



WHY ABKHAZIA IS GEORGIA

A TRUE HISTORY

Sokhumi State University

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The presented collective research is another attempt to give a convincing and scholarly substantiated answer to the new wave of falsification of historical past of Abkhazia, the integral part of the all-Georgian national, state, ethnical, and cultural universe. It summarizes 30-year-research of Georgian historians. The authors objectively and impartially analyse the main stages of the historical development of Abkhazia, the indigenous part of Georgia, from Ancient Times to the beginning of 21st Century. The special attention has been paid to the so-called “controversial issues” around which pseudo-scientific speculations are still not ending. The book represents the abridged translation of the Georgian-language book *Abkhazia is Georgia. Historical Perspective*. It is intended for specialists and a wide range of readers interested in the history of Georgia-Abkhazia.



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Contents

FOREWORD (<i>Zurab Papaskiri</i>)	5
CHAPTER I. THE BRIEF HISTORICAL-GEOGRAPHICAL REVIEW (<i>Bezhan Khorava</i>)	17
CHAPTER II. THE TERRITORY OF PRESENT-DAY ABKHAZIA FROM ANCIENT TIMES UNTIL THE 8TH CENTURY AD (<i>Zurab Papaskiri</i>)	24
§1. Prehistory	24
§2. The Outline of the Ethnic Image of Abkhazia in the 3 rd -2 nd Millennia BC According to the Archaeological and Linguistic Data.....	26
§3. The Ethnical Map of North-Western Colchis from the 1 st Millennium BC to the 8 th Century AD	31
§4. The Political and State Character of North-Western Colchis from the 1 st Millennium BC to the 8 th Century AD	38
CHAPTER III. CREATION OF THE “ABKHAZS” KINGDOM AND ITS NATIONAL AND STATE CHARACTER (<i>Zurab Papaskiri</i>)	43
CHAPTER IV. ABKHAZIA IN THE UNIFIED GEORGIAN STATE IN 11TH-15TH CENTURIES (<i>Zurab Papaskiri</i>)	62
§1. Creation of the Unified Georgian State and the Administrative Status of Present-Day Abkhazia in the 11 th -12 th Centuries	62
§2. The Political, State, and Cultural Character of Present-Day Abkhazia in the 11 th -12 th Centuries. The Meaning of the Terms “Abkhazia” and “Abkhaz”	66
§3. Abkhazia and the Abkhazs in the 13 th -15 th Centuries	73
CHAPTER V. ABKHAZIA FROM THE 16TH CENTURY TO THE BEGINNING OF THE 19TH CENTURY (<i>Bezhan Khorava</i>)	85
§1. Abkhazia in the 16 th -17 th Centuries	85
§2. Abkhazia in the 18 th Century	98
§3. The Social and Economic Situation of Abkhazian Principedom in the 17 th -18 th Centuries	103
§4. Abkhazia at the End of the 18 th and the Beginning of the 19 th Centuries. Abkhazia’s Entry into the Russian Protectorate	107
CHAPTER VI. THE RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL CHARACTER OF PRESENT-DAY ABKHAZIA IN THE 4TH-18TH CENTURIES	123
§1. Christianity in Abkhazia. Catholicasate of “Abkhazia” (Western Georgia) in the 9 th -18 th Centuries (<i>Jemal Gamakharia</i>).....	123
§2. The Cultural Image of Present-Day Abkhazia in the Middle Ages (<i>Lia Akhaladze</i>).....	130
CHAPTER VII. ABKHAZIA FROM 1810 TO 1917	147
§1. The Principedom of Abkhazia in 1810-1864 (<i>Bezhan Khorava</i>).....	147
§2. Abkhazia from the Second Half of the 1860s to the Beginning of the 1880s (<i>Bezhan Khorava</i>)	171

§3. Political Processes in Abkhazia at the End of the 19 th Century and the Beginning of the 20 th Century (<i>Kakha Kvashilava, Zurab Papaskiri</i>)	182
CHAPTER VIII. RELIGION AND CULTURE OF PRESENT-DAY ABKHAZIA IN 1810-1917	195
§1. The Religious Situation in Abkhazia in 1810-1917 (<i>Jemal Gamakharia</i>)	195
§2. The Cultural Life in Abkhazia in 1810-1917 (<i>Lia Akhaladze</i>)	202
CHAPTER IX. ABKHAZIA – AN AUTONOMOUS UNIT OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA (<i>Jemal Gamakharia</i>)	211
§1. The Issue of Abkhazia during the Struggle for the State Independence of Georgia (February 1917 – May 1918).....	211
§2. Abkhazian Autonomy in the Democratic Republic of Georgia	215
§3. Church Life in 1917-1921	229
CHAPTER X. SOVIET ABKHAZIA IN 1921-1953	232
§1. The Political and State Status of Abkhazia in Soviet Georgia in 1921-1931 (<i>Jemal Gamakharia</i>).....	232
§2. The Separatist Actions of Abkhaz Bolsheviks in the 1920s-1930s (<i>Zurab Papaskiri</i>)	241
§3. The Myth of the Georgian Attempt to Eradicate the Ethno-Cultural Individuality of the Abkhaz People at the end of the 1930s and in the 1940s (<i>Zurab Papaskiri</i>)	246
CHAPTER XI. THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SITUATION IN ABKHAZIA FROM THE 1950S TO THE BEGINNING OF THE 1990S (<i>Zurab Papaskiri</i>)	252
§1. The Separatist Protests in Abkhazia in the 1950s-1970s	252
§2. The Political Processes in Abkhazia in the 1980s and the Beginning of the 1990s	258
CHAPTER XII. FRATRICIDAL CONFLICT IN ABKHAZIA OF 1992-1993 AND ITS CONSEQUENCES (<i>Kakhaber Kalichava, Zurab Papaskiri</i>)	284
§1. Political Battles of 1992 prior to the 14 August tragedy	284
§2. Fratricidal War in Abkhazia.....	293
CHAPTER XIII. CHURCH AND CULTURAL LIFE OF ABKHAZIA IN SOVIET TIMES	311
§1. Church Life (<i>Jemal Gamakharia</i>)	311
§2. Education and Culture in Abkhazia in Soviet times (<i>Lia Akhaladze, Zurab Khonelidze</i>)	313
CHAPTER XIV. POST-CONFLICT ABKHAZIA	327
§1. Social and Political Situation in Abkhazia in 1994-2007 (<i>Kakha Kvashilava, Zurab Khonelidze</i>)	327
§2. Collisions in Russian-Abkhaz Relations (<i>Kakhaber Kalichava, Zurab Papaskiri</i>)	335
KEY FINDINGS	344
BIBLIOGRAPHY	354

FOREWORD

Abkhazia is an ancient historical land of Georgia. The ancestors of two sister nations, Georgians and Abkhazs, have lived next to each other on the territory of modern-day Abkhazia since the earliest times. Together they were striving for peace and strength of their mutual homeland, Georgia. Despite some confrontations between different Georgian regions, which would often turn into armed conflicts, the Abkhazs and Georgians had never been detached from each other. The perspective of these two kindred nations living in a united mutual Georgian political, social, and cultural area always remained undoubted. The situation changed cardinally from the 1860s when the Russian Empire effectuated the strategic plan of detaching Abkhazia from the rest of Georgia. Since then, the historical brotherhood and unity of Georgians and Abkhazs was in real danger.

The first big step the Empire took towards fulfilling its plan was creating the Abkhazian script based on Russian graphics. As the creator of the alphabet, general *Peter von Uslar* admitted himself, the purpose of this act was to separate the Abkhazs from the Georgian cultural world and integrate them with Russian literacy (**Uslar, 1881: XXXVII; Anchabadze Z., 1976: 119**). Moreover, the Russian imperial-ideological mechanism set up the so-called “historiographical Front” as well. In 1907 certain *L. Voronov* published a provocatively named book, “Abkhazia is not Georgia” (*«Абхазия – не Грузия»*). In this book the author developed an idea that Abkhazia had never been an organic part of Georgia, neither politically, nor religiously, and that Georgians were conquerors of Abkhazs, just like Romans, Greeks, Turks, and others in their times (**Voronov L., 1907; Papaskiri, 1998: 171-172**). An anti-Georgian historian working in Abkhazia, *Konstantin Kudryavtsev*, conveyed practically the same ideological message in his work. The author openly blamed “Georgian chauvinists” in declaring Abkhazs as the people of Georgian ancestry and was trying to present the history of modern Abkhazia as some chronicle of Absua-Abkhazs’ whom he strictly considered to be the only indigenous inhabitants of the region) constant battle for achieving independence from Georgia (**Kudryavtsev, 1926: 11-12**).¹

¹ Notably, some anti-Georgian performances are traceable in the Russian authors’ works (19th century) about Abkhazia even before the publication of *L. Voronov’s* and *K. Kudriavtsev’s* malevolent falsified lampoons. However, at that time, it did not have a systemic character and, more importantly, Abkhazia was not presented as being detached from the common Georgian space in those publications. For instance, archimandrite *Leonid (Kavelin)* in his brochure dedicated to Simon the Canaanite’s Russian monastery in New Athos considers it unjust converting the religious rites in Georgian churches into Slavic. However, he is firmly against the Georgian liturgy in areas with Abkhaz inhabitants and demands the divine service in old Slavic only (**Abkhazia and New Athos, 1885: 27-28**). Thus, even this more progressively thinking Russian prelate is trying to strengthen the plan of detaching Abkhazia from the common Georgian Christian Church and integrate it into the Russian religious space. It is exactly what the above-mentioned *L. Voronov* was preaching so openly and provocatively.

In the 1920s, the separatist groups of so-called “Abkhaz National Intelligentsia” grasped this formula. It is how the “manifesto” works of anti-Georgian Abkhaz figures, *Simon Basaria* and *Semion Ashkhatsava*, appeared (**Basaria, 1923; Ashkhatsava, 1925**). Besides the fact that history of Abkhazia was completely detached from the all-Georgian history, there were comic attempts of idealizing the Abkhaz ethnos and presenting its political and cultural hegemony across the Caucasus (at the cost of declaring Georgian historian legacy as Absua-Abkhazs’ belonging). For instance, S. Ashkhatsava stated that the so-called “Abkhazs’” kingdom („*Абхазское*“ *царство*) was not a Georgian, but an **Abkhaz nationalistic state**, which existed until the **15th century**, the period when it was divided into three kingdoms (Kartli, Kakheti, Imereti) and five princedoms (Samtskhe-Saatabago, Guria, Samegrelo, Svaneti, Abkhazia). For S. Ashkhatsava, the 16th-17th centuries was “*the downfall period of the ex-Abkhazs’ kingdom’s fragmented regions in all fields of life*”. It “*turned out a difficult trial for the national* (in his view, Abkhaz – **Z.P.**) *awareness*”. Consequently, “*the idea of uniting the Kartli tribes in the leading figures arouse not under the Abkhaz, but rather the name of Georgian state*” (**Ashkhatsava, 1925: 21**. Emphasis added – **Z.P.**). Moreover, it turns out “*the result of the Abkhazs’ kingdom’s fall in the 15th century*” was “*the stop of minting the national coins*” (**Ashkhatsava, 1925: 21**. Emphasis added – **Z.P.**). The completion of this fantastic picture of Abkhazia’s political, state, and cultural advancement was the statement about the Abkhazian script. According to S. Ashkhatsava, It is the writing system which is “*now known as the Georgian script*” (**Ashkhatsava, 1925: 38**).¹

At first glance, unlike the named publications, the “History of Abkhazia” published by the founder of the Abkhazian literature, *Dimitri Gulia* in Tbilisi in 1925 (**Gulia D., 1925**) was looking less partisan from political point of view. Nevertheless, its scholarly value, despite the attempts of the Abkhaz researchers to present the patriarch of Abkhazian literature as a prominent figure in historiography too (**Dzidzaria, 1978: 3-12**), is extremely doubtful, to say the least. This work’s main purpose was to prove that historically Abkhazia was settled only by the ancestors of the modern Apsua-Abkhazs. The mentioned publications (For their critical analysis, see: **Agrba, Khashba, 1934: 6-18**) were considered as evidence of Abkhazia’s “state independence.”

¹ It is worth mentioning that the publication of the falsified version of the Abkhazia’s historical past by S. Ashkhatsava was openly supported by Nikolai Marr. The scientist said in the foreword that the author (S. Ashkhatsava) was able to show “*the truly Abkhaz nationalistic period of the Abkhazs’ kingdom*” and “*the role of the Abkhazian language in it*” (**Ashkhatsava, 1925: 4**, emphasis added – **Z.P.**). Such “encouraging” attitude of N. Marr towards the anti-Georgian historical narrative was clearly caused by scholar’s embracing of Russian Imperial ideology. Its first signs appeared at the beginning of the 1910s, and became especially evident in 1918 after the foundation of the Georgian national university in Tbilisi (For the anti-Georgian direction of N. Marr’s “Abkhazian Studies,” see: **Gvantseladze, 2001: 33-34; Gamakharria, 2005: 737-738**).

In that period, Georgian historians were keeping academic calmness and were satisfied with declaring the general conceptual line of the Georgian-Abkhaz historian unity. First of all, we should pick out an extensive essay (a monograph, actually) of *Simon Janashia*, Georgian historian and leader of Ivane Javakhishvili school. In this essay, the author, against the background of the life and activities of *Giorgi Sharvashidze*, the heir of Abkhazia's last principal Mikheil Sharvashidze, presented an objective and scholarly solid vision of Abkhazia's cultural-political image (**Janashia, 1939**). Without exaggerating, we can say that this work is a kind of guide for analyzing the real (and not a mythical, as S. Basaria, S. Ashkhatsava, and others were suggesting) history of Abkhazia and Abkhazs.

From the 1950s, a political-ideological conjuncture in USSR gave a new impulse to creating Abkhazs' "nationalistic" (non-Georgian) history. However, owing to *Zurab Anchabadze* and *Giorgi Dzidzaria*, well-known Abkhaz historians, corresponding members of Georgian Academy of Sciences, this purpose was not fulfilled at first. The modern scientific history of Abkhazia is based on these famous scholars' fundamental researches.

Zurab Anchabadze, a student of *Simon Janashia* and *Niko Berdzenishvili*, prominent figures of the Georgian historian school, has major monographs: "*The History and Culture of Ancient Abkhazia*", "*From the Medieval History of Abkhazia (6th-17th centuries)*". These were the first works that perfectly clarified the Ancient and Medieval historical past of Abkhazia (**Anchabadze Z., 1964; Anchabadze Z., 1959**). Despite some lapses, the scholar's observations on Abkhaz people's origin, development stages, the role of the Abkhazs and Abkhazia in the all-Georgian historian process are of landmark significance. It is of extreme importance that Z. Anchabadze considered Abkhazia's and Abkhazs' history to be an organic part of the common Georgian historian process (**Papaskiri, 2000a: 386**).

We can say the same about another well-known Abkhaz historian, *Giorgi Dzidzaria*. Although G. Dzidzaria as a scholar-historian was raised in Moscow, among Russian academicians, he was never (except the demarche against the "pressure from Tbilisi" in youth. See: **Lezhava, 1997: 119-145**) openly against the Georgian-Abkhaz historical unity. Moreover, in his works, he considered Abkhazia's and Abkhaz people's history in the 19th-20th centuries within all-Georgian history. First general scholarly work on Abkhazia's history, a two-volume set of "*Essays on History of Abkhazia*" published in Russian in 1960-1964 (**Essays I, 1960; Essays II, 1964**),¹ was mainly based on the fundamental researches of Z. Anchabadze and G. Dzidzaria. The soviet ideological conjuncture was evident in this publication (especially when clarifying the history of the 19th-20th centuries), and the analysis of Ancient and Medieval times was not flawless either. However, it was a big step forward on the whole. Most importantly, the nationalistic line of Basaria-Ashkhatsava was defeated, and the historical past of Abkhazia was presented in unity with the rest of Georgia.

¹ The two-volume set of "*Essays on History of Abkhazia*" became a basis for the textbook on history of Abkhazia published in 1986 by *Zurab Anchabadze, Giorgi Dzidzaria, and Arvelod Kuprava* (**History of Abkhazia, 1986**).

Although the two-volume set of *“Essays on History of Abkhazia”* led the scientific study of history of Abkhazia in the right direction, not all Abkhaz historians shared its conceptualized vision. In the 1960s there were some attempts of detaching the Abkhazs and their historical past from the all-Georgian historian process. Firstly, we should remark the ethnographic research *“Abkhazs”* by *Shalva Inal-ipa (Inal-ipa, 1965)*, well-known Abkhaz ethnologist. The attempt of presenting history of Abkhazia as detached from the rest of Georgia, although masked, yet is quite evident in this work. It was not accidental that Sh. Inal-ipa was considered as a spiritual father by the Abkhaz separatist ideology at that time. His work was perceived as proof of the necessity of creating an independent Abkhaz state. In the 1970-1980s Abkhaz scholars, indulged with the concessive policy of Georgia’s central authorities, started open attacks on Georgian history and culture. The pace-setter again was Sh. Inal-ipa, who published monograph *“The Issues of Abkhaz Ethno-cultural History” (Inal-ipa, 1976)* in 1976. In the new work of the scholar, the Apsua-Abkhazs were openly presented as “the only aborigines” of Abkhazia. Furthermore, he was claiming that the ancestors of the modern Abkhazs were the first inhabitants of the historical Colchis on the whole (at least the East coast of the Black Sea).¹

The monograph of Sh. Inal-ipa was mainly based on the criticism of fundamental research by *Pavle Ingorokva*, famous Georgian scholar, dedicated to Giorgi Merchule. In his work, P. Ingorokva declared the Greek-Byzantine “Abazgoi”-“Apsilae” (previously considered as the ancestors of modern Apsua-Abkhazs) of the Late Ancient period and Early Middle Ages, and “Abkhazs” of the Early Medieval Georgian sources as ethnical Georgians. As for the present-day Abkhazs, he pronounced them as lately-arrived (in the 16th-17th centuries) from the North Caucasus (**Ingorokva, 1954: 118-189**).

Even though some scholars: *Giorgi Akhvlediani, Simon Kaukhchishvili, Davit Kobidze, Giorgi Chitaia*, etc. (**Akhvlediani, 1957: 107-114; Kaukhchishvili S., 1957: 115-125; Kobidze, 1957: 126-128; Chitaia G., 2000: 112-122**) openly supported P. Ingorokva in declaring “Abazgoi”-“Apsilae” and “Abkhazs” of the Early Medieval Georgian sources as ethnical Georgians, the official Georgian historiography did not share P. Ingorokva’s view and sharply criticized it (**Berdzenishvili, 1956: 125-131**. For the critical analysis of P. Ingorokva’s book see: **Lomtatidze, 1956: 132-139; Anchabadze Z., 1956: 261-278; Bgazhba, Kh., 1956: 279-303; Soselia, 1955: 2-4**). This was shown several times in the Georgian historical textbooks and other general works published in the 1950-1980s. The Abkhaz-Adyghe ethnical origin of Abazgoi-Apsilae was no longer questioned in them.

However, Sh. Inal-ipa was not alone on the “historiographic frontline.” The elements of considering the Abkhaz history as detached from the rest of Georgia was also evident in *Raul Khonelia’s (Khonelia, 1967a; Khonelia, 1967b)* and *Yuri Voronov’s*, Russian archaeologist living in Abkhazia, works (**Voronov, 1978**). At those times, *Mikheil Gunba*, known Ab-

¹ The second expanded edition of Sh. Inal-ipa’s this work was published in 2011. The author’s attitude was even more radical in it (**Inal-ipa, 2011**).

khaz historian and archaeologist become active too. He crossed the line of his teacher Z. Anchabadze (under his supervision M. Gunba prepared a quite organized dissertation /**Gunba, 1962**/ about the relationship between Western Georgia and the Byzantine Empire) and traced the way paved by S. Basaria and S. Ashkhatsava. It was vivid in the article published in 1973 (**Gunba, 1973**) and a monograph published in 1989 (**Gunba, 1989**).¹

In this period, when searching for the Abkhaz “national history,” the Abkhaz historians were supported by various sorts of provocateurs from Russian scholarly and creative circles. In this case, the pace-setter was *Giorgi Turchaninov*, a Russian philologist, who made a sensational “discovery” in the 1960s – decoded the so-called “inscriptions of Maykop tiles” in the modern Abkhazian language. He declared it as the biggest achievement of the world civilization, the oldest monument of the alphabetical script. As for the kingdom of Colchis, he announced it as an Abkhaz state (**Turchaninov, 1971**. For the critical analysis of G. Turchaninov’s views, see: **Giorgadze, 1989; Khoshtaria-Brosset, 1996**: 6-16, with corresponding literature). Not surprisingly, the Abkhaz nationalists quickly picked up this tale (later, in the 1980s, he “aged” the “Maykop inscription” for 1000 years) and started promoting it in Abkhaz population (**Gulia G., 1964**: 9; **Gulia G., 1968**. For the response on those publications, see: **Lomouri, 1969; Lomouri, 2001a**: 335-338).

Vadim Kojinov, Russian literary critic, later one of the standard-bearers of the fascist ideology of Great Russia, further developed this idea. He published an article about the Abkhaz people’s historical distinction (**Kozhinov, 1977**: 252-271) in a popular journal. He also named the ancestors of modern Abkhazs as the indisputable creators of the alphabetical script. Besides philologists, Russian historians were also interested in studying history and culture of Abkhazia. One of them was *Iakov Fedorov*, a scholar at the Chair of Ethnography at Mikheil Lomonosov Moscow State University, who declared the Abkhaz-Adyghe tribes as the creators of the “Colchian Culture” with their own “script” /invented by G. Turchaninov/ (**Fyodorov, 1983**).

At the end of the Soviet Era, during the period of “Perestroika,” the separatist tendencies became more frequent in the Abkhaz historians’ works. Firstly, we should remark a monograph of *Stanislav Lakoba*, Abkhaz historian and politician, on the political history of Abkhazia in 19th century and first half of the 20th century (**Lakoba S., 1990**). He was also an editor of “*The history of Abkhazia*” (**History of Abkhazia, 1991**), among whose authors were *Vladislav Ardzinba* and the above-mentioned Yuri Voronov. V. Ardzinba, who became the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazian Autonomous Republic, often appealed to the thesis about the mythical 1200-year-old Abkhaz statehood which appeared at that time. However, the leadership in giving the “scholarly” basis to this theory belongs to *Yuri Voronov* who later started talking about the 2500-year-old Abkhaz national statehood). From the 1990s, his publications crossed the “academic frames” and ente-

¹ Later, M. Gunba published the second volume of this work. It is a biased view of Abkhazia’s historical past, this time of the second millennium AD (**Gunba, 1999**).

red the field of fantasy. Because of this, they became the historiographical-ideological basis of the Abkhaz separatist movement (Voronov, 1991; Voronov, 1992; Voronov, 1993. For the response on these publications, see: Lordkipanidze M., 1991; Papaskiri, 1998: 56-75; Papaskiri, 2009: 224-246; Papaskiri, 2012: 241-264).

The tragic events of 1992-1993 gave a new impulse to the Abkhaz historians' anti-Georgian sentiments. Situation became especially deplorable in the later period when the separatist regime completely embraced the anti-Georgian hysteria. The core of this hysteria is exactly the "nationalistic-historiographical" propaganda. Its evidences are the publications of *Alexey Papaskir* (Papaskir, 2005; Papaskir, 2002; Papaskir, 2003; Papaskir, 2019) and *Valeri Kvarchia* (Kvarchia, 2015), where we can encounter several fantastic "discoveries." For instance, as these authors claim, the reign of Tamar was the "Golden age" not of the united Georgian state, but rather of the "*multi-national Abkhaz state*" (Kvarchia, 2015: 534; Papaskir, 2019: 215. Emphasis added – Z.P.). Furthermore, they claim that the term "Georgia" did not even exist at that time (Kvarchia, 2015: 457-458; Papaskir, 2019: 29, 305, 445). The most active propagandist of the absurd thesis of "Georgia's" nonexistence in the Middle Ages was recently deceased *Taras Shamba*, a public figure living in Moscow, doctor of juridical sciences and one of the voices of the Abkhaz separatist ideology. He stated that "*until May 1918 the state of "Georgia," as well as its territory, did not exist!*" (Shamba T., Neproshin, 2004).

One of the leaders on the anti-Georgian historiographical frontline is *Igor Markhulia* (Marykhuba). His most notable publications are the fictional tale about a nonexistent Abkhazian ("Abazgian") script /which is Georgian Asomtavruli in reality/ (Marykhuba, 2016) and collections of letters about the past and modern times of Abkhazia (Marykhuba, 2007; Marykhuba, 2017). We should also mention *Denis Chachkhalia*, the Abkhaz poet, whose observations on history and art of Abkhazia represent a rare mixture of ignorance and amateurish impudence (Chachkhalia, 2000; Chachkhalia, 2011; Chachkhalia, 2019).

Other philologists are also actively involved in voicing the anti-Georgian nationalistic narrative of the Abkhaz history. One of them is *Viacheslav Chirikba*, well-known linguist, a doctor of Leiden University (The Netherlands) and at the same time a politician ("Foreign Minister" of Sokhumi government in 2011-2016). Even though we cannot blame him for circulating the marginalized "theories"¹ and he stands out academically too (although he does lack knowledge in the historiographical area), he is still not immune to bias. The fact that he is trying his best to separate Abkhazia from the all-Georgian historical process confirms it. A well-known British scholar-linguist, Kartvelologist *George Hewitt* is not doing any less than the Abkhaz philologists in detaching Abkhazia from the common Georgian history and presenting the historical past of the Abkhazs, "oppressed" by Georgians, separately (Hewitt, 1989). G. Hewitt not only repeats the false Abkhaz historical

¹ In this case, we should point out V. Chirikba's scepticism about the existence of the Abkhazian script in the Middle Ages (Chirikba, 2012: 38).

narrative, he also states that the Georgians “are oppressing” Megrelians. As he states, Georgians have “taken away” Megrelians’ huge history from them (**Hewitt, 1993: 268; Hewitt, 1995: 285-310**).

Unfortunately, the works of professional historians are not any different. They, too, give just as fictional historian narratives. The history “textbooks” written by *Oleg Bghazhba* and *Stanislav Lakoba*, leading Abkhaz historians, are evidence of it (**Bgazhba O., Lakoba S., 2015; Bgazhba O., Lakoba S., 2006**. On this subject, see: **Papaskiri, 2010b; Papaskiri, 2012: 321-362**). When talking about the key issues of the Ancient and Medieval history of Abkhazia, they promote line of Basaria-Ashkhatsava. O. Bghazhba and S. Lakoba declare Apsua-Abkhazs as the only aborigine inhabitants of Abkhazia. They positively present G. Turchaninov’s reading of the so-called “*Maykop Tile*.” (According to G. Turchaninov, the oldest Phoenician alphabet in the world is of Abkhaz origin and Abkhaz tribes took a part in creating it.) The authors consider the Kingdom of the “Abkhazs” and the Catholicosate of “Abkhazia” as historical achievements of Abkhaz people. The historical issues of 19th-20th centuries, especially the events of 1917-1921, are also covered tendentiously. O. Bghazhba and S. Lakoba are repeating the separatist ideology’s famous formula that the Georgian Democratic Republic “occupied and annexed” Abkhazia, and the “sovereign” Abkhazia became a part of the Soviet Socialist Republic Georgia’s with a status of Autonomous Republic as a result of *Stalin’s* and *Beria’s* activities in 1931, etc.

