borders of a multiethnic state to elect an administration that understands the specific needs of the minority population and protects its interests in the face of zealous administrators from the “title nation.”

The Armenian raion represents a proactive attempt (even if it was formal to a certain degree, and done in the interests of official doctrine) by the Soviet government of the 1920s-1930s to meet the needs of ethnic groups settled outside their national-territorial formations.

To summarise the stages in the political history of the Armenian raion, the first stage (1920s) was characterised by socio-economic stabilization in the country, due to the successes of the New Economic Policy and the

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<sup>41</sup> *Sovetskij Sojuz* 1980.

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.nt.am/ru/news/147360/>, accessed 20 August 2016.

generally loyal attitude of the peasant population to the new Soviet powers, which resulted in the creation of a favourable environment for the liberalization of the public life. In this period, although it was not officially recognised, the authorities drew upon the idea of national-cultural autonomy, merging it with territorial autonomy.

From the end of 1920s, the “Great Turn,” which strengthened the totalitarian basis of the Soviet society, began. Under the conditions of strict centralism, the status of national raions, such as the Armenian, became increasingly formal. Eventually, the Armenian raion was liquidated, and the opinion of the Armenian population was no longer taken into account.

Many aspects of the organization and functioning of national raions and Village Soviets are still relevant today. The use of the national language in clerical work and the system of interaction between local authorities and higher-level bodies are two issues that remain particularly pertinent in regions where compact settlement of ethnic groups exist, where, especially where, on the one hand, the potential of extraterritorial cultural-national autonomy does not meet the minority ethnic group’s demands, and, on the other hand, where there is no possibility of forming a national raion due to a whole range of objective and subjective reasons.

The authors of the article hope that the material presented here will allow a fresh look at an aspect Soviet history. A future study would not only have to use a much wider historiographic base in the research of the topic under study, but also give a more in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of minor forms of autonomy.

### **The Socio-Political Development of the Armenian National Raion (District) in the Kuban Area (1925-1953)**

(Abstract)

The article deals with the Armenian raion (district) in the Kuban area - Krasnodar *kerai* (territory) - set up in 1925 and liquidated in 1953. The ancestors of the local Armenians came from the the Armenian historical and cultural area of Hamshen, in the northeast of the Ottoman Empire, namely. Fleeing from the tyranny of the Turkish authorities and genocide, the Hamshen Armenians began to settle on the Caucasian coast of Russia from the second half of the nineteenth century. The Armenian raion was created by merging the Armenian villages of two other raions - Khadyzhen of the Maikop *okrug* (district) and Goryachy Klyuch of the Kuban *okrug*. The article explores the policy of “nationalization” (also known as indigenization) which among other things demanded the switching of clerical work by the various administrative and cultural bodies to the Armenian language. Due in part to conflicting interests among the various levels of administration both within the raion and above it, at the levels of *okrug* and *kerai*, this switch never took place, and was eventually dropped as a policy by the Stalinist regime, which preferred to pursue a policy of unification and assimilation. Although the clerical switch never took place, there was a massive



expansion of the raion's schools network, bringing education in Armenian to 92% of its school-age children. Despite Stalin's policy shift away from autonomous minority regions, an administrative entity, the Armenian raion outlived (in name, at least) many other national raions, perhaps in recognition of the huge sacrifices made by its population in the struggle against German occupation during the Second World War. Despite all the drawbacks of the Soviet regime, it can be said that the very existence of the Armenian raion promoted the preservation of the Armenian population's self-awareness and identity, holding back the assimilation that dispersed ethnic groups in polyethnic raions are particularly subject to.

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**Keywords:** the North Caucasus *krai*, Krasnodar *krai*, the Kuban area, autonomy, national-territorial construction, national raion, the Hamshen Armenians.

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<b>ActaMN</b>	- Acta Musei Napocensis. Cluj-Napoca.
<b>ActaMP</b>	- Acta Musei Porolissensis. Muzeul Județean de Istorie și Artă Zalău.
<b>ADB</b>	- Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie. Verlag Duncker & Humblot. Leipzig.
<b>AÉ</b>	- Archaeologiai Értesítő a Magyar régészeti, művésztörténeti és éremtani társulat tudományos folyóirata. Budapest.
<b>AHA</b>	- Acta Historiae Artium. Akadémiai Kiadó. Budapest.
<b>AI</b>	- Artificial Intelligence. Elsevier. Amsterdam.
<b>AIAC</b>	- Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie Cluj. Cluj-Napoca (din 1990 Anuarul Institutului de Istorie „George Bariț”).
<b>AIIAI/AIIX</b>	- Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie „A. D. Xenopol” Iași. (din 1990 Anuarul Institutului de Istorie „A. D. Xenopol” Iași).
<b>AIIN</b>	- Anuarul Institutului de Istorie Națională. Universitatea „Regele Ferdinand I”. Cluj-Sibiu, Sibiu.
<b>AISC</b>	- Anuarul Institutului de Studii Clasice. Cluj.
<b>AJJ</b>	- Arktika: jekologija i jekonomika. Institut jadernoj bezopasnosti Rossijskoj akademii nauk. Moskva.
<b>AJN</b>	- American Journal of Numismatics. American Numismatics Society. New York.
<b>AJPA</b>	- American Journal of Physical Anthropology. The Official Journal of the American Association of Physical Anthropologist. Baltimore.
<b>AM</b>	- Arheologia Moldovei. Institutul de Istorie și Arheologie „A. D. Xenopol” Iași.
<b>AMZ</b>	- Arheološki muzej u Zagrebu. Zagreb.
<b>AnB</b>	- Analele Banatului (serie nouă). Timișoara.
<b>AnUB-I</b>	- Analele Universității din București - Istorie. Universitatea din București.
<b>Apulum</b>	- Apulum. Acta Musei Apulensis. Muzeul Național al Unirii Alba Iulia.
<b>ArchKözl</b>	- Archaeologiai Közlemények. Pesten.
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<b>Argesis</b>	- Argesis. Studii și Comunicări. Muzeul Județean Argeș. Pitești.
<b>ArhMed</b>	- Arheologia Medievală. Reșița, Cluj-Napoca.