Almost the same accents are made in *Bajgur Sagharia’s* (**Sagaria, 1993; Important milestone, 2002**), *Ermolai Ajinjal’s* (**Ajinjal, 1987; Ajinjal, 2000; Ajinjal, 2014; Ajinjal, 2002**), *Teimuraz Achugba’s* (**Achugba, 2010**), *Guram Gumba’s* (**Gumba, 1994; Gumba, 2003: 109-138; Gumba, 2004: 80-91; Gumba, 2016: 54-61; Gumba, 2002**), *Omar Maan’s* (**Maan, 2020**) and other professional Abkhaz historians’ works. In the recent period, some historians of the young generation appeared. Despite showing a qualified knowledge of adequate sources and historiographical heritage, they still cannot go beyond separatist propagandist clichés and are in captivity of fake historiographical postulates. First of all, it applies to the publications of *Dorotheos Dbar*, a cleric originating from the Russian ecclesiastical depths, the self-styled leader of fictional “*Metropolitan of Anakopia*” (**Dbar, 1997; Dbar, 1997a**. On D. Dbar’s “scholarly” fantasies, see: **Papaskiri, 2012: 482-486**). His conclusions are completely founded on groundless and absurd misperceptions about the existence of independent Abkhaz nationalist ecclesiastical organization (he considers the Catholicosate of “Abkhazia” as such body). Among the Abkhaz historians of new generation, we should also mention *Aslan Avidzba*, a young historian with monographs on the problems of Abkhazia’s contemporary history (**Avidzba, 2012; Avidzba, 2013; Avidzba, 2013a; Avidzba, 2018**). Even though there are attempts to critically analyse the recent Georgian scientific production, this criticism is usually baseless, biased, and populist.

The publications depicting the historical past of Abkhazia and the separatist vision of modern times are completed by the academic and popular works of philosophers and po-

litical scientists filled with Soviet-communistic nostalgia. Among them we should point out the monograph of *Oleg Damenia*, ideologist of Abkhaz Nationalist Movement (**Damenia, 2011**) and the articles of *Konstantin Dumava*, which are filled with anti-Georgian hatred (**Dumaa, 2011a; Dumaa, 2011b: 29-50; Dumaa, 2013**).

A rough distorting of Abkhazia's historical past and modern times is evident in encyclopaedic literature. Out of these publications we should mention the so-called "*Biographical dictionary of Abkhazia*" (**Biographical, 2015**) which disregards the representatives of Georgian political, scientific, and creative elite working in Abkhazia. At the same time, none of the somehow known Russian, Armenian scholars, writers, artists, etc., related to Abkhazia is missing. The glorifying of Russian clerics, the bishops of Tskhumi-Abkhazia, whose main aim was Russifying Abkhazia and turning the region into a typical Russian province, is especially noticeable.

Lastly, the Abkhaz separatist perception of the events at the turn of 20th-21st cc. is presented in the memoirs too. For evident reasons, the book of memories of *Vladislav Ardzinba*, the main culprit of 1992-1993 bloody tragedy (**Ardzinba, 2018**), sparks special interest. Besides the fact that V. Ardzinba tendentiously shows the processes in Abkhazia and blames the Georgian side for inciting the conflict, the work also exposes the author as an active supporter of the Evil Empire – the USSR, and not as a fighter for the Abkhaz people's "freedom" and "founder" of Abkhaz "national" state (**Ardzinba, 2018: 96**).

Such is the completely ill-advised, anti-Georgian, Abkhaz nationalistic vision, which mainly aims to mislead people that **Abkhazia was never a part of the all-Georgian political, state, ethnical, and cultural area, and that the reason for any disaster of Abkhazs** (even of such tragic event as Muhajirism, the Czarist Russia deporting a big part of the Mohammedan Abkhazs from their native land to the Ottoman Turkey) **is Georgia and Georgian people**. The "elaborated foundational" regulations by Abkhaz historians serve precisely this aim. We can summarize them as it follows:

1. The Abkhazs are the one and only aborigines of the present-day Abkhazia;
2. Every single ethnical group (among them the tribes of clearly of Georgian ancestry: The *Coli, Coraxi, Meskhs, Heniochi, Sanigi, Misimiani*, even the Colchians) mentioned on the territory of Abkhazia in Ancient times and Early Middle Ages is of the Abkhaz origin; The Kartvelian tribes arrived here late (mostly after the Muhajirism). Moreover, they are not even aborigines of Caucasus, and the ancient inhabitants of Abkhazia were the Abkhaz-Adyghe tribes;
3. Historical *Colchis*, which included the territory of current Abkhazia, was not a state. There was only "Abkhaz statehood", which is 2500 years old;
4. The territory of modern Abkhazia was never a part of the Lazika-Egrisi kingdom – the ethno-political border between Apsilia-Abazgia and Lazika-Egrisi was in the vicinity of Tsikhe-Goji even in the 6th-7th centuries;

5. The so-called Kingdom of the “Abkhazs” created at the end of the 8th century and covering the whole of Western Georgia (The territory of historical Colchis and her legal successor, the kingdom of Lazika-Egrisi) was not the Georgian, but rather the “Abkhaz National State”;
6. In the 11th-12th centuries, the “Abkhazs” kingdom turned into a “multinational Abkhaz state”, which was governed by “Abkhaz Bagrationis” and whose “Golden Age” was the reign of Tamar, famous “Abkhaz” king;
7. The so-called Catholicosate of “Abkhazia”, whose jurisdiction is known to be spread across the whole of Western Georgia, was also an “Abkhaz National” church organization, the cultural-ideological support of the Abkhaz “national” state, i.e. the Kingdom of the “Abkhazs;”
8. The military expansion (in which Jiks, kindred to Apsua-Abkhazs, were actively participating) organized by the representatives of the Sharvashidze princely house, in the Eastern direction in the 17th-18th centuries and the capture of territories belonging to the Dadianis, principals of Samegrelo-Odishi, was an Abkhaz people liberation movement (kind of a “Reconquista”) to restore their “historical borders;”
9. The Princedom of Abkhazia was not a part of the all-Georgian political system, but rather an independent state formation of the Abkhaz people;
10. In 1918-1921 there was a conquest of Abkhazia by Georgian troops and its incorporation in the Democratic Republic of Georgia against the Abkhaz people’s will;
11. In 1921 the Abkhaz people reached the “freedom” of Abkhazia from the Georgian “*hated Menshevik regime*” with the help of Bolshevik Russia’s “Red Army” and gained “state independence;”
12. The so-called “*Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia*” declared on 4 March 1921, was an “*Independent Abkhaz State*”, which the “omnipotent” Georgians, Stalin and Beria demoted from the status of “Independent Soviet Republic” to “Autonomous Republic” in 1931 and made it a part of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic by force;
13. In the 1930s-1950s, the government of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic conducted deliberately discriminative national policy (switching Abkhazian alphabet from Cyrillic to Georgian script, “liquidating” the Abkhaz national schools and transforming them into Georgian ones, mass migration of the Georgian population to Abkhazia) to dismantle the “ethnic individualism” of Abkhaz people;
14. The repressions of the 1930s, which took the lives of the representatives of the Abkhaz political elite and intellectuals, was the Georgian government's fault;

15. In the 1950s-1980s, the Georgian government roughly intervened in the “internal affairs” of Abkhazia and completely limited the Abkhaz people’s “exclusive right” of “looking after their own homeland.” It resulted in “fair” anger expressed in protests;
16. The 1992-1993 conflict in Abkhazia was not a fratricidal confrontation, but rather the “patriotic war of the people of Abkhazia” responding to the “aggression” from Georgia towards the “Independent (Abkhaz) State”.

Obviously, these mythologemes (we cannot define them otherwise) have nothing in common with real science. Therefore, on one sight, the serious reaction to those “activities” might be needless. However, taking into account that this completely fake (this work proves it clearly) narrative became the basis for the excessive nationalist-chauvinist propaganda in the historiographical field and has reached unprecedented scales, the active historiographical counterpropaganda has become urgent.

From the 1990s till today, Georgian historians have published a dozen of fundamental researches, which prove the groundlessness of the separatist vision of modern Abkhazia’s historical development. They use appropriate historical sources and detailed analysis of diverse historiographical heritage. In this regard, we should mention “*Investigations in the History of Abkhazia/Georgia*,” a collection published in Russian in 1999 (**Investigations, 1999**), which clarifies the key issues of Abkhazia’s history, archaeology, and ethnography. Another publication in Russian – “Abkhazia – A Historical Land of Georgia” (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997**) prepared by *Jemal Gamakharia* and *Badri Gogia* is also of landmark importance, as well as *Mariam Lordkipanidze’s* (**Lordkipanidze M., 1990**), *Nodar Lomouri’s* (**Lomouri, 1998; Lomouri, 2008**), *Zurab Papaskiri’s* (**Papaskiri, 2004; Papaskiri, 2007; Papaskiri, 2010; Papaskiri, 2020**), *Bezhan Khorava’s* (**Khorava, 1996; Khorava, 2011**), *Lia Akhaladze’s* (**Akhaladze, 2005**), *David Chitaia’s* (**Chitaia D., 2006**), *Dazmir Jojua’s* (**Jojua, 2007**), *Kakha Kvashilava’s* (**Kvashilava, 2011**), and other scholars’ monographic researches. In 2007, with *Jemal Gamakharia’s* initiative and supervising, Georgian scholars prepared and published a fundamental summarizing work (**Essays, 2007**) depicting the whole history (from ancient times to the 21st century) of present-day Abkhazia, which was later published in Russian (**Essays, 2009**) and English (**Essays, 2011**) languages as well.

It is an incomplete list of works about the key issues of history of Abkhazia published by Georgian historians in the last 30 years. Without exaggeration, those publications have significantly neutralized the pseudoscientific imperial-separatist insinuations and played a major role in setting the right vision of history of Georgia-Abkhazia in the scholarly field. However, the already accomplished success does not give a right for complacency. Furthermore, in the recent period, there are various unimaginable attempts of falsifying the historical past of Georgia-Abkhazia by the supreme authorities of the occupier country. Circulating some scholars’ falsified history (mostly Abkhaz-Ossetian separatist vision) of Georgia-Abkhazia (**Schnirelmann, 2003; Krylov, 2001; Skakov, 2002: 131-165;**

Skakov, 2004: 121-147; **Skakov, 2005:** 16-24; **Skakov, 2008;** **Skakov, 2013,**¹ etc.) and “expert” analysis (**Epifantsev, 2009**. For the critical review of this article see: **Papaskiri, 2014:** 9-28; **Papaskiri, 2020:** 100-135) is no longer enough in Russia. The country’s first person decided to make an “authoritative” involvement in the historiographical propagandist campaign. Particularly, its vivid demonstration was the television interviews on 28th August 2008 and 9th July 2019 (**Putin, 2008;** **Putin, 2019**), when the omniscient leader of Russia, *Vladimir Putin* conducted exceedingly provocative “history lessons” for the Georgian government (for Georgian historians’ responses, see: **Lordkipanidze M., Muskhelishvili, 2008;** **Metreveli, 2008;** **Metreveli, 2019;** **Vardosanidze, Guruli, Jikia, 2019;** **Gamakharia, 2019;** **Papaskiri, 2019:** 5-7). The aim of Russian President is evident. Giving the “wise advice,” he wants to “strengthen” the absurd decision about recognizing the separatist regions of Georgia as independent states on 26 August 2008, with another “argument” (in this case, historiographical). As it seems, blaming the Georgian government in “starting” the war is not enough for the Official Kremlin, and they are trying to find “historiographical grounds” for a decision absolutely harmful for the Russian state itself. Based on it, they can announce declaring Abkhazia and the so-called “South Ossetia” independent states as restoring historical justice. It is why the “historiographical studies” coming from the Kremlin **are much more dangerous** than just a falsification of history. It is not hard to realize that it is an **attack on Georgia, an attempt to discredit the country in front of the Commonwealth of Nations and prepare informational-ideological protection to dismantle Georgia as a sovereign state.**

At the same time, extremely unhealthy tendencies are apparent in the European scholarly area as well. Some researchers are openly propagandizing the Abkhazo-Russian narrative of history of Georgia-Abkhazia. They are technically blaming Georgia for nationalism, conducting a repressing policy towards the Abkhaz ethnos (all non-Georgian population living in Georgia, in general), and this way they are trying to present Georgia as a “Small Empire,” doubting the European future of a modern Georgian state. The collective works of German scholars (*Marc Junge, Bernd Bonwetsch, Daniel Müller*) about the 1930s repressions (**Bolshevik order, 1, 2015;** **Bolshevik order, 2, 2015;** **Georgia on Its Way, 2017**)² in Georgia is evidence of it. The fact that this anti-Georgian book is published in Moscow and in Russian, is especially thought-provoking.

¹ In this publication, which analyses data from Ancient Greek sources, a Russian scholar unexpectedly distanced himself from the separatist view regarding the ethnic appearance of Abkhazia in antiquity and acknowledged the settlement of Kartvelian tribes on the territory of present-day Abkhazia since Ancient times (see also: **Berulava, Papaskiri, 2015: 233-274**).

² Notably, Georgian historians (*Roin Metreveli, Sergo Vardosanidze, Vakhtang Guruli, Jemal Gamakharia, Alexander Daushvili, Zurab Papaskiri*, etc.) criticized the works of German scholars when reviewing them before their publication (their remarks can be found in the books: **Bolshevik order, 1, 2015;** 375-551; **Georgia on Its Way, 2017:** 19-110, 123-158). Later, the final version of *Jemal Gamakharia’s* response was published too (**Gamakharia, 2017**).

Consequently, it is evident that the comprehensive, unbiased scholarly study of Abkhazia's historical past is not only still relevant, but the intensive research of this issue and bringing the historical truth to scientific circles also remains one of the priorities. The presented collective research is another attempt to give convincing and scholarly proven answers to the new waves of falsifying the historical past of Abkhazia, an inseparable part of the common Georgian national, state, and cultural body. It sums up the results of Georgian historians' researches in the past 30 years; objectively and impartially analyses the main stages of Abkhazia's historical development from ancient times to the 21st century; special attention is drawn to the key issues and the pseudoscientific "speculations" around them. Besides the pure scholarly significance, the work has practical importance too. It promotes the defrosting the atmosphere of detachment and distrust between the two aborigine nations living in Abkhazia and reintegrating the modern Abkhaz society into a common Georgian political-state area.

The book represents the abridged translation of the Georgian-language book *Abkhazia is Georgia. Historical Perspective* (both books are published simultaneously). During the translation, it was decided to change some already adopted English forms of words. The main reason of such interference is the meaning of terms "Abkhazia," "Abkhaz," "the Abkhazs," and "Abkhazian." As a rule, in English the Georgian words „აფხაზი“ (*“apkhazi”* – Abkhaz), „აფხაზეთის“ (*“apxazet’is”* – Abkhazian in geographical meaning of the word) and „აფხაზერი“ (*“apkhazuri”* – Abkhazian in ethnical, not in geographical meaning of the word) are usually translated as "Abkhazian" (in geographical meaning). For example, the phrases like "Abkhazian intelligentsia" („აფხაზერი ინტელიგენცია“ – *“apxazuri intelligentsia”*) and "Abkhazian Bolsheviks" („აფხაზი ბოლშევიკები“ – *“apxazi bolshevikები”*) are usually understood by the English-speaking readers as "intelligentsia of Abkhazia" and "Bolsheviks of Abkhazia." Meanwhile, their original meaning is "the Abkhaz intelligentsia" and "the Abkhaz Bolsheviks." Therefore, it was decided to use word "Abkhaz" instead of "Abkhazian" when the meaning is clearly ethnical and not geographical. Furthermore, there was introduced the word "Abkhazs" which is used both as a plural form of "Abkhaz" and in order to translate correctly the Georgian idioms „მეფე აფხაზთა“ (*“mepe apkhazt’a”* – "king of the 'Abkhazs'") and „აფხაზთა სამეფო“ (*“apkhazt’a samepo”* – "kingdom of the 'Abkhazs'").

Besides the above-mentioned revisions, there were made corrections to certain geographical or family names that were usually translated from the Russian.

CHAPTER I. THE BRIEF HISTORICAL-GEOGRAPHICAL REVIEW

Abkhazia (Aphazeti in Georgian, Apsny in Abkhazian), the historical and geographical province of Georgia, is situated in the North-Western part of the country on the Black Sea coast, between the rivers Enguri and Psou. The River Psou and the Greater Caucasus separate the autonomous republic from Russian Federation while the Kodori and Abkhazian-Svanetian mountain ranges of the Greater Caucasus and the River Enguri – from the neighbouring Georgian regions of Svaneti and Samegrelo. The area of Abkhazia is 8700 square kilometres, which comprises 12.3% of the territory of Georgia (**Beradze T., Khorava, 2011: 5**).

The Greater Caucasus spreads from the North-West to the South-East of Abkhazia. The following peaks of the Greater Caucasus are located within Abkhazia: *Dombay-Ulgen, Gvandra, Ertsakhu, Pshish, Aghepsta*. There are several pathways across the *Sancharo, Adzapsha, Alashtrakhu, Ptishi, Nahari, and Magana* passes of the Greater Caucasus. There is a pathway to Svaneti through Khida pass. In the past centuries the *Marukhi* and *Klukhori* passes were used for trading and communication with the North Caucasus (**Geography of Georgia, 2000: 285, 292; Dbar R., 2012: 12-13**). The Greater Caucasus steeply descends to the canyons of the rivers *Bzipi, Chkhalta, and Sakeni*. The mountainous part of Abkhazia is occupied by the spurs of the Greater Caucasus. The *Gagra* range is the most Western of them. Then is the *Bzipi range*, which is linked with the *Chkhalta (Abkhazian) range*. To the East the *Kodori range* divides the River Kodori basin from the basins of rivers Mokvi, Ghalidzga, and Enguri. Its part to the Khojali Mountain is called the Aphazeti-Svaneti range, while the part west from the Khojali Mountain is called *Panavi* range (**Maruashvili, 1969: 35**).

Abkhazia is a mountainous country. 75% of its territory is occupied by the mountains and foothills, while the rest is covered by the valleys and lowlands. In some places the mountains are situated directly at the seashore, in other places there is a gap between them. In the North-West, on the left bank of the River Psou, the valley continues for 10-15 kilometres between the sea and the Caucasus. Then the Gagra range comes directly to the sea. To the South-east from Gagra the mountains gradually recede and the narrow seaside valley zone transforms into Bichvinta (Pitsunda) lowlands. To the South-East from Bichvinta (Pitsunda) the mountains again approach the Black Sea and nearby Akhali Atoni leans against it. To the South-East from Sokhumi the seaside zone gradually widens and beginning from the left bank of the River Kodori, passes into the Colchic lowlands. The seaside zone is usually straight but the Gagra, Bichvinta (Pitsunda), Bombora, Sokhumi, and Skurcha bays (**Geography of Georgia, 2000: 284; Beradze T., 1989: 20-28; Dbar R., 2012: 16**).

In the middle flow of the River Kodori, to the North from the Kodori range, the highland region of Tsebeli is situated. In the upper reaches of the River Kodori another

highland region Dali can be found. In the upper flow of the River Bzipi, between the Greater Caucasus and Bzipi ranges the mountainous region of Pskhu is located. The mountainous side of Aibga is situated in the source of the Psou river. The River Psou divides it into two parts. Most of Aibga is in the territory of the Russian Federation, while a small part (160 km²) is in the territory of Georgia. The name Aibga means “evil ridge” in Adyghe language. According to the dominant point of view, Pskhu is a composite name consisting of the Circassian suffix -ps (water) and the Abkhazian suffix -khu/-akhu (mountain, hill). The name Tsebeli is derived from the name of the early medieval castle Tsebili/Tsibilium, which is mentioned in Byzantine sources. The name of the fortress is connected with Tshipeli (Megr.-Svan – Tshipuri, Tshipra, Tshipelita), the Georgian name of the beech (**Melikishvili, 1965: 66**). An interesting opinion has been expressed lately, that the name Tsebili (of the Greek sources) derives from the Megrelian word “chibili” (“firmly built”). According to popular belief, the name Dali is derived from the name of the Svan hunting deity and means “Dali Kingdom” (**Tskhadaia, Khorava, 2016: 82; Gabisonia, 2017/2018: 41-42**).

Abkhazia is covered with the dense net of the rivers, which belong to the Black Sea basin: The Psou, the Bzipi, the Kodori, the Gumista, the Kelasuri, the Ghalidzga, the Mokvi, and the Enguri. The River Psou (length 53 km, basin size 421 km²) is the border river of Georgia and Russia. It flows from the mountain range of Aibga and falls into the Black Sea near the village Leselidze. According to the established viewpoint, its name derives from the Adyghe language and means “quick, swift river.” To the South-East from the Psou the River *Mekhadir* (length 15 km, basin size 23 km²) flows. Its source is located on the South-West slopes of the Gagra range. The Mekhadir falls into the Black Sea near the village Gantiadi. The longest river of Abkhazia is the Bzipi (length 115 km, basin size 1510 km²). It begins from the Adange pass on the Southern slopes of the Greater Caucasus, at the height of 2640 metres above sea level. It falls into the Black Sea near Bichvinta (Pitsunda) cape. Bzipi is a modern name of the river. It was called “*Kapoetis Tskali*” (the River Kapoeti) till 1820s. This is a Georgian name and derives from the name of the fish “Kapoeti,” which belongs to the family Salmonidae. “Kapoeti” is a large variety of trout which dwells in this river (**Tskhadaia, Khorava, 2016: 162-163**). The hydronym “*Bzipi*” supposedly is also of Georgian origin as it is associated with the name of the plant “*Bza*” (*Buxus*). The main river of Abkhazia flows along the valley where boxwood is the dominant tree (**Ingorokva, 1954: 148; Akhvlediani, 1957: 110**).

To the South-East of the Bzipi flows the Mtchishta or Shavtskala (The Black River), the karst river with its source at the South slopes of the Bzipi range and falls into the Black Sea to the West of Gudauta. In the Medieval times it was called “*Mitsis Tskali*”, i.e. “Earth River” (Underground River) as its great part flows under the earth. Its Abkhazian (The Mtchishta) and Russian (The Black River) names represent the translation of the original Georgian name “*Shavtskala*” (“*black water*”). To the South-East from the Mtchishta the

River Khipsta (length 33 km) flows from the Southern slope of the Bzipi range. It falls into the Black Sea near Gudauta. Its Abkhazian and Russian names (The White River) are also the translation of the Georgian name Tetrtskala. In the Middle Ages this river was called the Zupu. The name of the political centre of the Abkhazian Princedom in the 17th-19th cc. – Zupu (present-day Likhni) – has derived from this river, because it was located on its banks (**Kobalia, 2010: 311, 382**).

A small river, the Psirtska, flows into the Black Sea northwest of Akhali Atoni (New Athos). In the Middle Ages it was called the Anakopia River after the old fortress-town, Anakopia (present-day Akhali Atoni). To the South-East of the Psirtska the River Gumista flows and joins the Black Sea west of Sokhumi. The River Besleti flows into the Black Sea within the boundaries of the present-day Sokhumi. In the Middle Ages it was called the River Tskhomi after the city of Tskhomi (now Sokhumi). To the East of Sokhumi (near the village of Kelasuri) the Kelasuri River joins the Black Sea. The largest river (in Abkhazia) to the southeast of Kelasuri is the River Kodori. It flows in the Dali Valley and joins the Black Sea South of the village Adzubzha (Historical name Shkatskari /“The Middle River” in Megrelian/, the same as Shuatskali /in Georgian/, which was directly translated into Abkhazian as Adzubzha). The name “Kodori” has Georgian etymology and has derived from the word “Kad” (common-Georgian for water).

The significant river is the Mokvi. It starts from the Southern slopes of the Kodori range and joins the Black Sea near Ochamchire. To the east of Ochamchire the River Ghalidzga flows into the Black Sea. In the Middle Ages it was called *Egristskali* (“The Megrelian River”). The name Ghalidzga is of the Megrelian origin and means “the bank of the river.” Initially it was the name of the riverside village. On the South slope of the Kodori range starts the River Okumi and falls into the Black Sea near the village Gudava. The name Okumi is of Georgian origin (it has derived from Megrelian “Kumu”) and means “the place where flax is cultivated.” At first it was the name of the village and then it became the name of the river. The right tributaries of the Okumi are the rivers Tsarche (The Dadistskali of the Medieval Georgian sources) and Okhodje. The left tributary of the River Okumi is called the Didi Eristkali (Ertistskali of the historical sources). To the East from Okumi flows the fast and deep River Enguri. It takes its source in Svaneti from the glacier Enguri and joins the Black Sea near the village of Anaklia (**Tskhadaia, Khorava, 2016: 162-169**). The old name of the river is the Eguri and has derived from Egri, the tribe which lived mainly in the lower reaches of the river (**Beradze T., 1967: 140; Beradze T., 2018: 32**).

There are many lakes in Abkhazia. The following should be singled out: Ritsa, Small Ritsa, Blue Lake, Mza in the Bzipi basin; Amtkeli, Kvarashi, Adueda Adzishi, Derikvara Adzishi in the Kodori basin; Inkiti, Great Bebesiri, Bebesiri, Papantskvili in the coastal area (**Apkhazava, 1975: 106-124; Geography of Georgia, 2000: 289**). Lake Ritsa is located at the height of 884 metres above sea level in the Iupshara (the right tributary of the Bzipi) Gorge. Ritsa is the deepest lake in Georgia (101 meters). The banks of Lake Ritsa are sur-

rounded with the mountain slopes which are covered with the conifers and mixed forests. Because of this, Ritsa is considered to be one of the most picturesque lakes of the Caucasus. The small but very beautiful Blue Lake is located on the right bank of the River Bzipi, close to the Black Sea. Lake Inkiti is situated in the Bichvinta (Pitsunda) valley nearby the mouth of the River Bzipi (**Apkhazava, 1975: 106-112**).

The geographic location determines Abkhazia's climate. The Greater Caucasus protects it from the cold Northern winds. Warm, never freezing sea and rapid mountain rivers create a humid subtropical climate. The atmospheric precipitation ranges from 1300-1500 to 2200 millimetres throughout the year (**Kobakhidze, 1961: 17-18; Geography of Georgia, 2000: 287; Dbar R., 2012: 14-15**). Approximately 55% of Abkhazia's territory is covered with forests. There are over 2000 varieties of the plants in Abkhazia. The main varieties of the trees growing in Abkhazia are: Oaks, hornbeams, maples, linden, beeches, chestnuts, walnut trees, firs, pines, boxwood, etc. There is the pine relict grove on Bichvinta Cape, where the State Reserve was established in 1926. There are also the alder forests in the South-East Abkhazia, where the swamps are still preserved. The unique example of Abkhazian flora is boxwood with an average height of 10-12 metres. The boxwood groves are preserved in the valleys of the following rivers: The Zhoekvara, the Bzipi, the Gegi, the Ghalidzga, the Gumista. The top part of the Abkhazian mountain ranges is covered by Alpine grasslands (**Geography of Georgia, 2000: 290-291**).

The rich and multifarious natural landscapes define the diversity of fauna in Abkhazia. The red deer can be found in the Ritsa forests. There are West Caucasian turs and chamois in the subalpine and alpine zones. The forests are populated by fallow deer, bears, wolves, jackals, foxes, badgers, martens, squirrels, rabbits, etc. From the avifauna we should mention eagles, hawks, griffons, falcons, Caucasian snowcocks, pheasants, quails, thrushes, hoopoes, seagulls, etc. In the rivers and lakes are found trout, Colchic barbel, catfish, sometimes salmon and the Black Sea sturgeon. For the protection of the useful Flora and Fauna the Bichvinta-Myussera, Gumista, Ritsa-Avadhara, Pskhu State Reserves have been formed (**Kobakhidze, 1961: 15-16, 24; Rigvava, 2004: 61, 129-134; Geography of Georgia, 2000: 291**).

Abkhazia is rich in useful minerals. We have to mention Tkvarcheli and Bzipi coal deposits. There are also deposits of lead, zinc, copper, cobalt, baryte, dolomite, gypsum, limestone, clay, etc. The valleys of the Kodori, the Sakeni, the Bzipi, and the Avadhara rivers are especially rich with mineral waters. There are thermal waters in the vicinity of Tkvarcheli, Sokhumi, Akhali Atoni, and Gagra. The gorgeous nature and unique mineral waters turn Abkhazia into the richest health resort and create great conditions for the development of tourism (**Geography of Georgia, 2000: 291**).

According to the 1989 census, the population of Abkhazia comprised of 525 061 people. Among them Georgians were 239 872 (45.7%), Abkhazs – 93 267(17.8%), Armenians – 76 541 (14.6%), Russians – 74 914 (14.2%), Greeks – 14 664 (2.8%), other ethnical

groups – 25 804 (4.9%) (**On the Results, 1990**). There were five administrative districts (Sokhumi, Gulripshi, Gali, Ochamchire, Gudauta), one territory subordinated to the Gagra city council, seven cities (Sokhumi, Gali, Ochamchire, Gudauta, Akhali Atoni, Gagra, Tkvarcheli), and five urban-type settlements (Bzipi, Bichvinta, Gantiadi, Gulripshi, Myussera) in the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic in 1991 (**Khorava, Chanturia, 2019: 63**).

Sokhumi, the capital of the Autonomous Republic, is one of the ancient cities in Georgia. Toponym Sokhumi derives from the Georgian word Tskhomi/Tskhumi and means “hornbeam” (**Melikishvili, 1965: 65**). It is mentioned as Dioskurias–Dioskuriada–Dioskuria in the ancient Greek sources (**Kaukhchishvili T., 1957: 120-122, 125; Kaukhchishvili T., 1976: 83, 85; Lomouri, 1963: 33; Arbolishvili, 2006: 66, 67**). According to the antique tradition, the name originated from the mythical Dioscuri brothers, although it is possible that the name of the town was the Greek comprehension of the old Georgian name since “dia” means “mother” and “skuri” means “water” in Megrelian (**Beradze T., 1989: 20**). In the 1st century B.C., the Romans named the town as Sebastopolis (**Ross Taylor, 1975: 145-147; Kaukhchishvili T., 1976: 242; Arbolishvili, 2006: 59**). In the Georgian Medieval sources, the city is named Tskhomi or Tskhumi. The 12th c. Arab author Ibn al-azraq al-Fariqi is the first who mentions the city as “Sukhum” (**Japaridze G., 1995: 127-128**). Ottoman Turks also called the city Sukhum or Sokhum (**Beradze T., 1989: 20**). The Turkish form became “Sokhumi” in Georgian and “Sukhum” in Russian. The Abkhaz name for the city is “Aqua.” For the first time, this name, in its Georgian form “Aqu,” is denoted on the territory of Sokhumi on the map of the Western Georgia composed at the royal court of Imereti Kingdom in 1737. It is interesting that next to it the “Tskhumi Fortress” is also designated (**Burjanadze, 1959: 197**). In the 19th century the Russians adopted the Turkish form “Sukhum-Kale” and were using it till 1920s. From 1936 they replaced the form “Sukhum” with “Sukhumi” (**Khorava, Chanturia, 2019: 70-71**).

Gagra is one of the most important resort centres in Abkhazia. In the Middle Ages it was called Gagari. This name means “narrow pass in the canyon” in Old Georgian. On the left bank of the River Bzipi, on Bichvinta cape, there is a resort city of the same name. There is a pine relict grove on the cape. The Georgian name of this tree-plant gave name of the settlement. The ancient Greeks took the Georgian “bichvi”-“pichvi” (Greek – “Pitios”) as Pitiunt (**Kaukhchishvili T., 1957: 120**). Bichvinta is denoted in the form of “Petsonda” on the Italian naval maps of the 14-15th centuries. “Pitsunda,” the Russian and Abkhazian name of Bichvinta, has derived from it (**Beradze T., 1989: 19**).

The city of Gudauta is located at the mouth of the River Gudow. This settlement emerged through the separation from the village of Likhni in the 1830s. The name derives from the name of the river on which it was built. Originally both the settlement and the river were called Gudava. (Gudow is an Abkhazian form of Gudava.)

Akhali Atoni (New Athos) is located at the mouth of the River Psirtska (“The River Anakopia” of the old). According to the 6th century Byzantine authors, the fortress-city of

Trachea was located in this place. Its name is a Greek translation of the old Georgian “Ughaghi”, which means difficult to traverse, impassable place. It was called Anakopia in the Middle Ages. In historical sources, namely in “Kartlis Tskhovreba,” for the first time this name is mentioned in connection with the events of the 730s. From the beginning of the 19th century it was called Psirtskha (“river mouth” in Abkhazian), although some maps still mention the name Anakopia. In 1875, the Russian authorities opened a branch of the Russian monastery of St. Panteleimon on Mount Athos. The monastery received the name “Novi Afon” (New Athos).

Urban-type settlement Gulripshi is located on the left bank of the River Machara, at its mouth. It is mentioned in historical sources from the 1830s. The name in the Abkhazian language means “the Gulias’ dwelling, the Gulias’ water,” which indicates that the Georgian clan of Gulia lived there. At first the village was called Kvemo (Lower) Gulripshi, which was renamed as Gulripshi in 1975 and received the status of an urban-type settlement (**Khorava, Chanturia, 2019: 73**).

The city of Ochamchire is located southeast of Gulripshi, on the right bank of the River Ghalidzga, at its mouth. It was founded in the 1830s. The name derives from “Ochemchiri,” which means “vast field” in Megrelian. In the Ancient times, the Greek colony Gyenos was located in the vicinity of Ochamchire, at the mouth of the River Mokvi. In 1967 the form “Ochamchira” was officially adopted as the name of the city in Russian (**Khorava, Chanturia, 2019: 70**).

The city of Tkvarcheli is located at the source of the River Ghalidzga. The name is Georgian (Megrelian) and means “wooden staircase.” On the 17th c. Italian maps there is a settlement under the name “Tkvoja” (the Italian form of the Georgian toponym) in this place (**Beradze T., 2013: 5**). In the 1930s, in connection with the development of the coal industry, an urban-type settlement was established there. In 1942, the workers’ settlements of Tkvarcheli and Akarmara were separated from the Ochamchire district and the city of Tkvarcheli was created (**Khorava, Chanturia, 2019: 71**).

The most south-eastern city of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia is Gali. It is located on both banks of the River Eristskali. In the Middle Ages, the village of Gogieli was located in this place. In this form the name appears on the Italian maps of the mid-17th century (**Beradze T., 2013: 5**). The village Gali is denoted on the 1861 map of Samegrelo. In 1886, the Samurzakano district included the Gali community with the villages of the First Gali and the Second Gali. “Gali” has derived from “Ghali,” which means “brook” in Megrelian. In 1932, the urban-type settlement Gali was transformed into a city (**Khorava, Chanturia, 2019: 69**).

The indigenous population of Abkhazia consists of Georgians and Abkhazs. Abkhazian and Georgian languages belong to the Iberian-Caucasian language family, Georgian – to the Kartvelian language group, Abkhazian – to the North-Western or Abkhazian-Adyghe language group. The latter, along with Abkhazian, includes Abaza, Adyghe, Ka-

bardian, and Ubykh languages, which are spoken by the kindred North Caucasian peoples: Abazins, Adygheans, Kabardians, Circassians (**Lomtadze, 1967: 12**). Until the late Middle Ages, the Abkhazs were culturally and historically as Georgian as the population of other indigenous parts of Georgia (Kartlians, Kakhetians, Megrelians, Svans, etc.) and actively participated in the formation of the Georgian state and Georgian culture (**Lomouri, 1989**). According to Niko Berdzenishvili, *“Abkhazia was Georgia and Abkhaz was as Georgian, as Hereti and Heretian, as Kartli and Kartlian”* (**Berdzenishvili, 1990: 608**). In the late Middle Ages, the new groups of Abkhaz-Adyghe descent migrated from the mountains and the ethnic picture of Abkhazia changed significantly. As a result of the merging of the newly arrived Apsua-Abkhazs with the local population (“old” Abkhazians – cultural-historical Georgians and Colchis-Megrelians) the current Abkhazs were formed as an ethnos (**Khorava, 1996: 87**).

In Soviet times, Abkhazian language had the status of a state language. In this respect, Abkhazia was the only autonomous republic in the USSR where such a precedent existed. Currently, according to the Constitution of Georgia (Article 2), the state language of Georgia is Georgian, while, along with it, Abkhazian is also a state language in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia.

After the restoration of Georgia’s independence on 9 April 1991, the Kremlin used the “Abkhaz nationalism” to punish Georgia. The military confrontation of 1992-1993, which was in fact a Russian-Georgian war, was its direct result. The consequences of the war were severe for both sides. According to the official version, up to 10 000 Georgians and up to 5 000 Abkhazs were killed in the hostilities. The separatists and their allies carried out the ethnic cleansing of the Georgian population. Up to 300,000 people living in Abkhazia, including more than 200,000 Georgians, have become the IDPs (**Jojua, 2007: 353-364; Khorava, 2015: 638**).

After the 1992-1993 military conflict, the separatist regime declared Abkhazia an independent republic. Despite the Russian Federation’s open military aggression against Georgia in August 2008 and the recognition of her separatist regions as “independent states,” the international community, with the exception of a few states (Venezuela, Nauru, Nicaragua, Syria), unconditionally recognizes Georgian state jurisdiction over Abkhazia. According to the Georgian Constitution, Abkhazia is still considered an autonomous republic.

CHAPTER II. THE TERRITORY OF PRESENT-DAY ABKHAZIA FROM ANCIENT TIMES UNTIL THE 8TH CENTURY AD

§1. Prehistory

The territory of the present-day Abkhazia, alongside with the rest of Georgia, was an organic part of the common Caucasian cultural space. Beginning from the Lower Palaeolithic, Abkhazia, as well as other Georgian regions, became a zone of settlement and activities of the prehistorical humans. (The review of archaeological studies in Abkhazia can be found in: **Bgazhba O., Voronov, 1982**). Here we have the world-scale Lower Palaeolithic settlement of *Iashtkhva* (near Sokhumi, between the mountains of *Iashtkhva* and *Birtskha*, 80-140 metres from the sea level). The earliest part of this settlement is usually dated as belonging to Acheulean period (c. 1.76-0.13 Mya) (**Zamyatnin, 1937; Zamyatnin, 1961: 67-98; Berdzenishvili Nino, 1959: 159-180; Baramidze, Pkhakadze, 2011: 11**). The Acheulean sites are also found in *Kolkhida* (*Gagra* municipality), *Anukhva* (*Gudauta* municipality), *Eshera* (*Sokhumi* municipality), *Apiancha* (*Gulripshi* municipality), *Ghvada* and *Otapi* (*Ochamchire* municipality), *Gali*, *Chuburkhindji* (*Gali* municipality), etc. (**Trapsh, 1960: 5-6**.)

The favourable environment explains a great number of the prehistorical sites in Abkhazia. The prehistorical humans usually were settling at the seashores (**Japaridze O., 1999: 7**). The earliest settlements in Abkhazia were located at the Southern (Bzipi-Kodori) hills of the Greater Caucasus Range (**Berdzenishvili Nino, 1979: 40**). When analysing the material culture found in Abkhazia, many emphasize their similarity to the data from *Rioni-Kvirila basin* in Central Colchis (O. Japaridze and others). At the same time, there is some resemblance with the data found in North-Western Caucasus (**Japaridze O., 1999: 7; Japaridze O., 1989**).

In the Upper Palaeolithic (c. 35000 years ago) Abkhazia, as well as the Western Georgia on a whole, remained a place of activities of prehistoric humans. The Upper Palaeolithic sites of *Lechkopi* and so-called "*Mikhailov Quarry*" are found near Sokhumi and *Khupin-ipshakhva* (so-called "*Cold Grotto*") near *Tsebelda* (*Gulripshi* municipality) (**Trapsh, 1960: 8**). According to the scholars, from those times one can talk about the creation of the Upper Palaeolithic culture which covers the whole Western Georgia. At the same time, based on the analysis of the findings in some sites (*Apiancha*, *Svanta Savane*, etc.) scholars consider that this culture is a continuation of the previous (Mousterian period) local cultural layers (**Japaridze O., 1999: 8**). Moreover, using the same data, they talk about common Caucasian cultural unity, which covered the western part of the South Caucasus and could become the foundation for ethnocultural and linguistic unity of some kind (**Japaridze O., 1999: 9**).

In the Mesolithic (c. 13th-12th to 8th-6th Millennia BC) the further settling of Western Georgia and its north-western part (present-day Abkhazia) continued. The sites of *Kvap-*

chara, Apiancha, Khupinipshakhva, Djampal (Japaridze O., 1999: 9; Tsereteli, 1973: 40) prove it. Starting from the Mesolithic, scholars divide the settlements into three different groups: South Caucasian, Guban, and Chokhan. The local peculiarities found in those groups are considered as the signs of disintegration of the common Caucasian unity (Japaridze O., 1999: 9; Baramidze, Pkhakadze, 2011: 14-15).

The territory of present-day Abkhazia is not any less advanced in the Neolithic (c. 8th-6th – 4th Millennia BC), when the activities of the prehistorical humans became more diverse. As a result of the so-called “*Neolithic Revolution*,” the extensive economy was replaced by the intensive economy. Humans started cattle breeding and farming. The Neolithic culture in present-day Abkhazia, like the other parts of Western Georgia, has its roots in the Mesolithic culture (Nebieridze, 1972: 108; Japaridze O., 1976: 36; Kalandadze, 1986: 92-95, 109). Besides, there is certain similarity between the stone inventory found in Abkhazia (Apiancha, Khupinipshakhva, etc.) and in South Colchis. The situation is similar when comparing data from the Late Neolithic sites in Abkhazia (*Gali I, Ghumurishi, Chkhortoli*) and Central and South-Western Colchis (*Odishi, Anaseuli I, Gurianta*, etc.) (Kalandadze, 1986: 15-49; Japaridze O., 1999: 10). The stone material from *Kistriki* (near village Bombora, Gudauta Municipality), the biggest Neolithic settlement in Abkhazia (Lukin, 1950: 247-286) are also similar to the inventory found in other regions of Colchis (Japaridze O., 1999: 10-11). Nevertheless, there are some differences too, regarding the ceramics. The ceramic material found in *Kistriki*, unlike the ones from the Central Colchis, usually has no ornaments (Japaridze O., 1999: 10-11). Meanwhile, the ceramics found in *Okumi* cave is more alike the ceramic material found in Central Colchis (Rioni-Kvirila basin). It also has certain similarities with the inventory been excavated in Sochi-Adler Region (Pkhakadze, 1979: 68-76; Japaridze O., 1999: 11).

The local peculiarities found in the Late Neolithic material culture usually are connected with the disintegration in the ethnical composition of the Caucasus population. It is impossible to reconstruct this process because of the lack of anthropological or linguistic data. Nevertheless, scholars (O. Japaridze) think that the peculiarities found in the Late Neolithic culture in the Caucasus can point to the disintegration of the all-Caucasian ethno-linguistic unity (Japaridze O., 1999: 13). Based on this, there is a hypothesis that it was in this period when the formation of the main groups of Caucasian languages began: East Caucasian (Nakh-Daghestanian), West Caucasian (Adyghe-Abkhaz), and South Caucasian (Kartvelian) (Japaridze O., 1999: 18).

In the Chalcolithic (Aeneolithic) period, the further development of agriculture is evident in Abkhazia. According to scholars, the farming culture based on the local Neolithic traditions continues to exist in the North-Western Georgia, as well as in the North-Western Caucasus on the whole (Japaridze, 1976: 59; Baramidze, Pkhakadze, 2011: 16). The settlement found near *Ochamchire* showing quite a high level of agriculture and dated by the 2nd half of the 3rd Millennium BC (Solovyov, 1939; Trapsh, 1960: 10) sparked scholars’

interest. The inventory found in this settlement is similar to the ones been excavated from the sites in Colchic Lowlands, especially to the material from the lower layers in *Dikha-Gudzuba* (**Japaridze, 1976:** 174-175; **Pkhakadze, 1993:** 88-92). We have the same situation when analysing the Ochamchire-type settlement in *Gumista*, near Sokhumi. The inventory resembles the material found in the sites of Colchic Lowlands (**Bzhanina, 1973:** 70). The same applies to the data from *Machara* (*Gulripshi* Municipality) settlement (**Bzhanina, 1966:** 122). In general, the Chalcolithic material from Abkhazia is closely related to the data from the caves in Rioni-Kvirila basin. It also has some similarities with the contemporaneous settlements both in the Middle East and North Caucasus – Kuban (Early *Maykop culture*) (**Baramidze, Pkhakadze, 2011:** 17).

§2. The Outline of the Ethnic Image of Abkhazia in the 3rd-2nd Millennia BC According to the Archaeological and Linguistic Data

Beginning from the Early Bronze Age (first half of the 3rd Millennium BC) the “dolmen culture” is introduced in Abkhazia (**Kuftin, 1949:** 258-322). According to *Vladimir Markovin*, prominent Russian scholar, the dolmens in the North Caucasus had to be “imported” from the Mediterranean (**Markovin, 1978:** 283-319). *Otar Japaridze* thought that dolmens in the North-Western Caucasus had to appear from Colchis (**Japaridze O., 1999:** 14).¹ Some scholars connect the appearance of dolmens in the North-Western Colchis with certain ethnical changes and attempt to figure out the question of their settlement on the territory of present-day Abkhazia.

The first scholar who raised this issue, was *Lev Solovyov*, the Russian archaeologist. According to him, at the turn of the 2nd Millennium BC, the Kaska tribes migrated from Asia Minor to North-Western Colchis and settled at the area of so-called “Southern dolmen culture” (from the River Enguri to Adler). The local tribes (the bearers of dolmen culture) peacefully accepted the Kaska, whose proto-Hittite language emerged victorious afterwards (**Solovyov, 1958:** 157-164).

Zurab Anchabadze agreed with L. Solovyov’s hypotheses and applied them to the issue of Abkhaz ethnogenesis on the whole. According to Z. Anchabadze, the formation of the Abkhaz ethnos began in the 3rd Millennium BC and the Kaska-“Abeshla” tribes migrating from Asia Minor participated in this process along with the kindred local population of those times (3rd-2nd Millennia BC) of present-day Abkhazia (**Anchabadze Z., 1964:** 124-125). *Mikheil Trapsh*, the well-known Abkhaz archaeologist, had the same understanding of the problem as Z. Anchabadze (**Trapsh, 1970:** 78-80). At first, *Shalva Inal-ipa* (**Inal-ipa, 1971:** 53), the well-known Abkhaz ethnologist, shared this viewpoint. Although, he later changed

¹ For the most recent opinions regarding the area and routes of dolmen expansion, see: **Bgazhnokov, 2016b:** 31-39; **Bgazhnokov, 2016a:** 40-41.

his mind and stated that the whole Eastern Black Sea shore, beginning from the western part of the North Caucasus and ending with central and eastern parts of Asia Minor, was the place of origin of the Abkhaz-Adyghe-Hattian tribes (**Inal-ipa 1976: 120**).¹ This idea is shared in the works of *Vladislav Ardzinba* and *Viacheslav Chirikba*, *Yuri Voronov*, *Oleg Bgzhba* and *Stanislav Lakoba*, *Teimuraz Achugba*, *Valeri Kvarchia* (**Ardzinba, Chirikba, 1991: 11; Voronov, 1992: 18; Bgzhba O., Lakoba S., 2015: 12-13, 45; Achugba, 2010: 22; Kvarchia, 2015: 47, 537**),² etc.

The well-reasoned criticism of L. Solovyov's statements was given by O. Japaridze. He allows the possibility of migration from the South, but doubts that it could result in substantial ethnical changes in the North-Western Colchis (**Japaridze, 1976: 299-301**). The attention is also paid to the fact that the material culture found in dolmens is usually of the local origin. It proves that there should not be serious ethnical changes on the territory of present-day Abkhazia (**Japaridze O., 1999: 14**).

The fact that there are no significant changes of material culture in the Western Georgia in the Early Bronze Age does not contradict the widely recognized viewpoint regarding the existence of local peculiarities in different regions, which probably resulted in the rise of separate tribal unions. The territory north of the River Gumista is considered as one of such local regions (**Baramidze, 1999: 27**). According to the specialists, here we can find some influence of the so-called Maykop-Novosvobodnaya Culture. Nevertheless, it is thought that the influence was not substantial and, on the whole, the region had more common features with the rest of the Colchis. First of all, it is shown in the uniformity of metal tools and ceramics (**Baramidze, 1999: 27**). The same situation is observed in the Middle Bronze Age. The whole territory of Colchis, including present-day Abkhazia, shows the continuous line of development (**Baramidze, 1999: 27**).

The general picture is not changing in the Late Bronze Age when the so-called "Colchian Culture" spreads across the Western Georgia. The material belonging to the "Colchian

¹ For the critical review of Sh. Inal-ipa's this viewpoint, see: **Lomouri, 1989; Lomouri, 2001: 165-166; Lomouri, 1990: 165-166**. It should be also mentioned that Sh. Inal-ipa was not the first scholar who expressed this view. The Russian orientalist *Pyotr Ushakov* thought that in the 18th-15th centuries BC the whole Western Caucasus from the Black Sea Governorate to the Euphrates estuary was settled by the Abkhaz-Adyghe tribes (**Ushakov, 1921: 26-27**). He based his hypothesis on the assumption of *Arthur Gleye*, the Russian linguist of German origin, that the Abkhaz-Adyghes, not the Colchians-Georgians, were the native speakers of the Colchic language (**Gleye, 1907: 49-50**). A. Gleye's viewpoint was shared by *Dimitri Gulia* (**Gulia D., 1925: 28-29, 31**), who stated that the Abkhazs of the Antique sources and their ancestors Heniochi were Colchians (**Gulia D., 1925: 9, 35-52**).

² For the review of the scholarly works regarding the ethnogenesis of the Abkhazs, see: **Anchabadze Z., 1964: 119-130; Inal-ipa, 1976: 28-62; Gamakharia, 2011b: 39-48**. In the recent times, this problem is studied by *David Kandelaki* who has published a historiographical survey and analyzed the latest works on this subject (**Kandelaki, 2013: 218-243**).

Culture” is found in the present-day Abkhazia in *Eshera, Mugudzirkhva, Bombora, Kulanurkhva, Gagra, Bichvinta (Pitsunda), Likhni (Lykhny), Lechkopi, Pichori*, etc. (**Jessen, 1951: 12-14; Japaridze O., 1989: 130; Baramidze, 1983; Baramidze, 1988**) The region north of the River Gumista shows some different elements during the existence of “Colchian Culture” (c. 14th-7th cc. BC) too. That is why it is designated as a local region of “Colchian Culture.” The special attention is paid to the specifics of the burial rites and the existence of the so-called “secondary burial” (in the ceramic pots) (**Kuftin, 1949: 178-192; Abramishvili R., 1986; Baramidze, 1979; Baramidze, 1999: 31**). Besides, the region shows some similarity with the contemporaneous sites in Kuban (**Japaridze O., 1989: 130-132**). Despite this, there is no significant difference that can cast doubt on the fact that the region north of the River Gumista was culturally part of the Western Georgia (**Baramidze, 1999: 32**).

Hence, if there were any significant ethnical changes on the territory of present-day Abkhazia at the turn of 1st Millennium BC, they would be expressed in the material culture. Therefore, any statement regarding the ethnical changes is baseless unless archaeologists find new data which will prove the general aberration in the development of material culture in Colchis of that period.

Paleoanthropological and linguistic data is considered to be the most significant for the clarification of the ethnical situation in Western Georgia. According to the anthropologists, the present anthropological types of Caucasian population have the local origin (**Abdushelishvili, 1964: 90; Abdushelishvili, 1972: 231; Japaridze, 1976: 305**). This data supports the viewpoint that the Western Caucasus was settled by kindred tribes of common Caucasian origin from the ancient times.

The problem of the ethno-linguistic unity of the Caucasian peoples is more complex. For a long time, there was no doubt among scholars in the genetic unity of Caucasian languages. In the 19th c. this hypothesis was drawn by *Peter von Uslar* (**Uslar, 1868; Inal-IPA, 1976: 320; Inal-IPA, 2015: 115-116; Chikobava, 1955: 465-466**), the well-known researcher of Caucasus. Ivane Javakhisvili dedicated the special monograph to this problem and also concluded that the Caucasian languages had a common origin (**Javakhisvili, 1992**). For a long time, the viewpoint about genetic relativity of the Caucasian languages was dominant in linguistics (**Lomtadze, 1955: 73-82; Bokarev, 1954: 41-53**), but beginning from the 1960s some researchers started to deny the genetic unity between Kartvelian and North Caucasian languages (**Machavariani G., 1965; Diakonoff, 1982: 3-30; Gamkrelidze T., 1971: 34-48**).

At the same time more and more popular became the viewpoint about the relativity of the North Caucasian languages with the ancient languages of Asia Minor. The genetic relativity of Abkhaz-Adyghe languages with Hattian was considered as an established truth till recent times (**Militarev, Starostin, 1984: 34; Ivanov, 1985: 51**). Besides analysing linguistic data, scholars usually pay attention to the similarity of ethnonym “Kaska” (“Kaška”) tribes, living in the central and north-western parts of Asia Minor from the beginning of the 2nd Millennium BC with the names of Adyghe-Circassian tribes in the Medieval

sources: Byzantine “*Kasakhi*,” Arabic “*Kashak*,” Russian “*Kosogi*” (“*Kasogi*”), Georgian “*Kashagi*” and so on (Giorgadze, 2002: 12; Giorgadze, 1999: 52; Volkova, 1973: 19).