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- Astra Salvensis** - Astra Salvensis. Cercul Salva al ASTRA. Salva.
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- BCȘS** - Buletinul Cercurilor Științifice Studențești. Universitatea „1 Decembrie 1918” din Alba Iulia.
- BG** - Byllye Gody. Sochi State University. Sochi.
- BMS** - Bibliotheca Musei Sabesiensis. Muzeul Municipal „Ioan Raica” Sebeș.
- BOR** - Biserica Ortodoxă Română. Patriarhia Română. București.
- BpRég** - Budapest Régiségei. Budapest.
- BSNR** - Buletinul Societății Numismatice Române. București.
- Caietele CIVA** - Caietele CIVA. Asociația „Cercul de Istorie Veche și Arheologie” Alba Iulia.
- CArh** - Cercetări arheologice. București.
- Carpica** - Carpica. Complexul Muzeal „Iulian Antonescu” Bacău.
- CH** - Church History. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.
- CN** - Cercetări Numismatice. Muzeul Național de Istorie a României. București.
- ComȘtMediaș** - Comunicări Științifice. Mediaș.
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<b>Graiul Maramureșului</b>	- Graiul Maramureșului. Baia Mare.
<b>HCS</b>	- Historia y comunicación social. Departamento de Historia de la Comunicación Social de la Facultad de Ciencias de la Información. Universidad Complutense Madrid.
<b>HHCT</b>	- History and Historians in the Context of the Time. Academic Publishing House <i>Researcher</i> . Sochi.
<b>HIR</b>	- Harvard International Review. Harvard International Relations Council at Harvard University. Cambridge (Massachusetts).
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<b>SMK</b>	- Somogyi Múzeumok Közleményei. A Somogyi Megyei Múzeumok.
<b>Societatea de mâine</b>	- Societatea de mâine. Cluj (1924-1945).
<b>SPS</b>	- Sovremennye proizvoditel'nye sily. Sovet po izucheniju proizvoditel'nyh sil, Ministerstvo jekonomicheskogo razvitiya Rossijskoj Federacii i Rossijskoj akademii nauk. Moskva.

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- StComSibiu** - Studii și comunicări. Arheologie-istorie. Muzeul Brukenthal. Sibiu.
- StComSM** - Studii și comunicări. Muzeul Județean Satu Mare.
- StRI** - Studii. Revistă de istorie (din 1974 Revista de istorie și din 1990 Revista istorică). Academia Română. București.
- SUCH** - Studia Universitatis Cibiniensis. Series Historica. Universitatea „Lucian Blaga” Sibiu.
- SVS** - Supplément de la vie spirituelle. Le Edition de Cerf. Paris.
- SympThrac** - Symposia Thracologica. Institutul Român de Tracologie. București.
- Terra Sebus** - Terra Sebus. Acta Musei Sabesiensis. Muzeul Municipal „Ioan Raica” Sebeș.
- Thraco-Dacica** - Thraco-Dacica. Institutul Român de Tracologie. București.
- Történelmi Szemle** - Történelmi Szemle. Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Történettudományi Intézetének. Budapest.
- TP** - Telecommunications Policy. Elsevier. Amsterdam.
- Transilvania** - Transilvania. Centrul Cultural Interetnic Transilvania. Sibiu.
- Tyragetia** - Tyragetia. Muzeul Național de Arheologie și Istorie a Moldovei. Chișinău.
- Ungarische Jahrbücher** - Ungarische Jahrbücher. Berlin.
- VCGU** - Vestnik Cheljabinskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Cheljabinskij gosudarstvennyj universitet. Chelyabinsk.
- VIZ** - Voенno-istoricheskii zhurnal. Moskva.
- VKGU** - Vestnik Kazanskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta. Kazanskij (Privolzhskij) federal'nyj universitet. Kazan.
- VMZ** - Voенno-meditsinskii zhurnal. Moskva.
- VRJU** - Vestnik Rossijskogo jekonomicheskogo universiteta im. G. V. Plehanova. Rossijskij. Gosudarstvennyj universitet imeni G. V. Plehanova. Moskva.
- VSA** - Vestnik Severnogo (Arkticheskogo) federal'nogo universiteta, serija: Gumanitarnye i Social'nye Nauki. Severnyj (Arkticheskij) federal'nyj universitet imeni M. V. Lomonosova. Arkhangelsk.
- VTP** - Voprosy teorii i praktiki. Izdatelskiy Dom Gramota. Tambov.



- WI** - Die Welt des Islams. Internationale Zeitschrift für die  
Forschung des modernen Islams. Brill.
- WJC** - Western Journal of Communication. Western States  
Communication Association. Philadelphia.
- ZEKM** - Zhurnal eksperimental'noi i klinicheskoi meditsiny.  
Novosibirskii gosudarstvennyi meditsinskii universitet.  
Novosibirsk.
- ZfSL** - Zeitschrift für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde.  
Gundelsheim.