Based on above-said, the “*Kaska*” (“*Kaška*”) of Hittite cuneiforms were considered as Abkhaz-Adyghe-Hattian tribe. This viewpoint was supported also by the mentioning of another tribe – “*Abeshla*” in the cuneiforms of the 12th-11th centuries BC. “*Abeshla*” was considered as a synonym of “*Kaska*” (“*Kaška*”) and at the same time, it was also equated to the ethnonym “*Apsil*” (“*Apshil*”-“*Apsua*”) (Giorgadze, 1999: 52-53). As a result, there was a hypothesis that the ancestors of Abkhaz-Adyghe originally lived in the central and north-eastern parts of Asia Minor and, according to some scholars (L. Solovyov, V. Ardzinba and V. Chirikba, etc.), they migrated to the North and settled at the Eastern Black Sea shore. It is considered (L. Solovyov, Z. Anchabadze) that this process took place during the 2nd Millennium BC (Solovyov, 1958: 162-163; Anchabadze Z., 1964: 120-126) or even earlier, before the 3rd Millennium BC (Inal-ipa, 1976: 145). Moreover, as it was already mentioned, some scholars denied even some kind of migration from the South to the North and stated that Adyghe-Abkhazs were the aborigines in the Eastern Black Sea shore from the western part of the North Caucasus to the central and eastern parts of Asia Minor (Inal-ipa, 1976: 145; Ardzinba, Chirikba, 1991: 11; Voronov, 1993: 18. For the criticism of this viewpoint, see: Gamakharia, 2011b: 43-48).

The recent researches cast doubt on the conclusion that “*Kaska*”-“*Abeshla*” tribes were related to the proto-Hittite (Hattian) tribes, which is the basis of the genetic unity of Abkhaz-Adyghe and “*Kaska*”-“*Abeshla*” tribes. According to the observation of Grigol Giorgadze, the well-known scholar of Ancient Hittite world, the ethnic relativity of “*Kaska*” (“*Kaška*”) and “*Abeshla*” tribes with the Hattians is not an absolute truth, and they could have been kindred to Colchians-Kartvelians (Giorgadze, 1999: 45-55). Based on this, he denies the relativity of “*Kaska*”-“*Abeshla*” with the Adyghe-Abkhaz ethnic world (Giorgadze, 1999: 55). At the same time, Grigol Giorgadze acknowledges that Hattians were kindred to the Abkhaz-Adyghe, but he presumes that Hattians originally lived in the north-western part of Caucasus and they migrated to the north Central Anatolia later (Giorgadze, 1999: 48-49).¹

As we see, there is no uniformity among scholars regarding the genetic relativity of “*Kaska*”-“*Abeshla*” with the Hattian-Adyghe-Abkhaz world. Thus, it is more than doubtful that the whole Western Caucasus was populated by the Abkhaz-Adyghe tribes. At the same time, one cannot exclude the possibility of their settlement in the ancient times south of present-day Abkhazia because of the existence of certain toponyms in Guria and Adjara (Javakhishvili, 1913: 48-49; Javakhishvili, 1998a: 50; Javakhishvili, 1998b: 235; Janashia, 1959b: 117-123; etc.). Nevertheless, it cannot be used as proof that the Abkhaz-Adyghe were living throughout the whole Western Caucasus. Those toponyms, as it noted

¹ Giorgi Kavtaradze, based on the archaeological data, expresses the same viewpoint (Kavtaradze, 1978: 7-8).

by G. Giorgadze, are just showing that during migration “some groups of Abkhaz-Adyghe tribes were settling there and then they were assimilated by local population leaving behind their toponyms” (Giorgadze, 2002: 10).

Although G. Giorgadze’s conclusion is well-grounded, it is still more probable that the migration of Abkhaz-Adyghe-Hattian tribes took place from the South to the North and not vice-versa. As it was already shown, there are certain local peculiarities on the territory of present-day Abkhazia (only in the part north of the River Gumista) from the mid-3rd Millennium BC. Those differences are more evident in the period of “Colchian Culture.” Some peculiarities might have been connected with the appearance of the first wave of Abkhaz-Adyghe tribes in the region, which was generally populated by the aboriginal proto-Colchian (Kartvelian) tribes. Regarding this issue, one has to pay attention to Simon Janashia’s viewpoint. According to it, the Abkhaz-Adyghe were possibly preceded by Megrel-Chan and Svan tribes on the territory of the present-day Abkhazia (Janashia, 1959a: 15; Khoshtaria-Brosset, 2000: 9).

The issue of the ethnic belongingness of the tribes living on the territory of the present-day Abkhazia remains unsolved to this day. It is because modern linguistics cannot define their language. Therefore, it is more appropriate to give the decisive voice to archaeologists. Their conclusion that material culture is common for the whole the Western Caucasus at least from the Upper Palaeolithic period has to be a proof that the territory of the Western Caucasus was populated by ethnically related tribes of common Caucasian origin (Japaridze O., 1999: 15-18).

Therefore, based on the above-said, it is possible to make the following conclusions:

In prehistorical times, from the Upper Palaeolithic to Neolithic Age, the territory of the present-day Abkhazia was always a part of common material culture covering the whole Western Caucasus. The ethnically related tribes of common Caucasian origin were probably producers of that material culture. Beginning from the Bronze Age (or maybe even earlier) the process of differentiation began in the Paleo-Caucasian unity. It resulted in certain local peculiarities in the common material culture. Such peculiarities are seen on the territory of the present-day Abkhazia too, namely, north to the River Gumista. It could be caused by ethnic diversity of the region. There might have been the ancestors of modern Abkhazs among the tribes living in the region. The rest of the Colchis, along with the other regions of present-day Abkhazia, was definitely populated by Kartvelian tribes. At the same time, one should not exclude the possibility of settlement of different Kartvelian tribes (Megrel-Chans, Svans, maybe even Meskhs) in the North-Western part of present-day Abkhazia. It is not accidental that later, in the 1st Millennium BC, the Ancient Greek and Roman authors are naming the tribes of *Coli*, *Colchians*, *Coraxi*, *Heniochi*, *Sanigs*, *Svano-Colchians* and others on the territory of present-day Abkhazia. As we will show below, it is extremely difficult to cast doubt on their Kartvelian origin.

§3. The Ethnical Map of North-Western Colchis from the 1st Millennium BC to the 8th Century AD

The ethno-political situation of the present-day Abkhazia in the ancient times is one of the key issues in the historiography. Defining the ethno-demographic picture of the region at the beginning of the recorded history is essential since it is frequently used in the political debate. This issue is the basis of the anti-Georgian narrative and it is used for brainwashing the Abkhaz society for more than hundred years. Those are cornerstones of the Abkhaz ideology:

1. The Abkhazs are the only aborigines of the present-day Abkhazia. They *“have been living here from the ancient times and **do not share their aboriginality with anyone else”*** (Inal-IPA, 1976: 437. Emphasis added – Z.P.).
2. Abkhazia and the Abkhazs had their own identity in the ancient times and they were not part of the Georgian political and state world.

Besides the incorrect interpretation of the ancient sources, the Abkhaz historians attempt to strengthen these two defining postulates with another argument that there cannot exist two aboriginal peoples on one territory. For them, the “theory of dual aboriginality” is detrimental. It should be mentioned that the statement of the Abkhaz historians that “there cannot be two aborigine ethnical groups on one territory” is erroneous for several reasons. First of all, we can observe the present borders of Abkhazia only from the turn of 17th-18th centuries (for details see: **Kvashilava, 2008: 461-487; Kvashilava, 2015: 120-157**). Second, the Caucasus is well-known for its ethnical diversity¹ and even raising this subject is preposterous. As we will see later, the historical sources name different ethnical groups (the supposed ancestors of the Abkhazs are among them) living simultaneously on the territory of the present-day Abkhazia at least from the 1st-2nd cc. AD.

Following this methodological clarification, we can move to the problem itself. Comparing to the earlier times, the ethnical picture of the historical Colchis, which included the territory of the present-day Abkhazia, is easier to define since there exist the contemporaneous (Ancient Greek) written sources. The earliest information is given in the *“World Survey”* of *Hecataeus of Miletus* (6th c. BC). This work survived only in fragments which can be found in the geographical dictionary *“Ethnica”* of *Stephenus of Byzantium* (6th c. AD). Hecataeus names “the Coli,” who lived on the southern slopes of the Caucasus (**Lomouri, 1963: 23; Stephenus of Byzantium, 1936: 281; Stephani Byzantii, 2014: 168; Stephan of Byzantium, 1948: 322; Inadze, 1992a: 8; Inadze, 1999: 61**). Next to the Coli Hecataeus also names “the Coraxi,” whom he describes as a “Colchian tribe” (**Lomouri, 1963: 29; Stephenus of Byzantium, 1936: 288; Stephani Byzantii, 2014: 92;**

¹ The best example is the present-day Daghestan where more than 30 ethnical groups, mainly of Caucasian origins, have been living next to each other for Millennia. It is difficult to doubt the aboriginality of all of those groups (**Ibragimov, 2016: 88; Peoples, 2002**).

Stephan of Byzantium, 1948: 321; **Inadze, 1992a:** 8; **Inadze, 1999:** 61). Pseudo-Skylax (4th c. BC) gives more details regarding the tribes living at the Eastern Black Sea shore. He also names the *Coli* and the *Coraxi*. According to *Pseudo-Skylax*, to the north of them there lived the *Heniochi*. To the south of the Coli and Coraxi, he mentions the *Melanchlaeni*, *Geloni*, and *Colchians* (**Lomouri, 1963:** 33). The latter covered the vast territory from *Dioskurias* (present-day Sokhumi) to the *Apsarus* (the present-day River Chorokhi) (**Lomouri, 1963:** 33-34. Compare with: **Kaukhchishvili T., 1967:** 48-49; **Geographi graeci, 1855:** 62-63; **Pseudo-Skylax's, 2012;** **Pseudo-Scylax, 1988:** 260; **Inadze, 1999:** 61). The 5th c. AD anonymous author also confirms that the Colchians were living from *Dioskurias* to the River *Apsarus*. He also adds that the Colchians of the earlier times are the Lazs of the next period (**Flavius Arrianus, 1961:** 88. Compare with: **Lordkipanidze O., 2002:** 156).

The historians have ascertained the Georgian (Megrelian-Chan) origin of the Colchians and their ethnic belongingness to the Georgian world long time ago. *Zurab Anchabadze*, the well-known Abkhaz historian never doubted it. He stated that the classical sources, when mentioning “the *Colchians*,” were meaning the *Egrians* (population of Egrisi, the Lazs of the late classical sources), the ancestors of the modern Megrelians. He was also underscoring the point that according to anonymous author of 5th c. AD, those Colchians (the same as the Lazs) were **the aboriginal population** of the lands south of *Dioskurias* to the River *Apsarus* (the River Chorokhi) (**Anchabadze Z., 1964:** 132; **Anchabadze Z., 2010:** 126). It is also interesting that even those historians who want to sever Abkhazia from Georgia historically (*Oleg Bgaghba* and *Stanislav Lakoba*), acknowledge the Kartvelian origin of the Colchians (**Bgaghba O., Lakoba S., 2006:** 63; **Bgaghba O., Lakoba S., 2015:** 68). Nevertheless, there are some Russian and Abkhaz historians who declare the Abkhaz origin of the Colchians (**Turchaninov, 1971:** 11; **Bganba, 2000:** 68; **Kvarchia, 2015:** 156-164, 170). At the same time, it should be mentioned that the Georgian historiography does not doubt that the Colchians were consisting of different tribes both of Georgian and non-Georgian origin (**Berdzenishvili, 1990:** 538; **Melikishvili, 1959:** 62-64; **Anchabadze Z., 1964:** 132; **Lomouri, 1971:** 19-31; **Inadze, 1993:** 46-47).

Based on the above-said, there is no reason to cast a doubt on the viewpoint of Georgian historians (*Meri Inadze*, *David Muskhelishvili*, etc.) that the territory of present-day Abkhazia, both mountainous part and seashore, was populated by the Western-Georgian tribes in the 1st Millennium BC (**Inadze, 1992a:** 16-19; **Muskhelishvili, 1999:** 115). Those tribes were the Coli, the Coraxi, the Colchians and, possibly, the “*Moskhs*”-*Meskhs*, who according to *Hecataeus*, were also the “*Colchian tribe*” (**Lomouri, 1963:** 33; **Stephanus of Byzantium, 1936:** 282; **Stephani Byzantii, 2014**). The scholars suppose that those “*Moskhs*”-*Meskhs* could have migrated from the South to the Northern Colchis and settle in the mountainous regions and foothills on the territory of present-day Abkhazia (**Inadze, 1992a:** 19; **Inadze, 1999:** 61; **Melikishvili, 1959:** 87-88; **Gamakharia, 2011b:** 62-63).

The historical tradition regarding the “continuous settlement” of “*Moskh*”-*Meskhs*

in the northern part of Colchis from the 5th-4th cc. BC to the 1st c. BC (**Inadze, 1992a**: 19) should be taken into consideration. Therefore, we cannot justify its utter rejection by some Georgian scholars, even if among them we can find the most competent ones, like *Nodar Lomouri* (**Lomouri, 1998**: 20-30). The same can be said about N. Lomouri's skepticism concerning the settlement of classical sources' "Heniochi" on the territory of present-day Abkhazia (**Lomouri, 1998**: 10-20. For the criticism of this viewpoint, see: **Gamakharia, 1998**: 34-36; **Gogia, 2003**: 36-39, 54-60, 77-93). Most scholars (*Joseph Orbeli, Pavle Ingorokva, Giorgi Melikishvili, Bakar Gigineishvili, Meri Inadze, Tinatin Kaukhchishvili, Tamaz Gamkrelidze, Teimuraz Mibchuani, Geronti Gasviani, Jemal Gamakharia, Badri Gogia*, etc.) consider that they belong to the Kartvelian (Megrel-Chan, Svan) ethnic world (**Orbeli, 1911**: 200, 208; **Kiessling, 1912**: 278; **Ingorokva, 1954**: 135; **Melikishvili, 1965**: 63-68; **Melikishvili, 1989**: 183; **Gigineishvili, 1975**: 115-124; **Inadze, 1955**: 17-18; **Kaukhchishvili T., 1980**: 76; **Gamkrelidze T., 1991**: 12; **Gamkrelidze T., 1993**: 588; **Gamkrelidze T., 1992**: 93; **Mibchuani, 1989**: 56-64; **Gasviani, 1991**: 212; **Gamakharia, 1998**: 34-36; **Gogia, 2003**: 36-39, 54-60, 77-93; **Kavtaradze, 1985**: 23-29). It should be also mentioned that there exists an opposite viewpoint that unilaterally and without any substantial argument declares the Heniochi as the Abkhaz tribe (**Gulia D., 1925**: 35-52, 69; **Anchabadze Z., 1964**: 136-137, 173-176; **Inal-ipa, 1976**: 18; **Bgazhba O., Lakoba S., 2006**: 68; **Bgazhba O., Lakoba S., 2015**: 45, 59, 64, 69, 71, 75; **Kvarchia, 2015**: 43, 143, 224-230, 497, etc.).

Whatever will be the end of debate regarding the settlement of the "Moskh"-Meskhs and the Heniochi on the territory of the present-day Abkhazia, there is one conclusion that can be drawn from the Ancient Greek sources. According to them, the population of the region was mainly, if not completely, Georgian.

The significant ethnical changes took place in the North-Western Colchis in 1st-2nd centuries AD. Beginning from those times the Ancient Greek sources mention previously unidentified tribes on the territory of the present-day Abkhazia. From 70s-50s BC the sources (Memnon of Heraclea) name the tribe of *Sanigs*, whose settlement area in the 1st-2nd cc. AD was the territory from Tskhumi-Sebastopolis to the North, up to present-day Gantiadi (**Lomouri, 1998**: 31). The majority of the scholars (*I. Orbeli, S. Janashia, P. Ingorokva, G. Melikishvili, M. Inadze, N. Lomouri, T. Mibchuani, G. Gasviani, J. Gamakharia*, etc.) consider them to be a part of the Georgian ethnic world too (**Orbeli, 1911**: 200-208; **Janashia, 1959a**: 11-15; **Ingorokva, 1954**: 135; **Melikishvili, 1965**: 67; **Inadze, 1992b**: 45-50; **Inadze, 1999**: 70; **Lomouri, 1998**: 30-34; **Mibchuani, 1989**: 84-89; **Gasviani, 1991**: 200; **Gamakharia, 2011b**: 74-76).¹ Nevertheless, there are some attempts to announce them as the *Sadz* tribe of Abkhaz-Adyghe origin (**Anchabadze Z., 1964**: 132; **Anchabadze**

¹ It should be mentioned that even Donald Rayfield supports the Georgian (Svan, Megrelian) origin of the Sanigs (**Rayfield, 2012**: 21, 23). The opinion of the British literary specialist, who became interested in History of Georgia during the last decade, is interesting in this case since the Abkhazs sympathize with his several groundless statements.

Z., 1959: 15-16; Inal-ipa, 1965: 97; Inal-ipa, 1976: 35; Gunba, 1989: 154; Amichba, 2012: 68, 71; Kvarchia, 2015: 257, 269, 271; Dbar, 2015: 33-34, 37, 39-40, 44, 67, 222; Marykhuba, 2017: 119, 122; Nyushkov, 2014: 19; Anchabadze G., 2000: 29-30, etc.). Those attempts can be considered to be completely baseless. As N. Lomouri correctly states, the ethnonym “*Sanig*” contains “*the stem “San,”*” which is the Greek equivalent of “*Chan.*” This undeniably proves the Megrelian-Chan origin of this tribe (Lomouri, 1998: 33; Lomouri, 1989; Lomouri, 2001: 346; Lomouri, 1990: 162). Besides this, *Tskhumi* (“*hornbeam*” in Svan), the ancient Georgian name of Dioskurias-Sebastopolis, can be explained only in Kartvelian linguistic world. Since according to *Arrian*, the *Dioskurias* was in the area settled by the *Sanigs* in the 1st-2nd cc. AD (Flavius Arrianus, 1961: 43), it could receive the Svan name only in earlier times. Strabo’s highly credible note mentions that prior to 1st c. AD the mountains near Dioskurias-Sebastopolis was settled by *Svans* (Kaukhkchishvili T., 1957: 126; Strabo, 1917: 214-215). Meanwhile, *Claudius Ptolemy* (2nd c. AD) mentions the *Suanocolchi* at the seashore nearby Dioskurias (Claudius, 1991: 122; Lomouri, 1955: 43-44). As N. Lomouri correctly states, the name of the tribe definitely attests “*their mixed Svano-Colchian origin*” (Lomouri, 1955: 43-44; Lomouri, 1998: 33).

The written sources of the 1st-2nd cc. (*Pliny the Elder*, *Arrian*) mention “*Ἀψίλαι*” /“*Apsilae*”/ (Plinius Secundus, 1949: 290-291; Flavius Arrianus, 1961: 42-45) and “*Ἀβασχωῶν*” /“*Abazgoi*”/ (Flavius Arrianus, 1961: 42-45) for the first time in history. There is no consent among the historians regarding the place of their original settlement. The picture clears to the 6th c. AD. It is practically proven that the *Abazgoi* and *Apsilae* moved to the North-West (Melikishvili, 1970a: 545-546; Lomouri, 1998: 33. Compare with: Gama-kharia, 2011a: 96-97). The *Abazgoi* took over the *Sanigs* – from *Anakopia* (*New Athos*) to the River Bzipi (Anchabadze Z., 1959: 11-12, 16). To the south of their lands was *Apsilia*. At first its territory was beginning from the River Ghalidzga (Anchabadze Z., 1959: 8; Muskhelishvili, 1977: 117-120; Muskhelishvili, 1999: 124-125), then from the River Kodori (Lomouri, 1998: 33; Lomouri, 1999: 99), and later from the River Kelasuri as it is evident in the 730s. It should be also mentioned that there are some attempts to reconsider the place of the southern border of *Apsilia*. The Georgian historiography has correctly identified “*Klisura*” of the Georgian sources as the present-day River *Kelasuri*. This finding was shared by the leading Abkhaz historians (Anchabadze Z., 1959: 68; Inal-ipa 1976: 245, 247, 397; Gunba, 1962: 193-194; Gunba, 1989: 201-213). Some historians, who are under the influence of the Abkhaz nationalist views, reject this identification and they are moving the border inside present-day Samegrelo (Voronov, 1998: 76; Bgazhba O., 2007: 113; Nyushkov, 2016: 112; Gumba, 2003: 124; Gumba, 2004: 88; Gumba, 2016: 54-61; Maan, 2020: 167).

For a long time, no historian doubted that the *Apsilae*-*Apshils* and *Abazgoi*-*Abkhazs* were the ancestors of the present-day *Abkhazs*. The situation somewhat changed in 1950s when *Pavle Ingorokva*, the well-known Georgian philologist, decided to reconsider

this viewpoint and declared the Late Antique and Early Medieval Abazgoi-Apsilae as Kartvelian tribes (**Ingorokva, 1954:** 118-189). The Georgian historians, with the leadership of *Niko Berdzenishvili*, declined this novelty and supported the traditional viewpoint regarding the ethnical belongingness of Abazgoi-Apsilae (**Berdzenishvili, 1956:** 125-131). He was joined by other Georgian and Abkhaz scholars (**Lomtadze, 1956:** 132-139; **Soselia, 1955:** 2-4; **Anchabadze Z., 1956:** 261-278; **Bgazhba Kh., 1956:** 279-303; **Inal-IPA, 1976:** 50-51, 406). The official position was maintained in the textbooks and other general editions. P. Ingorokva's viewpoint was supported only by non-specialists and writers (**Adamia, 1968:** 8; **Miminoshvili, Panjikidze, 1990** and others).

The situation has changed after the conflict of 1992-1993. Historians and linguists, studying the Abkhaz-Adyghe languages and the ethno-cultural world of the Caucasus and Asia Minor, started to put forward new arguments regarding the Georgian origins of the Abazgoi-Apsilae. The works of Tamaz Gamkrelidze and David Muskhelishvili are especially notable from this point of view. They opposed the sameness of "Abazg"- "Abkhaz"- "Abaza," as well as sameness of "Apsil"- "Apsar"- "Apsua." As it is known, the Georgian scholars, working in the field of Caucasian Studies (*Ketevan Lomtadze, Otia Kakhadze, Ekaterine Osidze, Teimuraz Gvantseladze, etc.*) came to conclusion that the ethnonyms "Abazg," "Abkhaz," and "Abaza" are identical to each other and they are connected with "Apsua," the endonym of the modern *Abkhazs* (**Lomtadze, 1990:** 19-20; **Kakhadze, 1993:** 551-564; **Osidze, 1993:** 565-570; **Gvantseladze, 1993:** 571-580).

Contrary to this conclusion, *Tamaz Gamkrelidze*, who also considers that the form "Apsua" has derived phonetically from "Abaza" (**Gamkrelidze T., 1991:** 10; **Gamkrelidze T., 1993:** 586; **Gamkrelidze T., 1992:** 91), declared that "Abazg" and "Abaza" are independent forms and they are not connected to each other. According to him, the Greek form "Abazg" is the modification of Georgian "Abkhaz," which was denoting some Kartvelian (Megrelian-Chan, Svan) tribe (**Gamkrelidze T., 1991:** 7-16; **Gamkrelidze T., 1993:** 581-590; **Gamkrelidze T., 1992:** 89-95). *David Muskhelishvili* questioned the identity of ethnonyms "Apsil," "Apsar," and "Apsua." He is adamant that "Apsil" has nothing in common, neither geographically, nor chronologically or linguistically, with "Apsua" (**Muskhelishvili, 2000:** 21; **Muskhelishvili, 1999:** 122-123). He is less categorical regarding the ethnical belongingness of the "Apsilae," but also considers them as one of the "Western-Georgian tribes," and not as the ancestors of the "Apsuas" (**Muskhelishvili, 2000:** 22). At the same time, although D. Muskhelishvili does not doubt the sameness of the "Apsar" with "Apsua"- "Abaza," he presumes that the "Apsars" were the Abaza-Jiks who lived "at the seashore in the extreme north-western part of the Georgian feudal kingdom" and they were not the ancestors of the present-day *Abkhazs* (**Muskhelishvili, 2000:** 23).

The other scholars promoting P. Ingorokva's viewpoint are *Teimuraz Mibchvani* (**Mibchvani, 1989**), *Geronti Gasviani* (**Gasviani, 1998; Gasviani, 2003**). For the criticism of G. Gasviani's arguments see: **Rogava, 2014:** 29-40, 96-130), *Zurab Ratiani* (**Ratiani, 1995**),

Dermisha Gogoladze (Gogoladze, 1995: 51-54), *Jemal Gamakharia* (Gamakharia, 1998; Gamakharia, 2011a: 76-93), *Badri Gogia* (Gogia, 2003), *Noé Apkhazava* (Apkhazava, 2010: 70-71), *Alexandre Oniani* (Oniani, 1994; Oniani, 1999), *Teimuraz Gvantseladze* (Gvantseladze, 1998: 15-16, 33-39; Gvantseladze, 2011a: 216-226), etc. Although some of the above-mentioned authors are highly revered in their fields, the arguments are not convincing enough to revise the conclusions of *Ivane Javakhishvili*,¹ *Simon Janashia* (Janashia, 1952a: 419; Janashia, 1988b: 217, 245; Janashia, 1992: 24. See also: Rogava, 2014: 14-16), and *Niko Berdenishvili* regarding the Abkhaz-Adyghe origin of Abazgoi-Apsilae. Those conclusions are supported by *Giorgi Melikishvili* too (Melikishvili, 1970a: 360; Melikishvili, 1954: 76; Melikishvili, 1959: 90, 168). The leading specialists of Ancient and Medieval Georgian history also share this viewpoint (Inadze, 1992b: 50-65; Inadze, 1999: 72-78; Lomouri, 1998: 33; Lomouri, 2001: 340, 344-345; Lomouri, 1990: 158, 160-16; Lordkipanidze M., 1990: 10; Khoshtaria-Brosset, 2000: 33-40; Tsulaia, 1995: 10, 49-50; Papaskiri, 2002: 152-153; Papaskiri, 2004: 28-30; Papaskiri, 2010: 20-21).

Despite the differences regarding the Abazgoi-Apsilae ethnic belongingness and area of their settlement, the Georgian historians are practically unanimous that **the present-day Abkhazs formed as an ethnos on the territory of Georgia, in Abkhazia** (the Abkhazs have no other homeland). Moreover, **it represents some kind of ethnical mix of Adyghe-Circassian Apsuas and Kartvelians** (mainly, Megrelian-Chans). **That is why the present-day Abkhazs, along with the Georgians, are identified as aborigine population of Georgia (Abkhazia). This is officially recognized by the Georgian state. According to the Georgian Constitution, the Abkhazian language, along with the Georgian language, is the state language of Georgia (on the territory of Abkhazia).**

The Early Medieval written sources also mention the *Misimiani* tribe on the territory of the present-day Abkhazia, namely in the *Kodori Valley*, above *Tsebelda*. They are considered to be Kartvelian (Svan) tribe (Kaukhchishvili S., 1936 277-280; Melikishvili,

¹ As it is known, Ivane Javakhishvili, at the first stage of his scholarly career, in the second edition of the “History of the Georgian Nation,” considered that the Apsilae, together with the Laz-Megrelians and Svans, belonged to the “Three branches of the Georgians” (Javakhishvili, 1913: 55). Based on this, some scholars try to strengthen Pavle Ingorokva’s point of view on the Georgian origin of the Apsilae-Abazgoi with this statement of a great historian. In fact, as I. Javakhishvili explains in the next edition of the “History of the Georgian Nation,” he considered Abkhazs only as “relatives of Georgians” and not the Georgians themselves (Javakhishvili, 1928: 104; Javakhishvili, 1979: 152, emphasis added – Z.P.). It should be also mentioned that in other researches, including the same second edition of the “History of the Georgian Nation” (Javakhishvili, 1913: 66-67) the scholar considered the Abazgoi-Apsilae to be an ethnic group of Abkhaz-Adyghe origin and the direct ancestors of present-day Abkhazs (Javakhishvili, 1998a: 50; Javakhishvili, 1998b 235; Javakhishvili, 1998c: 460, etc. See more about this: Khoshtaria-Brosset, 2000: 4-7, 30-33; Papaskiri, 2014a: 165-175; Papaskiri, 2016: 368-379; Papaskiri, 2016a: 372-387; Rogava, 2014: 8-14)

1959: 65, 100, 384; Mibchuani, 1989: 128-143; Gasviani, 1990: 23-42; Tsulaia, 1995: 22; Lomouri, 1999: 97-98, etc.). This is based on the fact that the Greek form “Misimian” clearly derives from the Svan endonym “Mushvan.” Besides this, there are numerous Svan toponyms in the region, where the Byzantine sources located the Misimiani (Muskhelishvili, 1977: 121-123; Mibchuani, 1989: 131-133; Gasviani, 1991: 201-209; Lomouri, 1999: 98, etc.). The most significant is also Agathias’ (6th c. Byzantine historian) note that the “*Apsilians differ from these* (i.e. the Misimians – Z.P.) in both *language and customs* (Agathias, 1936: 86; Agathias, 1975: 85). Combined all these arguments are creating unshakable ground for the conclusion that the Misimians are the Georgians (Svans). Therefore, any attempts from some Abkhaz scholars to declare Misimians (as well as Sanigs and Heniochi) as Abkhaz tribe are ridiculous and they have nothing to do with the scholarly logic.

From the beginning of the 1st Millennium AD there is mentioning of Lazs on the territory of Abkhazia. According to Z. Anchabadze, they were living on the seashore in present-day Ochamchire and Gali regions in the 6th c. AD (Anchabadze Z., 1959: 6). Nevertheless, it is possible that the Lazs were living in the northern parts of the present-day Abkhazia too. Arrian is mentioning the toponym “*Old Lazika*” north to the River Acheunt (the present-day River Shakhe, nearby Sochi) (Voronov, 1979: 72) in 130s AD (Flavius Arrianus, 1961: 53). The *Anonymous author* of later period (5th c. AD) is more precise that the “*Old Lazika*” was *Nicopsis (Nicopsia)* (Flavius Arrianus, 1961: 93). Nowadays it is established that Old Lazika was located north-west to the present-day Tuapse, near the mouth of the River Negopsukho (Kiessling, 1912: 259-280; (Anchabadze Z., 1959: 67; Muskhelishvili, 1999: 118).

It is also possible that the hydronym “*Kotoshi*,” which was fixed near Bichvinta first by Frédéric DuBois de Montperreux in 1830s (DuBois de Montperreux, 1937: 97, 100-101, 113-114, 129) and then by Alexandre Dyatchkov-Tarasov in the beginning of the 20th c. (Dyachkov-Tarasov, 1903: 46-47; Dyachkov-Tarasov, 2003: 80), is also the trace of the Megrelian-Laz population in the region. Both authors underscore that the River Kotoshi was making a whirlpool at the mouth (DuBois de Montperreux, 1937: 101; Dyachkov-Tarasov, 1903: 46; Dyachkov-Tarasov, 2003: 80). Meanwhile, Megrelians call the whirlpools “*Koto*.” Since it is not likely that Megrelians lived in the mentioned region during the times of Fr. DuBois de Montperreux and A. Dyatchkov-Tarasov, it is probable that the river received its name when there lived “*the Colchian tribe of Koraxi*” and there was “*Old Lazika*” to the North (Dyachkov-Tarasov, 2003: 7-8; 171-172; Okujava, 2010).

The summary of our observations regarding the ethnical situation in the North-Western Colchis (present-day Abkhazia) in the 1st Millennium BC and the first half of the 1st Millennium AD gives the clear picture. In the mid-1st Millennium BC, according to the Ancient Greek sources, this territory was settled by *Colchian* (Megrelian-Chan, Svan) tribes: *The Coli*, *the Coraxi*, *the Colchians* themselves, *Heniochi*, maybe *the “Moskh”-Meskhs*. At the same time, the Colchians was an umbrella name and it is possible that along with the

Kartvelian tribes it unified some non-Georgian, Abkhaz-Adyghe tribes too. From the 1st-2nd centuries BC new tribes appear on the territory of present-day Abkhazia: Sanigs (1st c. BC), Apsilae and Abazgoi (1st-2nd cc. AD). Later there appear also *Misimiani*. From those tribes, the Kartvelian origins of the *Sanigs*, *Misimiani*, and Lazs (who also are mentioned on the territory of present-day Abkhazia at those times) is evident. We also support the opinion of the most of the scholars that the *Abazgoi-Apsilae* were the ancestors of the present-day *Abkhaz-Apsua*. At the same time, it should be mentioned that at first (in the 1st-2nd cc. AD) the Abazgoi-Apsilae were settled only in small part of the present-day Abkhazia (from the River Ghalidzga to the River Kelasuri). The main population of the region at that time were the Kartvelian (Megrelian-Chan, Svan) tribes: *the Lazs*, *the Sanigs*, and *the Misimians*.

§4. The Political and State Character of North-Western Colchis from the 1st Millennium BC to the 8th Century AD

From the Ancient time the North-Western Colchis (i.e. present-day Abkhazia) was part of the Georgian political and state world. It was structural part of Georgian (Colchian-Laz) state. The first state formations on the territory of Georgia started to rise at least from the end of the 2nd Millennium BC. The oldest Assyrian cuneiform inscriptions about *Daiaeni* (*Diakhi* of Urartian sources) and *Kilkhi* (*Kulkha*) give us the information about the state system in Southern and South-Western Georgia. The scholars have more and more certainty regarding the strong organization of those political formations. The Urartian cuneiform inscription of the 8th c. BC and the Greek mythological tradition make it especially true regarding *Kulkha-Kolkha* kingdom (**Melikishvili, 1959: 218-219; Melikishvili, 1962: 323-325; Melikishvili, 1970: 360; Lordkipanidze O., 2002: 154**).

Around 7th-6th cc. BC the Ancient Greek written sources confirm the existence of the state formation in the Western Georgia. It is known as Colchis. *Xenophon's "Country of Pasians,"* where the "*descendant of Aetes,*" the legendary king of Colchians, is also identified with *Colchis* (**Melikishvili, 1959: 218-219; Melikishvili, 1970: 360**). According to *Cyril Toumanoff, Colchis was the "the first Caucasian State"* and "*Colchis can be justly regarded as not a proto-Georgian, but a Georgian (West-Georgian) kingdom... It would seem natural to seek the beginnings of Georgian social history in Colchis, the earliest Georgian political formation"* (**Toumanoff, 1959: 24, 38, emphasis added – Z.P.**).

There is no consensus among the scholars regarding the extent of the statehood in Colchis. Most of them (*Simon Janashia, Otar Lordkipanidze, Teimuraz Mikeladze, Meri Inadze, Nodar Lomouri, Guram Lordkipanidze, etc.*) do not doubt that Colchis was highly established state formation with a king as a ruler (**Janashia, 1952b: 19; Melikishvili, 1959: 186; Melikishvili, 1970: 360; Lordkipanidze O., 2001: 31-97; Lordkipanidze O., 2002: : 158-160; Inadze, 1968: 161; Inadze, 1973: 156-164; Mikeladze, 1973: 153; Lomouri, 1962; Lordkipanidze G., 1978: 31**). The Russian scholars oppose this view and refute the

existence of state in Colchis even in the 6th-2nd cc. BC (**Boltunova, 1979c**: 260; **Boltunova, 1979a**: 3-4; **Boltunova, 1979b**: 51-55; **Voronov, 2006**: 95; **Yaylenko, 1982**: 247-258; **Voronov, 1993**; **Schnirelmann, 2003**: 336). At the same time, there is no unanimity among the Georgian historians too. *N. Berdzenishvili* had expressed some kind of scepticism in the state organization of Colchis (**Berdzenishvili, 1990**: 245, 365, 145). As for *Guram Koranashvili*, he fervently opposes any kind of statehood in Colchis (**Koranashvili, 2000**; **Koranashvili, 2001**: 98-135; **Koranashvili, 2002**: 191-224).

We do not think it correct to hyperbolize the Colchian statehood, but denial of any kind of statehood in Colchis is senseless. It is impossible to ignore the fact that the Classical written sources, for nearly five centuries, are mentioning only Colchis at the Eastern Black Sea shore in a vast region from Trapezous (Trebizond) to the north of Dioskurias and Pitius. Byzantine sources consider the kingdom of Lazika as a direct successor to the Ancient Colchis. Such a continuous unity could only be based on the political hegemony of the Colchians, “*the leading... ethnical element*” of this state formation, according to *S. Janashia*. It is impossible to imagine that the “*the unity of the Colchian universe... throughout the whole Colchis*” could be maintained by “*tribal union*” (**Janashia, 1952b**: 19) or military democracy. The Colchian political hegemony definitely would need more sophisticated state system even if it were imperfect.

The above-said does not mean that Colchis was a centralized state in the 6th-2nd centuries BC. We think that it was not able to become “*a Great Nation*” (**Berdzenishvili, 1990**: 251) and full-fledged national state. The scarce information regarding the Colchian kings proves this. There are few exceptions. First of all, it is *Akes*, whose coins are found inside the borders of Historical Colchis, namely in Trapezund (1865) and in village Kinchkha of Khoni municipality (1946). Scholars think that the geography of coins proves that the inscription on coin – *ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΚΟΥ* – belongs to the king of Colchis, who reigned after 195 BC (for the details and other works, see: **Dundua G., Dundua T., 2018**: 62-64).

There is also known *Saulaces*, “*descendant of Aeetes.*” According to *Pliny the Elder*, he “*reigned in Colchis*” and “*is said to have come on a tract of virgin soil in the country of the Suani and elsewhere and to have dug up from it a great quantity of gold and silver, his realm being moreover famous for golden fleeces*” (**Pliny, 1952**: 42, 43; **Inadze, 2003**: 306; **Lordkipanidze O., 2010**: 104; **Plinius Secundus, 1949**: 315). The numismatic material supports Pliny’s note. There are coins minted by *Saulaces*, who, according to number of scholars, is supposed to be the Colchian king mentioned by Pliny (**Gutschmidt, 1976**: 150-153; **Golenko, 1951**: 199-203; **Kapanadze, 1951**: 203-204; **Golenko, 1960**; **Golenko, 1963**: 69-81; **Inadze, 1994**: 217-218). Although, some scholars read the inscription as *Saumakos* and presume that the coins were minted by the king of Bosphorus (**Dundua G., 2002**; **Dundua G., Dundua T., 2018**: 89-99, etc.), but the recent finding of similar coin in Crimea (2006) with clearly eligible word *ΣΑΥΛΑΚΟΥ* (**Gavrilov, Shonov, 2007**: 31-33) leaves no doubt that those coins belong to *Saulaces*, the king of Colchis.

Those are all the notes given in the Classical sources regarding the Colchian kings. The fact that we do not have the local Colchian narrative sources (even in Greek) strengthens the argument about the imperfection of the Colchian statehood. Meanwhile, the Eastern-Georgian state of Kartli-Iberia has such historical narration. According to it, there was no separate state in the Western Georgia and the historical Colchis/Egrisi was part of the state structure of Kartli.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to ignore the fact that there definitely was a unified state organism in Colchis in the 6th-2nd cc., the so-called **political Colchis** of N. Berdzenishvili (**Berdzenishvili, 1990: 145**). Both Greek and Georgian historical traditions correlate regarding the borders of the Colchis. According to the Greek authors, the vast territory populated by the Colchians was beginning near Trapezous in the south and ending at the Caucasus range in the North (**Lordkipanidze O., 2002: 156**). As for the Georgian sources, they put the extreme north-western border of Egrisi at the “*river of Little Khazaria in the north, which is the Caucasus mountain border*” (**Leonti, 2008a: 26, Leont’i, 2014: 14**. Emphasis added – **Z.P.**). The Ancient Greek and Medieval Georgian sources are strengthened by the already mentioned 5th c. “*Periplus*” of *Anonymous author* and mentioning of “*Old Lazika*” nearby the “*river called Tofsida*” (**Flavius Arrianus, 1961: 93**), at the mouth of the present-day River Negopsukho North-West to Tuapse (see in detail: **Gamakharia, 2011b: 37**).

Based on the above-said, the territory of the present-day Abkhazia was completely within the borders of kingdom of Colchis. According to D. Muskhelishvili, it was an organic part of the Colchian state both ethnically and territorially (**Muskhelishvili, 1999: 119**). As for the groundless statements of the Abkhaz ideologists that there already had been the Abkhazian national state on the territory of the present-day Abkhazia at those times (**Voronov, 1993**), it is a pure fantasy of the authors.

At the beginning of the 1st c. BC Colchis was not a single state organism any more. It is supposed that several tribes who were previously under the aegis of the Colchian king temporarily became independent at that time (**Muskhelishvili, 1999: 119**). The territory of historical Colchis became a part of the Kingdom of Pontus during the reign of *Mithridates VI Eupator*. Later, from 65 BC it became the part of the Roman Empire. The new ethno-political units arose there in the 1st-2nd cc. AD in the form of the “kingdoms” of *Macrones* and *Heniochi*, *Lazs*, *Apsilae*, *Abazgoi*, and *Sanigs* (**Muskhelishvili, 1999: 119**). The territory of the present-day Abkhazia was partly in the “Kingdom” of Lazs (somewhere to the River Ghalidzga), partly in the “kingdoms” of Apsilae and Abazgoi (from the River Ghalidzga to the River Kelasuri), and partly in the “Kingdom” of Sanigs (**Muskhelishvili, 1999: 119**). The latter covered the lands from Dioskurias-Sebastopolis (Tskhumi-Sokhumi) to the region of Sochi-Tuapse (**Melikishvili, 1970a: 545; Inadze, 1999: 61; Lomouri, 1998: 33**). Thus, the most part of the present-day Abkhazia was controlled by the Lazs and the Sanigs. The Kartvelian origin of both those tribes is undisputable. Later, in the 6th c. one more Georgian (Svan) unit appeared in the region. Misimiania was located in the northern

part of the Kodori Valley (**Muskhelishvili, 1999: 119**). Only the “kingdoms” of Apsilae and Abazgoi can be considered as possible Abkhaz ethno-political units.

The “kingdoms” on the territory of Colchis were the early state formations ruled by the local dynasts (“kings”). According to Arrian, they were confirmed by Roman Empire. Beginning from the 3rd c., with the support from the Roman emperors, the Laz “kingdom” started to gain ground. At the end of the 4th c., it covered territory of Western Georgia on the whole and became a significant political force in the Eastern Black Sea shore. The Roman-Byzantine world unambiguously considered the Lazika-Egrisi kingdom as a legal successor of the Ancient Colchis (**Muskhelishvili, 1999: 119**). The territory of the present-day Abkhazia was an organic part of the Lazika-Egrisi, although the rulers of Abazgia (at those times it covered the territory from the River Gumista to the River Bzipi) enjoyed certain sovereignty and they just nominally recognized the suzerainty of the Laz kings (**Muskhelishvili, 1999: 119**). As for the Apsilia-Apshileti, administratively it was a part of the Lazika-Egrisi kingdom and the official appointed by the Laz king governed there. Procopius gives us the evidence of this. He mentions that the *“Apsilii have been subjects of the Lazi from ancient times”* and they were ruled by *Terdetes, “one among the notables of the Lazi, ... who held the office of “magister” ... in this nation”* (i.e. Apsilae – Z.P.). This Terdetes *“had had a falling out with Gubazes, the king of the Lazi, and was hostile to him.”* Thus, he defected to the Persians. But *Gubazes*, with the help of the Byzantines, was able to restore order and the Apsilii again became the *“subjects of the Lazi”* (**Procopius, 1962: 140-145**. Emphasis added – Z.P.).

The Byzantine Empire was trying to stop the desire of the Lazika-Egrisi kings to gain full sovereignty. Thus, they set off the rulers of Abazgia-Abkhazia against the kings of Lazika. As a result, in the first half of the 6th c. Abazgia-Abkhazia stopped being the subject of Lazika Kingdom and came under the direct rule of Byzantine Empire. It is possible that at that time the Byzantines cut off Abazgia-Abkhazia from Lazika-Egrisi off ecclesiastically too and created the independent eparchy there (**Muskhelishvili, 1999: 119**). The Byzantine historians have paid attention to the fact that during the reign of Justinian I the missionary work in Abazgia-Abkhazia became extremely active (**Procopius, 1962: 78-81**). This, along with the imperial policy conducted by official Constantinople extremely angered the leaders of Lazika-Egrisi. They decided to escape from Byzantine suzerainty with the help of the Persians, who gained their strength in the eastern part of the South Caucasus. The Byzantine-Persian 20-year-war on the territory of Egrisi did not bring the results wished by the leaders of Lazika Kingdom. It significantly weakened country and accelerated the process of its disintegration.

During the second half of the 6th c. and first half of the 7th c. the Byzantine Empire intensified its pressure on the central government of Lazika-Egrisi. Their goal was to reduce the influence of the Lazs in their provinces. Despite this in the mid-7th c. Apsilia-Apshileti and Misimiania still was directly governed by the rulers of Lazika. Moreover, ac-

According to *Theodosius of Gangra* (7th c.), one of the residences of the ruler of Lazika (the rulers of Lazika were no longer kings and they were holding the Byzantine title of *Patrikios*) was nearby the present-day *Mokvi* in Oчамchire region (**Theodosius, 1941: 50; Papuashvili, 1985: 58**).

Thus, based on above-said, it is safe to presume that the North-Western Colchis (i.e. present-day Abkhazia) from the ancient times (at least from the 1st Millennium BC) till the end of the 7th c. AD politically belonged to the Georgian universe. Despite its ethnical diversity, it was an organic part of Colchis-Lazika state. This is axiom and any attempt to revise it and separate the present-day Abkhazia from the Western-Georgian (Colchian-Laz) ethnical, cultural, and political space has no prospect. As for the hypothesis about the existence of the Abkhaz-Apsua national statehood from the 6th c. BC, it belongs to the field of fantasy, not science.

CHAPTER III. CREATION OF THE “ABKHAZS” KINGDOM AND ITS NATIONAL AND STATE CHARACTER

According to the Abkhaz nationalist historical narrative, the Abkhazs always had their own national state (independent from the rest of Georgia), which counts 1200 (or even 2500) years. This false postulate is solely based on the speculations regarding the name of the “*Abkhazs*” Kingdom (Kingdom of the “Abkhazs”), which was founded at the end of the 8th century and definitely was a Georgian state in every criterion.

The Georgian historiography has studied in detail all the key issues concerning the history the “Abkhazs” Kingdom and shows the fundamental role of this political unit in the process of creation the unified Georgian state. It is safe to say that all the representatives of the Georgian historical school (including *Zurab Anchabadze*, the well-known Abkhaz historian, who was the first to scholarly study the history of Ancient and Medieval Abkhazia) consider the Kingdom of the “Abkhazs” as the Georgian national and state unit. It is also significant that the leading Russian Caucasiologists never doubted it. *Vladimir Minorsky* (1877-1966), famous Russian Orientalist, made several significant observations regarding the “Abkhazs” Kingdom in his fundamental work on the history of Sharvan and Darband. Thus, when mentioning Mtskheta, he points out that “*Mtskheta, though the latter ancient town (lying west of Tiflis) may have belonged to the “Abkhaz” dynasty... and not to the south-western princes...*” (Minorsky, 1958: 161. Emphasis added – Z.P.).

It is not accidental that V. Minorsky puts the name of the dynasty in quotes. He also explains to which ethnical and political world had belonged the so-called “Abkhaz” dynasty. When talking about the political and state configuration of Georgia in the 9-10th cc., he mentions that “*Apart from the Kuirikan dynasty of Kakhetia, there existed the main Bagratid dynasty in the central and southern parts of Georgia and the so-called Abkhazian dynasty of Western Georgia*” (Minorsky, 1958: 84. Emphasis added – Z.P.). Meanwhile, he knows who are the Abkhazs themselves and says that “*the real Abkhaz are a small nation living on the east coast of the Black Sea (near Sukhumi)*” (Minorsky, 1958: 84).

In other chapter, V. Minorsky also mentions that “*in the first part of the tenth century Karthli was annexed by the rulers of the westernmost Georgian kingdom, of the so-called “Abkhazian dynasty”*” (Minorsky, 1958: 164. Emphasis added – Z.P.). Apart from the “Abkhaz” dynasty, he puts in quotes “Abkhazia” and “Abkhazian.” For example, when covering the activities of *Aghsartan*, king of Kakheti, V. Minorsky says that he “*was usually on bad terms with the king of Western Georgia (Abkhaz, as it was called by the Muslims, in view of the origin of the dynasty)*. At the time in question the “Abkhaz” ruler was the energetic *Bagrat IV /1027-7/, son of Giorgi I /1041-27/*” (Minorsky, 1958: 67. Emphasis added – Z.P.). Finally, in his commentaries to *Masud b. Namdar’s* poem, according to which *Fariburz of Sharvan* has allegedly “subjugated the Abkhaz,” V. Minorsky clarifies: “*he subjugated the Abkhaz (i.e. the Georgians)*” (Minorsky, 1958: 68. Emphasis added – Z.P.).

The Russian historians who study the historical past of the Eastern Europe and, especially, the Caucasus, also acknowledge the Georgian national and state belongingness of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom. We have to specifically mention the opinion of *Anatoly Novoseltsev*, the well-known Russian Orientalist. According to his interpretation, the “Abkhazs” Kingdom, founded in the 8th c., “*At first covered territory mostly populated by the Abkhazs. However, in the 9th c., when the centre was moved to the Western Georgia, it practically became the Western-Georgian state, which played a significant role in the history of Georgia*” (Constantine Porphyrogenitus, 1991: 401. Emphasis added – Z.P.).

One more scholar, who paid attention to the problem, is *Vladimir Kuznetsov*. When writing about the unification of the Western Georgia by the “Abkhazs” Kingdom “*with the capital in Kutaisi*”, he mentions that “*Georgian became the common language for all the peoples of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom*” (Kuznetsov, 2004: 16. Emphasis added – Z.P.). Even more specifics can be found in *Sergei Arutiunov’s* viewpoint on the “Abkhazs” Kingdom. According to him, “*Abkhazia was always populated by the Abkhazs, but by the Georgians too. ...Sometimes Georgians were in majority, sometimes in minority, but there was no time when there were living only Abkhazs or only Georgians. There was no such time. These peoples lived together for at least two centuries... Abkhazs in Georgian history had the same role that probably had the Rus-Varyags in the history of Russia. The “Abkhazs” Kingdom became the unifier of the Georgian lands*” (Essence of the Events, 2004, emphasis added – Z.P.)

Not everything is correct in the Russian scholars’ above-given statements (first of all, the opinion that the “Abkhazs” Kingdom was the Abkhaz national state before moving to Kutaisi), but it is significant that they do not doubt the Georgian character (cultural, political or state) of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom. Despite that, the Abkhaz historians try to convince society in the opposite. They continue their speculations regarding the name of the kingdom and persuade the unsophisticated reader that the “Abkhazs” Kingdom was truly Abkhaz (in the modern sense of the word) ethno-political unit.

The myth that the “Abkhazs” Kingdom was the Abkhaz-Apsua state formation began to appear after 1917 February Revolution. Some representatives of the Abkhaz national intelligentsia were the first to state this notion. Among them we have to mention *Mikhail Tarnava*, who published the leaflet on the Abkhaz “national” church in 1917. He was trying to “scholarly” prove the necessity of creating “independent” (from the Georgian Orthodox Church) church organization in Abkhazia (Tarnava, 1917). The author declared the “Abkhazs” Kingdom to be a state founded by the ancestors of modern Abkhazs. According to him, “*the strength and flourishing of Abkhazia (“Abkhazs” Kingdom – Z.P.) begins to decline when the reign of her independent rulers ended*” and the throne of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom in Kutaisi passed to prince Bagrat, the first king of unified Georgia. After that, “*the fate of Abkhazia became connected with the fate of Georgia*” (Tarnava, 1917: 9. Emphasis added – Z.P.). In 1920s-1930s this tendency was extended in the works of the separatist leaders. The work of *Semion Ashkhatsava* has to be singled out in this case. He unequivocally de-

clared the “Kingdom of Abkhazia” as the Abkhaz national state and stated that it existed till the 15th century, when it broke up into several political units: kingdoms of Kartli, Kakheti, and Imereti; principedoms of Samtskhe-Saatabago, Guria, Samegrelo, Svaneti, and Abkhazia (Ashkhatsava, 1925: 21).

Some Russian historians, who studied history of Abkhazia in those times, also fell under the influence of S. Ashkhatsava and his colleagues. K. Kudryavtsev, known for his anti-Georgian views, has to be especially mentioned in this case. He pronounced that the “Abkhazs” Kingdom of the 8th-10th cc. was the national state formation of Apsua-Abkhazs. According to K. Kudryavtsev, “after Tevdose II Blind was overthrown, the throne of Abkhazia was taken by **non-national, foreign dynasty**” (Kudryavtsev, 1922: 121-122. Emphasis added – Z.P.). Anatoly Fadeev, Russian historian, who lived and worked in Sokhumi for a long time, was not specific about the “national” period of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom. Nevertheless, he called the unified Georgian state of Bagrat III a “Union State” («союзное государство»). According to him, Bagrat III was “Union king” /«союзный государь»/ (Fadeev, 1934: 84, 86). It shows that he considered the formation of “Leonids” epoch as solely Abkhazs’ state ethnically. The similar viewpoint was shared by Dimitri Gulia, the founder of Abkhaz national literature (Gulia, D., 1925: 191-222).

Later there was no dispute among the scholars regarding Georgian character of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom. The Abkhaz historians were no exception. First of all, this was the accomplishment of Zurab Anchabadze (Anchabadze Z., 1959: 95-158), who recognized the “Abkhazs” Kingdom as the Western-Georgian state unit (Abkhazian Autonomous, 1981a: 324), whose “**cultural and church policy... as wells as social and state policy was dictated by the common Georgian interests**” (Anchabadze Z., 1959: 153. Emphasis added – Z.P.). Shalva Inal-ipa, the known Abkhaz historian and ethnologist, agreed with him on principle. He stated that after moving its capital to Kutaisi, the “Abkhazs” Kingdom “**practically became Georgian state because of the majority of her lands, population... and common Georgian State policy**” (Inal-ipa, 1976: 403. Emphasis added – Z.P.).¹

Despite this, from time to time, there were publications, which presented the “Abkhazs” Kingdom as the Abkhaz national formation (Khonelia, 1967a; Khonelia, 1967b). The Abkhaz national character of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom was promoted by Vadim Kozhinov, who was even claiming that the church service and state governance in the “Abkhazs” Kingdom was conducted in the Abkhaz language (Kozhinov, 1977: 256) through the Abkhaz script “deciphered” by Georgii Turchaninov. From V. Kozhinov’s “discoveries” we should also mention his statement that “**prior to 1931 Abkhazia was never a part of**

¹ It should be mentioned that in the second, revised edition, which was published 15 years later after scholar’s death (1995), this phrase («Абхазское царство... вскоре после своего образования... превратилось по существу в грузинское государство по своей основной территории, составу преобладающего населения... и осуществлявшейся... общегрузинской политике») is omitted (see: Inal-ipa, 2011).

Georgia; never in her thousand-year history. But there was a time when part of Georgia was included in the Kingdom of Abkhazia” (Kozhinov, 1993. Emphasis added – Z.P.).

Beginning from the second half of 1980s, particularly from 1988, against the background of the strengthened separatist movement, the Abkhaz scholars became more aggressive in their statements regarding the Abkhaz-Apsua belongingness of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom. It was especially evident in the publications of *Mikheil Gunba* (Gunba, 1989: 232-249) and *Alexey Papaskiri* (Papaskiri A., 1988: 114-129). This postulate was also elaborated by archaeologist *Yuri Voronov* in his works, who joined the Abkhaz separatist movement at that time and sacrificed all the scholarly objectivity to politics. Besides the fact that he was totally biased when covering Ancient and Medieval history of Abkhazia, Yuri Voronov made unexplainable mistakes. The most outrageous of them was his statement that ***“Gurandukht, the heiress of the Abkhazs’ throne, married Bagrat III, the representative of the Southern-Georgian Bagratids”*** (Voronov, 1993: 28. Emphasis added – Z.P.). In reality Gurandukht was mother, not wife, of Bagrat III, the first king of unified Georgian Kingdom.

The “achievements” of the Abkhaz scholars regarding the national and state character of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom were summarized in the so-called “auxiliary textbook” on history of Abkhazia, which was published in Sokhumi in 1991 (**History of Abkhazia, 1991: 68-88**). Yuri Voronov, the author of the subchapter dedicated to the “Abkhazs” Kingdom, did his best to hide the Georgian character of this formation. Nevertheless, even he had to recognize the historical unity and co-existence of the Georgians and the Abkhazs in the common political space. Moreover, he had to show the leading role of Georgian rulers in some events that happened on the territory of present-day Abkhazia in the 8th c. The acknowledgement of the fact that Mihr and Archil, the “kings” of Kartli, were the commanders of the united host of Kartlians and Abkhazs when fighting against the troops of *Marwan ibn Muhammad* (i.e. Murwan the “Deaf”) near Anakopia (the residence of *Leon*, Eristavi of Abkhazia) is the evidence of it (**History of Abkhazia, 1991: 70**). Yu. Voronov also underscores the role of Byzantine Empire in the strengthening the positions of Leon I in Western Georgia. He states that the Byzantines supported ***“the transfer of the royal insignias, previously belonging to Kartli’s king Mihr, to Leon I”*** (**History of Abkhazia, 1991: 74**. Emphasis added – Z.P.).

After declaring the *“state independence,”* the separatists were no longer satisfied with Yuri Voronov’s somewhat cautious position regarding the national character of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom. They were not content with proclaiming only the “Leonids” kingdom as the Abkhaz national formation and decided to absorb the 11th-12th cc. unified Georgian state too. Unlike Yuri Voronov, who was mentioning the leading role of the Apsua-Abkhazs in the “Abkhazs’ and Kartvels’ Kingdom,” but acknowledged the Georgian character of this formation (**History of Abkhazia, 1991: 98**), they declared that the “Abkhazs” Kingdom (the national state of the Apsua-Abkhazs) continued its existence till 1259. For example, *Sergei Shamba* states that the “Abkhazs” Kingdom was Abkhaz national state, where the Abkhaz

population was dominant in the 8th-13th centuries (Shamba S., 1999: 253-266). He also mentions that “in 978 the crown of the Abkhaz kings passed” to Bagrat, **“the representative of the Southern-Georgian branch of the Armenian royal family of Bagratuni”** (Shamba S., 1999. Emphasis added – Z.P.).¹ Even more aggressive in this case is *Ermolai Ajinjal*, who talks about the existence of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom as an Abkhaz “national state” till 1259 (Ajinjal, 2014: 16-17).

According to *Taras Shamba* (brother of Sergei Shamba) and his co-author, *Aleksandr Y. Neproshin*, **“the Abkhazs independently created the state** (i.e. the “Abkhazs” Kingdom – Z.P.) **on their native land and for two centuries the Abkhaz state was the strongest among her neighbours”** (Shamba T., Neproshin, 2004. Emphasis added – Z.P.). They also consider the name of the unified monarchy – “Kingdom of the Abkhazs and Kartvels” as a **“conditional one, since Bagrat, who was the ruler, was not Kartvel at all. He was the representative of the Armenian (and earlier Persian) family from Tao-Klardjeti and his mother was Abkhaz. Therefore, he had nothing in common with the Kartvelian tribes”** (Shamba T., Neproshin, 2004. Emphasis added – Z.P.). T. Shamba and his co-author do not stop here and they declare the significant Georgian sources like *“Divan of the Abkhazs’ Kings”* and *“Kartlis Tskhovreba”* as **“works of the Medieval historians of the Abkhazs’ Kingdom”** (Shamba T., Neproshin, 2004a; Shamba T., Neproshin, 2004. Emphasis added – Z.P.). Moreover, they state that **“Abkhazia was never a part of Georgia. Rather the Southern Caucasian princedoms, Kartli and Kakheti included, can be considered as belonging to Abkhazia both administratively and territorially”** (Shamba T., Neproshin, 2004a; Shamba T., Neproshin, 2004).

Of course, there is no sense to make any commentaries on these absurd conclusions, which have nothing in common with the historical science and truth. It is a pity that such “novelties” can be observed not only in the works of the dilettantes, but in the publications of some professional historians. For example, the above-mentioned historian and archaeologist M. Gunba states that **“the Abkhazs created strong Kingdom of Abkhazia, independent from Byzantine Empire”** and that **“Abkhazia has nothing to do with preserving the “integrity” of Georgia,”** because the **“settlement of Georgians in Abkhazia”** began only from the end of the 19th century and **“basically had place in the 20th century”** (Gunba, 2000: 89. Emphasis added – Z.P.). *Irina Agrba* also considers the “Abkhazs” Kingdom of the 8th-10th cc. as the Abkhaz national state (Agrba I., 2011: 82-87). *Guram Gumba* states that Abkhazs” Kingdom of the 8th-10th cc. was only Abkhaz national state and also adds that the unified Georgian Kingdom in the 11th-15th cc. was the **“federative state of the Southern Caucasian peoples”** (Gumba, 1994: 4-5). The textbooks, published in

¹ Later S. Shamba made some corrections to his viewpoint. In other article he stated that the “Abkhazs” Kingdom, “a strong state... created by the Abkhaz people in the 8th century, as a result of the dynastic marriages, transformed into Georgian state in the 11th century. The latter existed till the 13th century” (Shamba S., 2005. Emphasis added – Z.P.).

Sokhumi, also are biased when covering history of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom. They usually repeat Yuri Voronov’s viewpoint on the history of the 8th-10th centuries (**Bgzhba O., Lakoba S., 2015: 140-163**).

The new generation of historians also continue to represent the “Abkhazs” Kingdom as Abkhaz national state. We should mention *Naala Kaslandzia* (**Kaslandzia, 2017**. See also: **Khorava, 2021: 8-19**) and *Omar Maan* (**Maan, 2020**) from them. Although authors (mostly O. Maan¹) attempt to cover the historiographic heritage on the problem, they have no new arguments. Anyway, they embrace the nationalist-separatist ideology and blindly follow Ashkhatsava-Inal-ipa line on this issue. The best example of uncritical thinking is O. Maan’s reference to *Vladimir Degoev’s* (the Ossetian-born Russian scholar) evaluation of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom as “*strong, rich, and independent state*” (**Degoev, 2011**. Emphasis added – **Z.P.**). The problem is that O. Maan used only that part of V. Degoev’s article, which was convenient to him. Meanwhile, V. Degoev, who is one of the competent scholars of 18th-19th cc. Caucasian history, shows ignorance of the earlier epochs. In the same paragraph, which is used by O. Maan as a reference, V. Degoev ends the history of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom in 1089, when David the Builder ascended to the throne and immediately “conquered Abkhazia” (**Degoev, 2011**. Emphasis added – **Z.P.**). Thus, if we except the correctness of this hypothesis, it appears that the “Abkhaz” king David the Builder, who was born and raised in Kutaisi,² the capital of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom, “conquered” his own country. It is unexplainable why O. Maan did not oppose this absurd statement, which completely contradicts the myths supported by him and other Abkhaz scholars (*M. Gunba, O. Bgzhba, A. Papaskir, V. Kvarchia*, etc.) that the “Abkhaz” kings were conducting permanent military expansion towards the Georgian lands and their efforts, according to the Abkhaz historical mythology, ended with creation of the “multi-national state of Abkhazia” in the epoch of David the Builder and King Tamar.

Such is the viewpoint of the Abkhaz separatist historiography regarding the national and state character of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom. As we see, the above-mentioned authors do their best to convince the world that the “Abkhazs” Kingdom, founded by Leon I at the end of the 8th c., at least for two centuries (before Bagrat III became the King of the “Kartvels”), represented Abkhaz national state only. Of course, it was possible to name other publications too, which promote such views, but we think that the cited works are enough to show the historiographical anarchy that reigns in the present-day “independent” Abkhazia.

Now, following this rather substantial historiographical review, let us answer the question, why the “Abkhazs” Kingdom, created at the end of the 8th century, was a Geor-

¹ Looks like O. Maan knows Georgian and is familiar with the Georgian-language publications. It cannot be said about N. Kaslandzia, whose article on queen Gurandukht (**Kaslandzia, 2018: 41-48**) shows no knowledge of recent Georgian scholarly literature on the problem.

² O. Maan, like some other Abkhaz scholars, are trying to explain the etymology of Kutaisi in Abkhazian language (**Maan, 2002: 56; Kvarchia, 2015: 83, 147, 190, 441-442**).

gian (and not Apsua-Abkhaz) state formation. In order to clarify this issue, we have to touch upon the pre-history of its creation and the processes that made it possible to found a new sovereign political unit under the hegemony of *Eristavi* of Abkhazia in Western Georgia, on the territory of the former Lazika-Egrisi Kingdom.

The 20-year Byzantine-Persian war conducted in Western Georgia in the 540s-550s weakened the Egrisi Kingdom, which started to lose control over some regions. Throughout the 7th c. the Byzantine Empire continued its political pressure over the central government of Lazika-Egrisi. Already in the mid-7th century Egrisi is governed not by king, but by local dynast holding the byzantine title of Patrician (**Theodosius, 1941:** 50). As it seems, this caused the rift in the relations with Byzantium. The confrontation became especially fierce from the end of the 7th c. According to *Theophanes*, in 697 *Sergi Barnukisdze* (Sergios son of Barnoukios of Byzantine sources), “*the patrician of Lazika, revolted and put it under the Arab rule*” (**Theophanes, 1941:** 105; **Theophanes, 1982:** 67). Later, at the beginning of the 8th c., the Arabs installed their garrisons in Lazika-Egrisi, namely in Archaeopolis and in the Kodori Valley (**Anchabadze Z., 1959:** 66-67). Abazgia-Abkhazia also recognized the suzerainty of Caliphate (**Theophanes, 1941:** 107; **Theophanes, 1982:** 85; **Anchabadze Z., 1959:** 89-90; **Bogveradze, 1988:** 174).¹

The Byzantine Empire took countermeasures to restore its positions in the Western Georgia. They decided to punish the Lazs and the Abazgians for their “betrayal.” Justinian II sent spatharios Leo the Isaurian to Caucasus. His mission was to persuade the Alans and use them against Abazgians and Lazs (**Theophanes, 1941:** 106-107; **Theophanes, 1982:** 85). Leo the Isaurian was successful and at the beginning of the 710s the official Constantinople was able to separate Abazgia and Apsilia from Lazika. Thus, the Byzantine Empire partially restored her influence in Western Georgia (see in detail: **Papaskiri, 2008:** 439-447).

The relations between Byzantium and the Caliphate were especially tense at that time. The Khazar Qağanate, which had its own interests in Caucasus, became the main ally and satellite of the Byzantine Empire in this confrontation. The ruling house of Kartli also became actively involved in this struggle. At the end of 720s *Al-Jarrah ibn-Abdallah*, the reappointed governor of Transcaucasia, renewed the so-called “Charter of Immunity” and imposed new obligations on the population of Kartli (**Silagadze, 1991:** 75-85). The situation in Eastern Georgia quickly aggravated and the ruling house of Stephanoz *Erismtavari* became the main supporter of the anti-Arab coalition in the Southern Caucasus. It was the

¹ There is no consensus in historiography whether Abazgia-Abkhazia really was under the rule of Arabs. For example, *Marius Canard*, the known French Orientalist, when making commentaries on *Theophanes’* reference regarding Leo the Isaurian’s voyage to Alania, says that only Lazika recognized the Arab suzerainty during the rule of Emperor *Leontios* (695-698). As for the Abazgians and Apsilians, according to scholar, they simply reneged the Byzantine Empire (**Canard, 1971:** 354). *S. Zeteishvili* categorically denies the presence of the Arabs in Abazgia-Abkhazia (**Zeteishvili, 1976:** 85). Meanwhile, Igor Chichurov believes *Theophanes’* reference and thinks that Abazgia-Abkhazia also recognized the Arab suzerainty (**Chichurov, 1980:** 137).

initiative of Kartli's *Erismtavari* ("Malik" of Arabic sources) to organize a massive invasion of Khazars under the leadership of *Barjik*, son of *Qaghan*. The latter, following the "wise council" of "Georgian Malik," destroyed the Arab army at Ardabil. Al-Jarrah was killed in the battle (**Artamonov, 1962: 213; Silagadze, 1991: 85**).

The Byzantine Empire, which clearly backed up the Khazars in their confrontation with the Arabs (**Novoseltsev, 1990: 178**), decided to use the leaders of Kartli. It looks like they began to support their ascension throughout the whole Georgia. The *Erismtavaris* of Kartli established their control over the most part of Western Georgia (excluding Abkhazia, which became directly part of the Byzantine Empire). This was happening with the diplomatic help from Byzantium, which established the more desirable regime in Western Georgia and, thus, had some kind of a revenge for the "betrayal" of Sergi Barnukisdze.¹ This is indirectly confirmed by the Georgian chronicler (Juansher Juansheriani), according to whom there was no local dynast in Western Georgia in the 730s and Egrisi was part of Kartli.²

Thus, the alliance of Byzantium with the *Erismtavaris* of Kartli became a fact in the 730s. First of all, this alliance was directed against the forces supporting the Arabs in Western Georgia. Moreover, it is probable that Byzantium and Kartli divided Lazika-Egrisi among themselves. The imperial government "satisfied" the desire of Abazgia-Abkhazia's leaders to secede from Lazika-Egrisi and took over this region (down to the River Kelasuri). The other parts of Lazika came under the rule of Kartli's *Erismtavaris*. It was the end of Lazika-Egrisi as an independent unit. At the same time, with giving the most part of Egrisi to Kartli and creating the united Kartli-Egrisi state ("*SakarTvelo*"/"*Georgia*"), the Byzantine Empire was effectively expanding her spheres of influence and tried to restore the situation that existed after the seizure of Tbilisi by Emperor *Heraclius* and Khazars in 628.

The Arab Caliphate was not going to cede her positions in Caucasus on the whole and in Georgia particularly. In the mid-730s they organized the full-scale military expedition under the command of *Marwan ibn-Muhammad* (Murwan "the Deaf"). The latter invaded both North and South Caucasus and seriously hampered the Khazars' influence in the region. The Arabs fiercely punished "disobedient" Georgians. First, they ravaged Eastern Georgia, then, following *Mihr* and *Archil*, sons of *Stephanoz Erismtavari*, moved to Lazika-Egrisi and devastated that region too.

¹ It should be mentioned that *Anatoly Vinogradov*, the Russian historian also acknowledges such development of the events. He presumes that official Constantinople transferred to *Stephanoz III* the rights on Egrisi, although he says that it happened in 711 (**Vinogradov, 2013: 164**).

² It is becoming more popular among historians to accept the correctness of *Juansher's* chronicle regarding the unity of Kartli-Egrisi and creation of the all-Georgian state under the aegis of *Stephanoz's* ruling house of Kartli (See: **Berdzenishvili, 1990: 270, 579; Aleksidze Z., 1967: 173, 181-186; Abramishvili, 1977: 36-37; Bogveradze, 1979: 98-100; Muskhelishvili, 1980: 76-77; Muskhelishvili, 2003: 376-383; Papuashvili, 1985: 64-65; Papaskiri, 2008: 450-452; Papaskiri, 2016: 183-185**).

The Georgian written sources (Chronicle of *Juansher Juansheriani* and “*Martyrdom of David and Constantine*”) contain detailed description of Marwan’s invasion in Western Georgia. The Arabic sources generally are well informed on Marwan’s activities in the Caucasus, but they have no recollection of this military campaign. Nevertheless, the great majority of the scholars (among them practically all Abkhaz historians) has no doubts in veracity of Georgian sources and acknowledges the reality of Marwan’s raid in Western Georgia. During the assault, according to *Juansher Juansheriani*, the Arab commander “*passed K’lisura, which was the border between Greece and Georgia, ... destroyed the town of Apshileti – Tskhumi, and approached the fortress of Anak’opia*” (**Juansher, 2008: 235-236; Juansher Juansheriani, 2014: 111**. Emphasis added – Z.P.).

Near Anakopia fortress the united host of Kartlians and Abkhazs fought Marwan’s 35,000 Arabian army. There is no consensus in Georgian sources regarding the outcome of the battle, although they agree with each other that Marwan was not able to capture Anakopia. Meanwhile, the third source concurs with *Juansher Juansheriani* and confirms the defeat of the Arabs: “*Asim turned to him and said: “You have seen **the defeat of Abkhazia by Saracens,**¹ haven’t you?” Saint Archil replied: “I was there, when God defeated them.” Then Asim asked: “Whose God overcame the Saracens?”* (**Martyrdom of Saint Archil, 2014: 136**). Anyway, it is evident that Marwan was not able to strengthen the Arab influence in Western Georgia and had to leave it. There is also one more significant detail regarding the battle of Anakopia. The commanders of the united host (2000 Abkhazs and 1000 Kartlians) were Mihr and Archil, while Leon, “*Eristavi of Abkhazia,*” was not in Anakopia. According to *Juansher Juansheriani*, “*the Eristavi of the Caesar, Leon, was in the fortress of Sobghisi, situated on the Ossetian pass*” (**Juansher, 2008: 236; Juansher Juansheriani, 2014: 111**). It is possible that his absence was the part of the military plan and Leon was defending the passes in the Caucasus.

The Georgian historical tradition connects the victory over Marwan’s army with the changes in the political structure of the state. The Byzantine Empire officially recognized Stephanoz’s house as the leader of all-Georgian world. The emperor declared *Mihr* and *Archil* as the kings of unified Kartli-Egrisi (“*He sent them two crowns and a charter to Mihr and Archil.*” See: **Juansher, 2008: 239; Juansher Juansheriani, 2014: 112**).² To *Leon*, “*Eris-*

¹ As it can be easily confirmed in Georgian original, this line should be translated as “**You have seen the defeat of Saracens in Abkhazia...**” (Editor’s translation. Compare: **Leonti, 2008b: 249**).

² The Abkhaz historian N. Kaslandzia cannot reconcile with narrative given in the Georgian source regarding the establishment of Stephanoz’s house’s hegemony over the Western Georgia and the leading role of *Mihr* and *Archil* in the battle of Anakopia. Her only argument is that the Byzantine and Armenian sources are silent on the military and foreign political activities of *Mihr* and *Archil* (**Kaslandzia, 2017: 94**). Unfortunately, the Abkhaz historian does not understand that her argument is absurd, because in this case she has to doubt the Georgian narrative regarding both “*Leon, Eristavi of Caesar,*” and his nephew *Leon*, “*king of the Abkhazs,*” as

tavi of Caesar,” Emperor granted Abkhazia in hereditary ownership and gave the following order: “*But honour with kindness the kings and the people of Kartli, and do not infringe henceforth on their freedom and the borders of Egrisi, as long as they remain there or even when they leave...*” (Juansher, 2008: 240; Juansher Juansheriani, 2014: 113).

This order of Byzantine Emperor became the basis of further rapprochement between Leon and the ruling house of Kartli-Egrisi with Archil as its head. (Mihr soon died from the wounds received in the battle of Anakopia.) This alliance was confirmed with dynastic marriage. Leon married Guarandukht, one of Mihr’s daughters. Thus, he became the full member of Kartli-Egrisi’s “royal” family. Nevertheless, he declared himself as a vassal of Archil (“*Join me to the number of your slaves...*”) and declined the territorial gifts as dowry. Moreover, he gave Abkhazia to Archil (“*I do not need your lands, but let mine be yours*”). In exchange for this, the far-sighted “*Eristavi of Abkhazia*” received the “royal crown,” which was given to Mihr by the Byzantine Emperor (Juansher, 2008: 242; Juansher Juansheriani, 2014: 113). As a result, Leon quickly became the leading political figure, practically the second person, in Georgian political universe. This was the beginning of a new phase in his political career.

Thus, the new political reality emerged in Georgia from the 730s. At least, from this time, both Eastern and Western Georgia, including Abkhazia, legally became one state ruled by the house of Kartli’s *Erismtavari*.¹ Leon, “*Eristavi of Caesar,*” voluntarily became part of this world as a political heir Mihr, his father-in-law. Later, the house of Leon used its favourable position and established hegemony over Western Georgia on a whole. In the 780s, the principal (no longer *Eristavi*) of Abkhazia was ruling there and the whole country (former Egrisi) was called “*Apkhazeti*” (Martyrdom of Habo, 1963: 59-60).

Historians cannot define the exact time and circumstances under which the “*Eristavi of Abkhazia*” became Principal. It is possible that it happened after the death of *Iovane*, son of “king” Archil, which supposedly did take place after 760. In the 760s, *Juansher* was in “honourable captivity” of Khazar Qağan for seven years (Matiane, 2008: 254; Matiane Kartlisa, 2014: 141. According to Ivane Javakhishvili’s calculations, in 764-771. See: Javakhishvili, 1983: 80-81). Therefore, it is possible that the “*Eristavi of Abkhazia*” (it could

the Byzantine and Armenian sources do not mention them. If there were no Georgian sources, we would have no information on the activities of first “Leonids” or the foundation of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom. The same can be said about the scepticism of Anatoly Vinogradov, who thinks that this story is a fantasy of Georgian chroniclers and even doubts the existence of Leon I (Vinogradov, 2013: 166-167; Vinogradov, 2016: 14-15).

¹ It is no coincidence that the Georgian Medieval historical tradition uses the word “Georgia” (“*Sakartvelo*”) for the first time in regard with the state of *Stephanos-Archil* (Juansher, 2008: 235; Juansher Juansheriani, 2014: 111). The Abkhaz historian *Guram Gumba* simply forgets it as he does not mention Juansher’s chronicle and says that this term was used for the first time in the 11th c. in “*The Life of Iovane and Euthymius*” and “*The Life of Mediolanian*” (Gumba, 1994: 10-11).

be Leon I) took advantage and filled the void as the legitimate representative of “*Khosroans*” house (**Papaskiri, 2006:** 204; **Papaskiri, 2009:** 174). It is not known what happened with Juansher after his return from captivity and whether he was able or not to return to power. Against this background it is significant that *Adarnase Bagrationi*, who was installed as Erismtavari of Kartli by the Arabs instead of “disobedient” Archil (see: **Papaskiri, 2008:** 453-454; **Papaskiri, 2016:** 186-187), is mentioned as Kouropalates. This is evidence that the Byzantine Empire had found another partner in Georgian political universe. Therefore, the mission to fight against the Arabs passed from Archil’s house to its rival family represented by Adarnase Kouropalates.

It is strange that in this situation that the Principal of Abkhazia was very hospitable towards the *Nerse*, Erismtavari of Kartli, heir of Adarnase Kouropalates.¹ The Principal of Abkhazia, as a member of the Khosroans house, logically had to defend the interests of Archil’s heirs and be an enemy of the house of Adarnase-Nerse (the usurpers). Instead of it, he gives the political asylum to Nerse, who was persecuted by the Arabs. This shows that the political situation has changed since 764 and Archil’s house has exhausted its resources after the disastrous defeat from the Khazars. It is possible that the Eristavi of Abkhazia decided to support (or maybe he received orders from Constantinople to do so) the new leader of the Georgian state in exchange for the recognition of Leon I’s rights on the Western Georgia (**Papaskiri, 2008:** 458-459; **Papaskiri, 2016:** 192).

At the end of the 8th century, Leon II, the nephew of Leon I, who also “*was the son of the daughter of the King of the Khazars,*” with the aid from the Khazars, “*separated from the Greeks*” and seized “*Abkhazia and Egrisi up to Likhi.*” He assumed the title of King of the “Abkhazs” (**Matiane, 2008:** 254; **Matiane Kartlisa, 2014:** 142). Thus, was founded the new Western Georgian state, which, due to the origin of its ruling dynasty, received the name Kingdom of the “Abkhazs” (“Aphkazeti”).

The researchers pay special attention to the fact that old Georgian historical tradition (“*Matiane Kartlisa*”) connects this event with the dynastic crisis existing in the “royal” (Stephanoz-Archil’s) house of Kartli-Egrisi. According to “*Matiane Kartlisa,*” Leon II assumed the title of the king because “*lovane was dead and Juansher had grown old. Then Juansher died too*” (**Matiane, 2008:** 254-255; **Matiane Kartlisa, 2014:** 142). It is evident that the Georgian chronicle, which is the only written source covering this event, tries to underscore the legitimacy of Leon II’s ascension to the united throne of Egrisi-Abkhazia.

¹ As we can read in *Ioane Sabanisidze’s* work, the Caliphate had already once pardoned Nerse (in the 770s), but he became disobedient again. Instead of going to Baghdad, he went to Khazars Qaghan to receive military and political assistance in his struggle against the Arabs. Beforehand, he had sent his family to Abkhazia, where “Saracens had no entry.” Khazars received Nerse with great honour, but the negotiations ended without any results. The Khazars decided not to launch military campaign in the Eastern Georgia at that time and Nerse had to leave Khazaria and also went to Abkhazia (**Martyrdom of Habo, 1963:** 56-60; **Papaskiri, 2008:** 458; **Papaskiri, 2016:** 191-192).

Nevertheless, it would not be correct to think that the assuming of title of the king by the new leader of Egrisi-Abkhazia was just an act of internal politics. First of all, it became possible due to the favourable foreign-political situation. It is not coincidental that the Georgian chronicler ties Leon II's assuming of king's title with his separation from Byzantium and cutting the relations with Emperor.

The foreign-political background of creation the "Abkhazs'" Kingdom is well-studied in historiography. According to the *Simon Janashia's* well-founded argument, the rejection of Byzantine suzerainty and assuming the title of king coincides in time with the political crisis in Empire at the end of the 8th c. Around 797, there was a coup in Constantinople, which resulted in the dethroning of Constantine VI, the grandson (or nephew) of Khazar Qaghan. S. Janashia presumes that Khazars reacted negatively to this news (**Janashia, 1952: 331-333**). It is possible that Khazar Qaghan decided to support (or even inspired) his other grandson (or nephew) Leon "*Eristavi* of Abkhazia," close relative of dethroned Emperor, in his anti-Byzantine demarche.

Since "*Eristavi* of Abkhazia" proclaimed himself as the "King of the Abkhazs," his state was mentioned as the country of the "Abkhaz" ("Apkhazeti") king, the "Abkhazs' Kingdom," or simply "Abkhazia" both internally and externally. The change of the name did not mean that the national and state character of country has changed. It definitely did not result in the creation of new, Abkhaz-Apsua national state, whose legal successor is the present-day self-proclaimed "Republic of Abkhazia," as it is claimed by some Abkhaz historians.

There are numerous precedents, when the name of the state has derived from one ethnical group, but politically and culturally it represents the other nation. For example, Bulgaria received name from her founder khan *Asparuh*, who was Bulgar (Turkic tribe) ethnically (**Nikitin, 1952**). Nevertheless, no one can seriously claim that the state created by Asparuh was Turkic country. It was and is Slavic state. The example of Russia can also be mentioned in this case. There is no doubt that the "Rus'" tribe, from which the name of country has derived, belonged to the Norman ethnical world. The viewpoint about the Slavic origins of this tribe is called "historiographical myth" among the leading Russian scholars themselves (**Petrukhin, 1995: 117**. For the correct interpretation of ethnonym "Rus'," see also: **Khaburgaev, 1979: 215-226; Melnikova, Petrukhin, 1989: 24-38; Avdusin, 1988: 23-34; Pchelov, 2000, 139-183; Danilevsky, 2000, etc.**). Nevertheless, even **the most defiant defenders of the "Norman theory" cannot deny that the Kievan Rus' of Varyag konungs *Ryurik* and *Oleg* was a Slavic state**, and not a Norse-Scandinavian one. The same can be said about the "Spanish Precedent." The ascension of *Philippe*, Duke of Anjou, the grandson of *Louis XIV*, as king *Philip (Felipe) V* (**Mauerer, 1998: 197-215**) on the Spanish throne did not mean that Spain became a French state.

The ethnical belongingness of the ruling dynasty is not decisive when defining the national and state character of the state. The political history of Georgia also proves it. For example, after the death of *Kvirike III*, "*King of Kakheti and Hereti*," the throne had

passed to his nephew *Gagik*, the representative of Armenian dynasty of Tashir-Dzoraget (**Matiane, 2008:** 281; **Matiane Kartlisa, 2014:** 155). Nevertheless, the Georgian Kingdom of Kakheti did not change into Armenian one.

It is also significant that the Georgian historical tradition clarifies when and why Abkhazia became the name of historical Egrisi. *Vakhushti Bagrationi* in his work *“Description of the Kingdom of Georgia”* (18th c.) mentions: *“There are three names of this country: first Egrisi, second Abkhazia, third Imereti. Egrisi was called because of Egros, son of Targamos, who received this country among his brothers. And this was the name of the country before the passing of the Khosroans (i.e. the house of Stephanos-Archil – Z.P.). Abkhazia received her name because of Levan, who after the first Leon, was Eristavi of Abkhazia... This Leon, after the passing of Khosroans, became the king and took in possession Egrisi, and he named his kingdom Abkhazia. And he expanded the name of his saeristavo over Egrisi”* (**Vakhushti, 1973:** 742. Emphasis added – Z.P.). It should be also mentioned that some Armenian historical sources (for example, the work of *Hovhannes Draskhanakertsi* in the 10th c.) the kings of the “Abkhazs” are called as kings of “Egrisi” (**Hovhannes Draskhanakertsi, 1987:** 129, 148, 158-159, 162, 215). This confirms that the neighbouring countries were well-informed as to which country was named “Abkhazia” from the end of the 8th c.

Modern Georgian historiography, because of *Vakhushti Bagrationi’s* clarification, often mentions the “Abkhazs” Kingdom as the Kingdom of “Egrisi-Abkhazia” (**History of Georgia, 1958:** 135-137; **Lordkipanidze M., 1973:** 421; **Lordkipanidze M., 1988:** 285). From our point of view, it is not fully justified because the unsophisticated reader can understand it not as the new Western-Georgian state in the name of which Egrisi is the same as Abkhazia, but as some kind of “federative” union of two countries (Egrisi and Abkhazia).

The Abkhaz separatist historians presume that the “*Eristavi* of Abkhazia” conquered Egrisi using military force, annexed it to “his own Abkhazia” and created a new, Apsua-Abkhaz national state, which had nothing in common with the Georgian statehood. This is based on the incorrect reading of the relevant place in Georgian chronicle, which gives us information regarding Leon’s ascension to the throne („*დაიპყრა აფხაზეთი და ეგრისი ვიდრე ლიხაძე*“ /“*took possession of Abkhazia and Egrisi up to Likhi*“/. See: **Matiane, 2008:** 254; **Matiane Kartlisa, 2014:** 142. Emphasis added – Z.P.). Namely, they understand the word „*დაიპყრა*“ (“*daipq’ra*”) in its present sense as “conquered.” Thus, they presume that the “Abkhazs” kings (including Bagrat III and his descendants, the “Abkhaz Bagratids” as they call them) were the “conquerors” of Georgia. Meanwhile, it is evident that in the above-mentioned the word „*დაიპყრა*“ is used in its other meaning „*დაეუფლა*“ (“*daeup’la*”) – “took possession” (in this phrase, “*came to power*”),¹ because it is

¹ Moreover, it is highly probable that, based on the Georgian grammar of those times, the word „*დაიპყრა*“ in this case should be written as two words – „*და იპყრა*“ (“*da ipq’ra*”), which means only “took possession” and leaves no chance for misunderstanding (Editor’s note).

equally applied to both Abkhazia and Egrisi. Moreover, Abkhazia is mentioned first among the “conquered” countries (See in detail: **Tsulaia, 1982:** 31-32). Thus, if we follow the incorrect reading, it turns out that Leon has “conquered” Abkhazia, which is unacceptable for the Abkhaz separatist historians themselves, since they want just to prove that “Abkhazia conquered Egrisi.” Therefore, the only correct reading is that Leon “took possession” over already united Abkhazia and Egrisi. It is possible that it even happened as a result of a coup, since the author of the chronicle underscores that he was a nephew of “*Leon the Eristavi to whom Abkhazia had been granted as an appanage*” (**Matiane, 2008:** 254; **Matiane Kartlisa, 2014:** 142).

Actually, at first even the Abkhaz scholars were correctly understanding the reference in the Georgian chronicle. Moreover, it was *Zurab Anchabadze*, who paid attention to this reference and correctly explained it in Russian as “took possession” /«завладел»/ (**Anchabadze Z., 1959:** 95). *Giorgi Amichba* also used the correct translation (**Amichba, 1988:** 57). Even *Shalva Inal-ipa* used the word correctly in the first edition of his book (**Inal-ipa, 1976:** 400), although in the second edition changed his mind. He said that the word „ღაიპყრა“ could not be read as “took possession” (he even tried to connect it with the Abkhaz word *აწყარა*, which means beating) and declared that such meaning “was not known to him” in the Georgian sources (**Inal-ipa, 2011:** 541).

There will be no exaggeration to say that **Sh. Inal-ipa discredited his scholarly competence** with this statement. **He showed not only his ignorance of the Georgian written sources** (as an ethnologist, he probably did not need them), **but of the primary sources regarding the history of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom.** First of all, we mean the “*Divan of the Abkhazs’ Kings*,” which represents the historical and legal proof of Bagrat III’s rights on the throne of the “Abkhazs” kings and where it is written: “*I, Bagrat Bagratoan, son of blessed Gurgen and of the daughter of Giorgi, King of the Abkhazs, took possession of („ღაიპყრა“) Abkhazia, my mother’s land*” (**Takaishvili, 1913:** 47, emphasis added – Z.P.).¹

Anyway, it is clear that the statement of the Abkhaz scholars that Leon conquered Egrisi is baseless. Even if we presume that the so-called “Abkhaz” dynasty came to historical Lazika-Egrisi as a “foreign conqueror,” which took over neighbour country with military force and established there the Abkhaz-Apsua statehood, alien to the local population, it cannot explain why the Georgians accept the “aggression” so peacefully. It is well-known that every Georgian chronicler, who covers the activities of the “Abkhaz” kings, is well-disposed and shows great reverence towards the representatives of the so-called “Abkhaz” dynasty. “*Matiane Kartlisa*,” the only source, which gives the full account of history of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom, is the great example of this. There is no doubt that this chronicle, which was written in 1070s, would never praise the “Abkhaz” kings if they

¹ It should be mentioned that this phrase is correctly translated into Russian by *Giorgi Amichba* (**Amichba, 1988:** 24).

were not unifying, but conquering Georgia as it is baselessly stated by some historians (M. Gunba and others).

For example, we can cite the appraisals of Giorgi II (922-957) and Leon III (957-967), the “Abkhazs” kings who were the most successful in the struggle for Kartli and practically established their control in the Eastern Georgia. According to chronicler, Giorgi II “*was filled with every virtue, courage and valour, God-fearing and, above all, a builder of churches, compassionate to the poor, generous and meek, perfect in every goodness and grace. He ordered and settled all the affairs of his patrimony and kingdom: he built the church of Ch’q’ondidi, setting up an episcopate and embellishing it with many relics of holy martyrs*” (Matiane, 2008: 261; Matiane Kartlisa, 2014: 145). Giorgi II is also praised in the other place of the chronicle, when the author gives us an account of Bagrat III’s deeds in “Abkhazia” and, first, compares him to his grandfather and only after it to his adoptive father David Kouropalates: “*Within two years he began to look into and zealously administer all the affairs, like his grandfather the great King Giorgi, but even better, I should say, for in everything he acted like the man who had brought him up, the great King David the Kuro-palate, and every good deed was seen to come from him*” (Matiane, 2008: 269; Matiane Kartlisa, 2014: 149). Chronicler gives an appraisal of Leon III too: “*God enhanced his kingship, similarly to his father’s. He too was God-loving and filled with every virtue. He built a church at Mokvi which he made into an episcopal see. Consecrating the church, he ordained all the rules for it*” (Matiane, 2008: 265; Matiane Kartlisa, 2014: 147).

The only explanation of the full loyalty expressed by the Georgian writers and chroniclers towards the “conquering” politics of the “Abkhazs” kings is that they were considered to be the Georgian leaders, like representatives of the Bagrationi dynasty, and not the “foreign conquerors.” For the Medieval Georgian society, the “Abkhazs” Kingdom was a part of all-Georgian cultural, political, and state world, in which the so-called “Abkhaz” dynasty became the leading force.

Another statement of the Abkhaz historians that the Abkhaz (Apsua) tribes were the only creators of Leon II’s “Abkhazs” Kingdom also cannot withstand criticism from the scholarly point of view. This false postulate is based on Zurab Anchabadze’s wrong assumption that the Abazgoi, Apsilae, and other tribes living on the territory of present-day Abkhazia, formed some kind of “united Abkhaz feudal nation,” which resulted in the foundation of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom (Anchabadze Z., 1959: 69; Anchabadze Z., 1960a: 63-64; Anchabadze Z., 1976 51-52). Of course, there definitely was some kind of ethnic consolidation around the Abazgoi in the mid-8th c. After the 730s Apsilae and Apsilia are no longer mentioned in the sources, which should be the sign that they were integrated with the Abazgoi-Abkhazs. Nevertheless, it does not mean that the process was already finished and there was created the “united Abkhaz feudal nation” with its own ethno-cultural and state mentality reflected in the “Abkhazs” Kingdom.

Georgian historiography, namely, *Niko Berdzenishvili*, has clearly shown why was it impossible to form the “united Abkhaz feudal nation” at that time (Berdzenishvili, 1990:

590-593, 604-605). Lately, *Nodar Lomouri* also presented additional arguments that there were no conditions for the consolidation of the Abkhaz tribes into united Abkhaz nation. Meanwhile, there were all necessary preconditions for their integration into the united Georgian feudal nation (**Lomouri, 1999: 103-105**). We will just add that the history of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom itself is the best proof that the Abkhaz tribes were not able (or did not have enough time) to form the united nation with its written and state tradition. From the very beginning, this formation was the Georgian political unit. As it was correctly said by above-mentioned Zurab Anchabadze, the “Abkhazs” Kingdom was “the cradle of unified Georgian state.”¹

There is no consensus among historians regarding the ethnical origins of Leon II and his ancestors. Georgian historian *Dimitri Bakradze* was the first scholar who paid attention to the fact the first “Abkhaz” kings had Greek names, but he never defined their ethnicity (**Bakradze, 1889: 273-274**). The Russian scholar *Praskovya Uvarova* unambiguously declared them as “Greek Archons” (**Uvarova, 1894: 8**). *Dimitri Gulia*, the founder of the Abkhaz literature, also recognized their Greek origins (**Gulia D., 1925: 208**). *Pavle Ingorokva* connected the “Leonids” with the Georgian world and considered them to be the descendants of Laz officials appointed by the king of Egrisi (**Ingorokva, 1954: 192**). Meanwhile, some scholars (Z. Anchabadze, Sh. Inal-ipa, etc.) are sure that they had the Abkhaz (Apsua) origins (**Anchabadze Z., 1959: 76-79; Inal-ipa, 1976: 407**).

As we see, there is no definite answer regarding the ethnic origins of the “Abkhazs” kings. At the same time, it does not matter. **Whoever the “Abkhazs” kings were ethnically** (it is definitely possible that they were Abkhazs in modern sense of word), **they represented the all-Georgian cultural, political and state universe. They were building the unified Georgian state of “Sakartvelo” and not the Abkhaz-Apsua national state formation of “Apsny.”** The church policy of the “Abkhazs” kings is the best example of this. As it is known, after gaining political independence, the “Leonids” were anxious to release the Western Georgian church from the subordination to Constantinople. It was clear that it was the only way to stop being a part of Byzantine sphere of influence. For it, they needed the national-ideological basis. This struggle of the “Abkhazs” kings ended successfully with the creation of Catholicosate of “Abkhazia.”

We will dedicate the special section to the Abkhaz historians’ opinion regarding the Catholicosate of “Abkhazia” in the other chapter of this work. But we have to mention here the falsehood, which is actively promoted in recent times. Some Abkhaz historians are claiming that the Abkhaz, alongside with the Greek, was the language of liturgy in the “Abkhazs” Kingdom (**Dbar, 2006: 6; Amichba, 2012: 68, 71; Kaslandzia, 2017: 243-244; Maan, 2020: 249-250**). This utter rubbish has nothing in common with either historical evidence or scholarly work. It is the fantasy of the authors who are trying to “prove” with

¹ Although, Z. Anchabadze had never wrote this viewpoint in his works, the scholar was frequently using this poetical form in his lectures and public speeches.

this “argument” that the “Abkhazs” Kingdom was the Abkhaz national state. Even if we assume for one minute that the liturgy in the “Abkhazs” Kingdom was in the Abkhaz language, then the following question arises: how was it possible that the Abkhaz literacy and liturgy ceased to exist in the period of strengthening of the Abkhaz kings? Why would it stop after *Bagrat Bagrationi* was enthroned as the King of the “Abkhazs” in Kutaisi? Was he some “stranger”? No, he was the grandson of *Giorgi II*, the greatest King of the “Abkhazs”! Then why would happen that the Abkhazs, who allegedly (according to the above-mentioned authors) were adopting Christianity in their own native language from the 6th c., were not able to create literacy during their political strengthening. This was done by Georgians, Armenians, Slavs, but not by Abkhazs. Why did happen that the leaders of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom decided to adopt Georgian as a language of their official record keeping and liturgy?

Of course, our opponents do not and cannot have a scholarly based and logical answer to those questions. This issue had been dealt long ago by none other than Zurab Anchabadze. The prominent Abkhaz historian singled out the factors that foreordained the Georgian as the language of divine service and official record keeping. According to him, *“the universal usage of Georgian as a language of literacy and culture”* throughout the “Abkhazs” Kingdom was predetermined by the fact that **“the Georgians were the majority of the population”** and their **“settlement area was both bigger and more cultivated. Moreover, the Kartvelian element was better developed from the social-economic and cultural points of view too”**.¹ Because of this, the “Abkhaz” kings never thought about formation of Abkhaz (Apsua) state and national ideology, which should result in the creation of the Abkhaz (Apsua) literacy. That was the reason that they decided to use the Georgian Church and Georgian liturgy as the means to oppose the Byzantine ideology and launched intensive church-building process in the Western Georgia. Thus, they created the conditions for spreading the Georgian literacy and Georgian Christian literature in the region. This process was accompanied with the replacement of the Greek eparchies by Georgian ones. There is direct reference to those events in Georgian chronicles (**Matiane, 2008: 265, 273; Matiane Kartlisa, 2014: 147, 151**) and other written sources. As a result of this national policy of the “Abkhazs” kings, at the beginning of the 10th c. the Western Georgia, i.e. the “Abkhazs” Kingdom, became the land of the Georgian literacy. Meanwhile, the Western Georgian Church joined the Mtskheta Catholicosate organizationally (**Anchabadze Z., 1959: 146; Lordkipanidze M., 1988: 289**).

The only explanation of the deeds of the “Abkhazs” kings is that **Leon II and his ancestors** (not to mention his descendants), **long before becoming the monarchs, notwith-**

¹ «*Картвельский элемент составлял значительное большинство населения, а также занимал большую и ведущую часть... царства в территориальном отношении. Кроме того, картвельский элемент оказался более развитым в социально-экономическом и культурном отношении*» (**Anchabadze Z., 1959: 106-107. Emphasis added – Z.P.**).

standing their ethnical origins, considered themselves as a part of all-Georgian cultural, political, and state universe. For them the language of Kartli, which became the basis for the literary Georgian language, and the Georgian Christian culture was as native, as for the other Western Georgians, among whom were the Megrel and Svan tribes, who spoke (and continue to speak till the present day) the different languages and dialects from the literary Georgian. Even if we hypothetically presume that there existed the Abkhaz (Apsua) mentality among the “Abkhaz” kings in the beginning, it is evident that their political ambitions would cause them to take the national and state interests of the absolute majority of population into account.

There is no doubt that the Kartvelian tribes were the ethnic majority in the “Abkhazs” Kingdom. According to Vakhushti Bagrationi, it was Leon II who divided the “Abkhazs” Kingdom into eight *Saeristavos* (Vakhushti, 1973: 796). Only one of those Saeristavos, namely, the “Apkhazeti Saeristavo,” which covered the territory from north to the River Gumista to Nikopsia, was settled by the Abkhaz tribes. (It is also possible that some Abkhaz tribes were settled in the part of Tskhumi Saeristavo too.) The other seven Saeristavos’ population (Tskhumi Saeristavo included) was definitely Georgian. We think, there is no reason to doubt Vakhushti Bagrationi’s this reference.

The Kartvelian ethnic element, especially its Georgian-speaking part, which significantly increased in Western Georgia at the end of the 8th c., as it is correctly written by Z. Anchabadze, was the most developed in the cultural viewpoint (Anchabadze Z., 1959: 106-108). Georgian was the only Kartvelian language with literary tradition. It was also the language of liturgy and official record keeping in Eastern and South Georgia. Because of this Georgian became the official state language of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom too.

The choosing of Kutaisi, and not Tsikhe-Goji, the old residence of the Laz kings, as the capital of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom by the “Abkhazs” kings, also showed the increasing cultural and political influence of the Eastern-Georgian element in Western Georgia. It is also another proof that the “Leonids” considered themselves as the legal successors of Stephanoz-Archil’s House, since the historical tradition connects the advancement of Kutaisi with the migration of the Kartli Erismtavaris in the 730s. Therefore, when transferring their residence from Anakopia to Kutaisi, the “Leonids” underscored connection with Stephanoz-Archil’s House.

Based on above-said, it is evident that, from the very beginning, the “Abkhazs” Kingdom was definitely a Georgian state formation, which emerged from the ruins of Lazika-Egrisi Kingdom. It was the direct legal successor of the Ancient Colchian and Lazika states. Moreover, **foundation of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom was the new stage in the history of Georgian statehood. Unlike the Lazika-Egrisi Kingdom (not to mention the Ancient Colchis), where the process of national and state formation was far from its end (it is enough to say that the official language of record keeping and divine service was Greek), the “Abkhazs” Kingdom was the first Georgian national state in Western Geor-**

gia with Georgian national Christian ideology and Georgian as its state language. The political aspirations were also Georgian. The “Abkhazs” Kingdom was guarding the all-Georgian political and state interests. It was the devoted working of the “Abkhazs” kings and their activities aimed at further territorial expansion and strengthening of the country that created the basis for the formation of the unified Georgian kingdom with its capital in Kutaisi at the beginning of the 11th century.

CHAPTER IV. ABKHAZIA IN THE UNIFIED GEORGIAN STATE IN THE 11TH-15TH CENTURIES

§1. Creation of the Unified Georgian State and the Administrative Status of Present-Day Abkhazia in the 11th-12th Centuries

Previously, the Abkhaz nationalist historical narrative put forward the notion that the unified Georgian state founded by Bagrat III was some kind of a federation uniting the “kingdom of the Abkhazs” (the Abkhaz national state) and the “kingdom of the Kartvels” (**History of Abkhazia, 1991: 95**), which existed till 1259 (**History of Abkhazia, 1991: 98**). Lately, we can observe the resurrection of the absurd statement of *Semion Ashkhatsava* that the unified Georgian state of the 11th-15th centuries was an Abkhaz national state known as a “*kingdom of the Abkhazs.*” As evidence, we can name the corresponding chapter in the recent textbook on history of Abkhazia with the following title: “Kingdom of **Abkhazia** in the 11th-13th cc.” («**Абхазское царство в XI-XIII вв.**»). We should also mention the subsection of this chapter, which is entitled as the “Kingdom of the Abkhaz Bagratids” /«**Царство абхазских Багратидов**»/ (**Bgzhba O., Lakoba S., 2015: 164**. Emphasis added – **Z.P.**). The content of the chapter is even more preposterous. The Georgian kings, including *David the Builder* and *Tamar*, are mentioned as the representatives of the “*Abkhaz dynasty*” of Bagrationi. Moreover, some authors claim that the reign of Tamar was “*the Golden Age of the Abkhaz multi-national state*” (**Kvarchia, 2015: 534; Paspaskir, 2019: 215**). It is difficult to find the correct name for this kind of ignorance and impudence. This is the rape of true history. Even more preposterous is the fact that those authors are, at the same time, trying to declare the Abkhazs as the sole creators of civilization of “*The Knight in the Panther’s Skin*” epoch and denying the belongingness to this cultural universe in the present time.

These completely false statements are based on the one and only argument and the pseudo-scholarly speculations regarding the title of the “*king of the Abkhazs.*” This was the title held at first by Leon II and his “Leonid” heirs, then, since 978, by Bagrat III Bagrationi, the legitimate representative of the same “Leonid” dynasty from the maternal line. Bagrat III took under his control the Southern Georgia and the rest of the Eastern Georgia (excluding Tbilisi Emirate) and founded the unified Georgian state. Since he has done it already being the king of the “Abkhazs,” the new state was usually called the “*Kingdom of the Abkhazs*” in the 11th-12th cc. and sometimes later too, till the 15th c. Meanwhile, the question is what was the real character of the unified Georgian state, did it belong to the Georgian or to the mythical Apsua-Abkhaz political world, and what was the administrative, ethnical, and cultural image of modern Abkhazia in those times.

The struggle among the Georgian political units, which continued for nearly two centuries, entered its final phase in the 970s. It ended with the creation of the unified

state with Bagrat III as its head. *Bagrat III*, son of *Gurgen Bagrationi* (son of Bagrat II, the king of the “Kartvels”) and *Gurandukht* (daughter of *Giorgi II*, king of the “Abkhazs” in 922-957), became the king of the “Abkhazs” in 978. Without any doubt his selection was no fortuity. This was a well-thought move with far-reaching consequences. Its main protagonist, along with *Ioane Marushisdze*,¹ was *David III Kouropalates*, the acknowledged leader of the Georgian world. It is safe to say that the adoption of Bagrat III, who had a wide range of legitimate dynastical claims, by David Kouropalates was a part of the grand design aimed to unify all the Georgian lands into one kingdom. It is confirmed with the official statement of David Kouropalates when presenting prince Bagrat before the *aznauris* of Kartli: “*This is the successor (of the kings) of T’ao, Kartli, and Abkhazia, my son and ward, and I am his guardian...*” (Matiane Kartlisa, 2014: 148). As David Muskhelishvili correctly mentions, this statement shows that “*the Georgian politicians of those times, among whom David Kouropalates was one of the leaders, had the truly acknowledged program of building “Georgia”*” (Muskhelishvili, 2012: 179. Emphasis added – Z.P.).

According to Ioane Marushisdze’s plan, Bagrat’s appointment to Kartli was the preparatory stage for enthroning him in Abkhazia /“*This Ioane Marushisdze favoured Bagrat as the king*”/ (Matiane, 2008: 267; Matiane Kartlisa, 2014: 148). It is known that beginning from the 860’s, when Kartli first fell under the control of official Kutaisi, the “Abkhazs” kings were appointing their heirs as the governors there. Thus, by taking Kartli in 975, Prince Bagrat was automatically becoming the heir to the Western Georgian throne. The dynastic crisis in the “Abkhaz” royal house and the absence of any other prince with real claims made it more evident.

The question is whether Ioane Marushisdze’s initiative and the instalment of Prince Bagrat as a governor in Inner Kartli was agreed with the official Kutaisi and what was the role of *Teodosi the “Blind,”* the King of the “Abkhazs.” For a long time, it was considered that Ioane Marushisdze was acting in accordance with the central government of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom (Melikishvili, 1973: 135; Lordkipanidze M., 1988: 375; Samushia, 2012: 29). However, the sources practically eliminate any chance of such participation from Kutaisi throne. According to “*Matiane Kartlisa*” (the only source for this event), Ioane Marushisdze was completely independent in his actions and the central government of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom had been cut off from processes in Kartli. It was caused by the fact that Ioane Marushisdze was very concerned with the “close” relations be-

¹ As it is known, it was *Ioane Marushisdze*, appointed as Eristavi of Kartli (in this case, meaning Shida Kartli) by the royal court of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom, who came out with the idea of installing Bagrat on the throne in Kutaisi. Ioane Marushisdze was the first person, who made the statement in 975 regarding Bagrat’s dynastic claims in Western Georgia and asked David Kouropalates either to take Kartli himself, or give it to his adopted son Bagrat, “*whom Abkhazia and Kartli belonged on his mother’s side.*” Bagrat had claims on Abkhazia and Kartli as the “*son of the daughter of King Giorgi of the Abkhazians*” (Matiane Kartlisa, 2014: 148).

tween Teodosi and *Kvirike II*, the ruler of Kakheti (929-976).¹ It is significant that “*When King Demetre passed away, all the residents of the country, seeing that the King had left no successors in Abkhazia and Kartli, brought Teodosi out and made him king. Then the K’akhis came and invaded Uplistsikhe*” (Matiane, 2008: 266-267; Matiane Kartlisa, 2014: 148. Emphasis added – Z.P.). It seems there was some secret deal between Teodosi and Kvirike. In exchange for Kvirike’s help, Teodosi had promised Shida Kartli. Ioane Marushisdze was against this deal and asked David Kouropalates for help. It should be stressed that Ioane Marushisdze was interested in Prince Bagrat not only as a governor of Kartli, but as a king of “Abkhazia.” This means that the Eristavi of Kartli was against the alliance between Teodosi and Kvirike. Thus, he started the preparations for the coup in Kutaisi. Based on above-said, we are safe to think that Ioane Marushisdze’s plan was elaborated behind the back of the “Abkhazs” king and the official Kutaisi had nothing in common with it (Papaskiri, 2013-2014: 360-365; Papaskiri, 2016: 54-59).

The enthronement of Bagrat in Kutaisi in 978, after which he received the title of the “Abkhazs’ King,” did not at all mean that the “Abkhazs” Kingdom ceased its existence, as it was thought by some scholars (Kudryavtsev, 1922: 120-121; Fadeev, 1934: 84, 86; Anchabadze Z., 1959: 166,171; Anchabadze Z., 1960b: 75; Anchabadze Z., 1976: 57; Inalipa, 1976: 412). Even the change of dynasty did not take place since Prince Bagrat took the throne of the “Abkhazs” kings not as Bagrationi, but as a “Leonid” (from the maternal line). That is why he underscores his “Abkhaz” descent in the “Divan of the Abkhazian Kings.” The latter, according to *Ekvtime Takaishvili*, represents some kind of manifesto (Takaishvili, 1913: 23), the legal basis for enthronement as the king of the “Abkhazs.” At the same time, stressing the “Abkhaz” roots by Bagrat III in the “*Divan of the Abkhazian Kings*” cannot be understood as the evidence of his “ethnic mentality,” as it is thought by some scholars (Tsulaia, 1995: 108; Anchabadze G., 2012).²

¹ The co-operation between them began when *Kvirike II*, the Prince (chorepiscopus) of Kakheti, openly supported Prince *Teodosi’s* mutiny against his brother *Demetre III* (967-975). Then Teodosi became a co-ruler of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom (Matiane, 2008: 265-266; Matiane Kartlisa, 2014: 147-148). It is possible, that Kvirike II also played a significant role in the ascension of Teodosi the “Blind” to the throne after the death of Demetre III in 975.

² The Abkhaz historians are actively speculating about the “ethnic sentiments” of the first king of the unified Georgia. They are not consent with the statements regarding the “Abkhaz” descent of his mother and are trying to underscore the political influence of queen *Gurandukht*. Moreover, they show her as the “chief ideologist” of Bagrat’s policy of “conquering” the territories of “neighbouring” Georgia (Bgazhba O., Lakoba S., 2015: 164; Chachkhalia, 2000). Meanwhile, in reality, queen Gurandukht contradicted the policy of unification. It became especially evident in the beginning of the 980s, when Bagrat III had to take the extreme measures to suppress the “anti-Abkhaz” revolt of the *Aznauris* in Kartli. As a result, he had to remove queen Gurandukht from Kartli and put her under house arrest (See in detail in: Papaskiri, 2013-2014: 352-380; Papaskiri, 2016: 45-75).

The enthronement of Bagrat III in Kutaisi did not change either ethno-political, or state-legal character of the “Abkhazs’” Kingdom. It was just a beginning of the political transformation from Western-Georgian state into all-Georgian one (**Papaskiri, 2010: 50**). Thus, it was marking only the territorial expansion of the “Abkhazs’” Kingdom, since from its very beginning (from Leon II’s times) it was the Georgian state. That is why the Georgian chroniclers of the 11th-12th centuries often use the term “Apkhazeti” to denote the whole Georgia. It is especially evident in “Matiane Kartlisa” (**Matiane, 2008: 287, 297; Matiane Kartlisa, 2014: 158, 162**), David the Builder’s historian’s (**Life of David, 2008: 342; Life of David, 2014: 188**), and Lasha-Giorgi’s chronicler’s (**Lasha-Giorgi’s Chronicle, 2008: 354; Chronicle of Giorgi Lasha, 2014: 203**) works.

Another issue, which rises about the territory of the present-day Abkhazia in 11th-12th cc., is its status in the unified Georgian state. First of all, it should be noted that there is no evidence supporting some scholars’ statement that present-day Abkhazia had some kind of state status in the Georgian Kingdom (**Tsulaia, 1995: 130**). Moreover, present-day Abkhazia was not even a single unit at that time. As it was already mentioned, its territory was divided among three Saeristavos beginning from *Leon II’s* times. **Apkhazeti Saeristavo** included territory from Anakopia (present-day Akhali Atoni /New Athos/) to Nikopsia (present-day Tuapse). **Tskhumi Saeristavo** covered territory south from Anakopia (present-day Sokhumi and Gulripshi districts, part of present-day Ochamchire district). **Bedia (Odishi) Saeristavo** included a part of present-day Ochamchire district and Gali district (**Anchabadze Z., 1959: 79**).

In due course, *Zurab Anchabadze*, based on the *Korneli Kekelidze’s* understanding of the relevant place in “History and Eulogy of Monarchs” (**History and Eulogy, 1941: 9-10**), made an assumption that the Apkhazeti and Tskhumi saeristavos were unified during the reign of *Tamar*. He explained that it was predetermined by the fact that both saeristavos were populated by the Abkhaz (Apsua) tribes ethnically (**Anchabadze Z., 1959: 177-178**). Later, following the better textual analysis of *Tamar’s* First Historian’s chronicle, the scholars figured out that *Otagho Sharvashidze* was the Eristavi of Apkhazeti, while *Amanelis-dze*, whom K. Kekelidze considered to be the *Eristavi of Argveti*, was in fact the *Eristavi of Tskhumi* (**Tskitishvili, 1966: 222-227; Antelava II, 1988: 142-147; Bakhtadze, 2003: 245-247; Gogoladze, 1995: 12-14; Papaskiri, 1999: 178; Papaskiri, 2009: 67-69; Papaskiri, 2004: 59-60**). We think that after this clarification, the assumption that two Saeristavos were united during *Tamar’s* reign, especially due to the sameness of their population, has to be acknowledged as incorrect.

Of course, it does not mean that the Abkhazs could not live outside the Apkhazeti Saeristavo. Nevertheless, the fact that both during the reign of the “Leonids” in the “Abkhazs’” Kingdom and of the descendants of Bagrat III in the unified Georgia, the name “Apkhazeti” was applied to the specific (northern) region of present-day Abkhazia, means that the ethnical Abkhazs mostly were living in the Apkhazeti Saeristavo (**Gogoladze, 1995:**

14-15). Even if we presume that the Abkhazs were living in the Tskhumi Saeristavo and the ethnic factor was determining the administrative division of country, the question arises why those two ethnically similar saeristavos were not united in Leon II's times.

Sources provide only fragmentary information about the Eristavis of Bedia (Odishi), Tskhumi, and Apkhazeti. First of all, it is Dothaghod (Othago) Sharvashidze, who headed the Apkhazeti Saeristavo during the reign of Queen Tamar. There is no consensus among historians on the origin of the Sharvashidze family. Some researchers consider that they have to be the descendants of one of the representatives of the Shirvanshakh's family who was moved by the King David IV "the Builder" to Abkhazia after annexing Ani to Georgia (**Brosset, 1895: 154; Gulia D., 1925: 138; Anchabadze Z., 1959: 192; Anchabadze G., 2006: 72-80**). There also exists an opinion that the ancestors of the Sharvashidzes played an active role within the *Apkhazeti Saeristavo* as far back as in the middle of the 11th century (**Berdzenishvili, 1957**). Thus, in the chronicle *Matiane Kartlisai* ("The Chronicle of Kartli") there is mentioning of a certain "Otagho, son of K'vabuleli Ch'ach'a," whose troops (by order of the king Bagrat IV – **Z.P.**) besieged the fortress of Anakopia (**Matiane Kartlisa, 2014, 156**). In this case, attention was paid to the similarity of the name of *Eristavi* (Sharvashidze) *D-otagho-d*, who lived in the 12th century, with the name of Quabuleli Chachas-dze **Otagho** on the base of which some researchers consider "Chachas-dze" to be the Georgian form of the surname *Chachba* (**Inal-ipa, 1976: 141**).

In our view the similarity between "Chachas-dze" and "Chachba" seems quite admissible although it is hard to imagine for us how "Chachas-dze"–"Chachba" can be associated with Sharvashidze. As has been justly pointed out by Z. Anchabadze, the Georgian forms of the family names of the Abkhaz nobility are directly derived from corresponding Abkhaz surnames: Marshania–Amarshan, Inalishvili–Inal-ipa, Anchabadze–Achba, Dziapshishvili–Dziapshipa, Marghania–Maan, etc. As to the surname of Sharvashidze, this is an exception to the rule. The Abkhaz form of this surname has nothing to do with its Georgian form. In Z. Anchabadze's view, an old Georgian form of Sharvashidze–"Sharvash(i)s-dze literally means "the son of Shi(a)rvanshakh" (**Anchabadze Z., 1959: 194; Papaskiri, 2010a; Papaskiri, 2020: 69-71**).

The positions of the Eristavis of Apkhazeti, Tskhumi, and Bedia (Odishi) were similar to other eristavis. According to the correct observation of Z. Anchabadze, they were subordinated not to the king directly, but to Msakhurtukhutsesi (Mayor of the Palace), who governed the whole Western Georgia (**Anchabadze Z., 1959: 178**).

§2. The Political, State, and Cultural Character of Present-Day Abkhazia in the 11th-12th Centuries. The Meaning of the Terms "Abkhazia" and "Abkhaz"

The scholars correctly point out that the territory of present-day Abkhazia did not look like the "distant province" during the period of might of the unified Georgian monar-

chy (**Inal-ipa, 1976: 411**). Moreover, they were one of the main supporters of the central government in the struggle against the feudal opposition. Although some scholars think that there were anti-governmental and even separatist views among the ethnic Abkhazs due to the “abolition” of the “Abkhazs’” Kingdom (**Inal-ipa, 1976: 412**), but it is unknown what is the basis for such assumptions. There is not even a single hint in the sources to confirm this viewpoint. First of all, as it was already mentioned, there was no “abolition” of the “Abkhazs’” Kingdom in 978. Second, practically all the anti-governmental revolts that took place both in Western and Eastern Georgia in the 11th-12th cc., were aimed not at seceding, but at installing their challenger on the unified throne. At that time, the main goal of the feudal opposition was to strengthen their influence at the royal court and to change the political course according to their inspirations (**Berdzenishvili, 1965: 34**).

This was true during the revolt of Prince Demetre, when he, with the help from Byzantium, tried to overthrow his half-brother Bagrat IV. Although the author of “*Matiane Kartlisa*” mentions that some *aznauris* supported the prince, who took over Anakopia, but there is no basis to consider them as ethnical Abkhazs. And of course, it never was the separatist uprising of the Abkhaz feudals, despite the views of some scholars (**Anchabadze Z., 1959: 178; Gunba, 1999: 91; Tsulaia, 1995: 122**). “*Matiane Kartlisa*” (practically the only source that covers this revolt) clearly shows that the supporters of Prince *Demetre* were attempting the coup d’état and their goal was to make the challenger a King of Georgia. Moreover, as the events of 1040s have shown, the main supporters of Prince Demetre were the feudal lords from Eastern and Southern Georgia, while King *Bagrat IV* was controlling Western Georgia (**Anchabadze G., 1987: 85-86**). Besides Anakopia, which was given to Byzantium by the rebel prince in 1030s, Bagrat IV’s governance was firm in Abkhazia (**Papaskiri, 1990: 157-158**). Moreover, in 1040s he gave the task of liberating Anakopia to the “host of Apkhazeti” under the leadership of *Otagho Chachas-dze* (presumably, the Eristavi of Apkhazeti), whom some of the scholars consider as the founder of the House of Sharvashidzes (**Inal-ipa, 1976: 408**). Thus, any statement regarding the separatist mood of the Abkhazs in those times is groundless.

There is also no sense in looking for the separatist aspirations on the territory of present-day Abkhazia during the reign of *David the Builder* (**Anchabadze Z., 1959: 182**). The reference of chronicler regarding arranging the affairs in Bichvinta (“he favoured those worthy of grace and punished the guilty”) cannot be viewed as a fight against separatists (**Life of David, 2008: 323; Life of David, 2014: 179**). And last, it is inexplicable why some scholars consider the participation of the Western Georgian feudal lords (Abkhazs among them) in the uprising, which intended to return to throne Yuri (Giorgi), the first husband of Tamar, as an expression of the particularistic tendencies of the insurgents (**Anchabadze Z., 1959: 184; Inal-ipa, 1976: 413**). It is evident that they were fighting not for the secession, but for the change of political regime in the whole country and achieving the dominant positions at the royal court.

Therefore, there is no reason to doubt the loyalty of the Abkhazs towards the central government of Georgian Kingdom in the 11th-12th cc. On the contrary, all the existing sources confirm that they were among the most loyal subjects of Georgian kings. The Abkhaz nobility always played a significant role at the royal court. In *“The History and Eulogy of the Monarchs”* the chronicler gives us a description of the ceremony of reception for the foreign guests during Tamar’s reign. The Abkhazs were among the closest to the royal apartment (**History and Eulogy, 2008: 436; History and Eulogy, 2014: 255-256**).

The role of *saeristavos* situated in the present-day Abkhazia had also increased. It is especially true regarding Tskhumi Saeristavo. The city of Tskhumi became one of the royal residences. According to historian, *“Queen Tamar, herself, wintered in Dvin, and spent the summer in Kola and Tselis-T’ba, moving sometimes to Abkhazia – Geguti and Tskhumi”* (**History and Eulogy, 2008: 478; History and Eulogy, 2014: 276**. Emphasis added – Z.P.). Tskhumi was also a port. It was from Tskhumi that Giorgi III sent home Shahanshah, who was living in Georgia for a while after his failed revolt against his brother *Kilij Arslan II*, the Sultan of Rum (**Japaridze G., 1995: 127-128; Papaskiri, 2003: 125**). All this confirms that Tskhumi was one of the most significant political and cultural centres of Georgia (**Sizov, 1889: 49**).

The Abkhazs were active participants in all the military actions of Georgian state in the 11th-12th cc. There is no hint in the sources that the Abkhazs were somewhere different from the inhabitants of other parts of the kingdom. Thus, any attempt to find the signs, like autonomous principedom, of Apsua national statehood in the 11th-12th cc. (**Voronov, 1993**), are futile. As it was already mentioned, the territory of present-day Abkhazia did not even represent a single unit administratively in the 11th-12th cc. The only privilege sought by the Abkhazs was fighting for the strength of Georgia, their homeland.

The territory of present-day Abkhazia was completely Georgian from the cultural point of view too in the 11th-12th centuries. There was no difference with the other regions (**Anchabadze Z., 1960b: 86**). The Medieval Georgian Christian monuments that cover the whole territory of the present-day Abkhazia are the best example of it. We should single out the *Bedia Cathedral*, which was built by *Bagrat III*. This monastery and the Bedia Eparchy, which replaced the Gudakva Eparchy (Greek), had a special function in the further strengthening of Georgian Christianity and Georgian statehood on the whole. Bedia became the sacred ground and had the same symbolic significance as Bagrati Cathedral in Kutaisi, which was built at the same time (**Papaskiri, 2000: 3-9; Papaskiri, 2012: 417-428**). It was not accidental that building the Bedia Cathedral was considered as the embodiment of Bagrat III’s strength and greatness. The 11th c. Georgian chronicler underscores this fact: *“Whoever wishes to see and realize Bagrat’s greatness let him first consider the splendour of the Bedia church and he will understand that there has not been any other King like him in the country of Kartli and Abkhazia”* (**Matiane, 2008: 273; Matiane Kartlisa, 2014: 151**).

As it was mentioned previously, the notion of depicting the “Abkhazs” Kingdom of “Leonids” and later of the “Abkhaz Bagrationis” (Bagrat III and his heirs) as the “Abkhaz national state” comes from the usage of words “Abkhazia” and “Abkhazs” in the relevant sources regarding the state and its inhabitants. At first, this idea was popular only with the politically active “national” figures (*Semion Ashkhatsava, Simon Basaria*) and some dilettantes (*Aleksei Papaskiri, Igor Marikhuba*), but today it has broadened its scale. Lately, the trend of selling the all-Georgian history as the history of the Abkhaz people became a norm as it is clearly shown in the latest books (**Gunba, 1999**: 7-160; **Kaslandzia, 2017**: 114-250; **Maan, 2020**: 233-258, etc.) and “textbooks” on the history of Abkhazia published in Sokhumi (**Bgaghba O., Lakoba S., 2015**: 164-173; **Kuakuaskir, 2010**: 84-102). Moreover, those authors are trying, without giving any arguments, to perceive the Abkhazs and Abkhazia in their present meaning when reading the places where the 11th-12th cc. foreign sources mention “Abkhazia” and the “Abkhazs.” In reality, all the foreign sources mean “Georgia” and “Georgians” when they mention “Abkhazia” and the “Abkhazs” regarding the events of the 11th-12th cc. For example, nearly all the Byzantine authors refer to the Georgian kings as “Abazgian Archons” and to the population of country as “Abazgians” (**Kedrenos, 1963**: 22-24, 31, 55-56; **Attaleiates, 1966**: 27-30; **Zonaras, 1966**: 235-236, 239; **Tsetses, 1967**: 23). There are only some exceptions.¹ Although, the Byzantine sources are easy to understand (see in detail: **Lomouri, 1993**: 82-84) and leave no further questions, the Abkhaz historians are trying to connect them with present-day Abkhazia and Abkhazs. Sometimes their attempts get simply ridiculous.

The insinuations about one reference of Joannes (John) Zonaras is best example of such absurd. Joannes Zonaras gives us information about the “Abazgians” who were in the retinue of the “Abazgian girl,” fiancée of “Caesar’s elder son” (**Zonaras, 1966**: 239). Sh. Inal-ipa who, as it seems, had no idea about David the Builder’s historian’s information regarding the dynastic ties between the Georgian royal family and the House of Komnenos in the 1st quarter of 12th century² and the comments of Georgian scholars (see in detail: **Kopaliani, 1968**: 113-120; **Meskhia, 2016**: 97-99; **Metreveli, 1997**: 34-35, etc.), considered Joannes Zonaras’ reference to be a proof of the relations of the Byzantine rul-

¹ *Nikephoros Bryennios* (husband of Anna Komnene, daughter of emperor Alexios I Komnenos) is one of the rare authors who refer to Bagrat IV (father of Byzantine Empress Mariam) as the ruler of the “Ibers” (**Bryennios, 1963**: 306). Georgian state is mentioned as “Iberia” also in the works of *Georgios Kedrenos* (**Kedrenos, 1963**: 79-81; **Lomouri, 1993**: 87), *Michael Attaleiates* (**Attaleiates, 1966**: 23-26), and *Joannes (John) Zonaras* (**Zonaras, 1966**: 234, 236-237).

² “The same year he sent his daughter, K’at’a, to Greece to marry the son of the Greek king. Before this, he sent his first-born daughter, Tamar, to become the queen of Shirvan. He did this for his descendants who would inherit from their father his sun-like splendour, illuminating the firmament, shining in the East and in the West” (**Life of David, 2008**: 317; **Life of David, 2014**: 177).

ing house with the ancestors of the present-day Abkhazs. Moreover, since the author mentioned that the “Abazgian girl” was engaged to the eldest son of Alexios Komnenos, the future emperor John (Ioannes) II, Sh. Inal-ipa declared the latter as “the son-in-law of the Abkhazs.” He did not stop at this point and made up a story that there were other persons of Abkhaz origin (besides the bride’s retinue) in John Komnenos’ circle, who were holding high positions in Constantinople (**Inal-ipa, 1976: 196**). Later Sh. Inal-ipa strengthened his fantasies with the commentary made by Russian scholar *Yakov Lyubarsky* to the Russian translation of Anna Komnene’s “Alexiad” (**Inal-ipa, 2011: 508**). According to Y. Lyubarsky, the Abazgians of the text were the ancestors of the present-day Abkhazs (**Anna Komnene, 1965: 627**). Meanwhile, Y. Lyubarsky, despite all his fame in Byzantine Studies, had no knowledge of history of Georgia of 11th-12th cc. and the fact that Georgia was usually referred as “Abkhazia” (“Abazgia”) in those times. This is confirmed with his other comment. When referring to Emperor Romanos III Argyros’ giving the title of Magister to Prince Demetre, half-brother of Bagrat IV, Y. Lyubarsky mentioned that Demetre’s “father ... was Abkhaz and mother was Alanian” (**Anna Komnene, 1965: 465**). He never expressed any interest in finding out who was that “George of Abasgia” whose wife Alde gave to Emperor the “fortified stronghold of Anakouphia” /Anakopia/ (**Kedrenos, 1963: 58; Skylitzes, 2010: 367**). Otherwise, he would have known that the “George of Abasgia” of Skylitzes-Kedrenos was no one else but Giorgi I, the second king of the unified Georgia, whose fierce confrontation with Emperor Basil II, along with the Georgian, Armenian, and Arabian sources, was covered in Byzantine sources too.

As was shown above, Sh. Inal-ipa’s “novelties” were based on the faulty arguments. Unfortunately, they are still believed by his “epigones” (**Maan, 2020: 241**). One of them is *Naila Kaslandzia*, who has completely immersed into her fantasies. She categorically rejects the sameness of Joannes Zonaras’ “Abazgian girl” with Katai, daughter of David the Builder /«*Невесту из Авасгии» нет оснований отождествлять с Катой, дочьрью царя Давида IV Строителя*»/. At the same time, she takes into account the Georgian chronicler’s information, “founds the place” for the Georgian princess at the court of Alexios I Komnenos, and acknowledges her as the spouse of Prince Isaac. (Actually, this is the correct statement.) On the other hand, N. Kaslandzia married the “Abkhaz bride” – an imaginary person – to Prince John, the heir of Alexios I and future emperor John II Komnenos (**Kaslandzia, 2012: 95-104**. Emphasis added – **Z.P.**).

Georgia and the Georgians are referred to as “Abkhazia” and the “Abkhazs” in the works of Arab authors writing about the events of 11th-12th cc. Yahya of Antioch (11th c.) refers to Giorgi I the “King of the Abkhazs” /“Malik al Abkhaz”/ and to his kingdom as the “land of the Abkhazs” /“Bilad al Abkhaziia”/, “land of the Abkhaz” /“Bilad al Abkhazi”/, or “Kingdom of the Abkhaz” /“Mulk al Abkhazi”/ (**Silagadze, 1986: 116-118; Japaridze G., 1993: 132**). Bagrat IV is also called in Arab sources as a “king of the Abkhazs.” David the Builder, Demetre (Demetrius) I, and Giorgi III are referred to as the “kings of the Abkhazs

and Kurjs” (**Japaridze G., 1993:** 134). According to Sadr ad-Din Ali al-Husayni, the Seljuk sultan Alp Arslan pursued the “King of the Abkhazs” Bagrat IV in “Kurjistan” /Georgia/ (**Shengelia, 1976:** 192-193; **Sadr ad-Din Hussein, 1989:** 54; **Japaridze G., 1993:** 132). Ibn al-azraq al-Fariqi also refers to Demetre I as the “King of the Abkhazs” (**Minorsky, 1958:** 170). Some Arab authors follow this tradition when covering the events of the 13th c. too. For example, Shihab ad-din Muhammad al-Nasawi, the biograph of Jalal ad-Din Khwarazmshah, several times refers to Georgia as “Abkhazia” (**Nasawi, 1996:** 154-155, 161-163, 183 160; **Japaridze G., 1993:** 132). For Yaqt al-Hamawi, another Arab author of the 13th c., “Abkhazia” was settled by “kurjs” /Georgians/ (**Iakut, 1964:** 1; **Japaridze G., 1993:** 132). Ibn al-Athir al-Jazari refers to Liparit Baghvashi (11th c. Georgian political and military figure, the Eristavi of Kldekari) as “Malik-Karit of **Abkhazia**” (**Silagadze, 1971:** 68; **Japaridze G., 1993:** 133. Emphasis added – **Z.P.**). According to Imad ad-Din al-Isfahani, in 1154 the Seljuk Prince Suleiman Shah married the “**Abkhaz Lady**” /“Khatun al-Abkhazii”/, who was a daughter of the Georgian king /“Malik al-Kurj”/ (**Japaridze G., 1993:** 133. Emphasis added – **Z.P.**).

The situation is nearly same in the Persian written sources. For example, according to ibn-Isfandiyar (12th-13th cc.), Tamar was “Padishah of Tbilisi and Abkhaz” (**Beradze G., 1976:** 70. Emphasis added – **Z.P.**). In Feleki Shirvani’s poem the Georgian king Demetre I is declared as “*Shahanshah of **Abkhaz** and Shaki, king of horizons*” (**Bunyadov, 1966:** 289. Emphasis added – **Z.P.**). Khaqani, another poet from Shirvan, gives us the following line: “*I settled in **Abkhazia** and began to talk in Georgian*” (**Boldyrev, 1938:** 137. Emphasis added – **Z.P.**). In the work of Seljuk chronicler ibn-Bibi King Tamar (“Tamar Khanum”) is referred to as “Georgian Queen” (“Malika Gurj”), who was ruling over the “land of the **Abkhazs**” (“Mamlakat-Abkhaz”) and its “dar-al mulk (capital) Tfilisi” (**Novoseltsev, 1972:** 72. Emphasis added – **Z.P.**).

The Armenian sources also sometimes refer to the kings of the unified Georgia as the “Abkhazs” kings. This is true regarding Bagrat III for the 11th c. historians, *Stepanos Taronetsi* (**Tsagareishvili, 1973:** 176; **history Stepanos of Taron, 1864:** 200) and *Aristakes Lastivertsi* (**Tsagareishvili, 1973:** 179; **Aristakes, 1974:** 41-42; **Aristakes, 1968:** 57-58). The latter sometimes also calls *Giorgi I* an “Abkhaz king” and refers to his country as “Abkhazia” (**Tsagareishvili, 1973:** 182,185,187,190; **Aristakes, 1974:** 48,50-52; **Aristakes, 1968:** 57-58), although in other place of his work *Giorgi I* is mentioned as “*Georgian Principal*” (**Tsagareishvili, 1973:** 181; **Aristakes, 1974:** 45; **Aristakes, 1968:** 65). The 13th c. Armenian historian *Vardan Areveltsi* calls *Giorgi I* the “*Abkhazs’ king*” too (**Vardan, 2002:** 117; **History of Vardan, 1861:** 117; **Tsagareishvili, 1973:** 195).

The 11th-12th cc. Georgia is known only as “Obezi” /old Russian form of word “Abaza,” same as Abkhazia/ (**Tsulaia, 1975:** 100-101; **Muskhelishvili, 1999:** 129) by the old Russian chronicles and other written sources (**Patericon, 1911:** 8, 193; **Hypatian Codex, 1908:** 468, 716; **Galician-Volhynian Chronicle, 1981:** 236; **Chronicle of Resurrection Monastery,**

1856: 60; **Moscow Chronicle, 1949:** 58, 118, 175, 222; **Legend of the city of Babylon, 1953:** 142). Some Abkhaz and Russian authors argue that old Russian “Obezi” and “Obezhanin” mean “Abkhazia” and the “Abkhaz” in its present sense,¹ but the historians have already proven that all the known Russian sources mean the Georgians and Georgia in its broader sense under “Obezi” (See in detail: **Tsintsadze, 1956:** 65-67; **Tsintsadze, 1962:** 15-26; **Anchabadze Z., 1959:** 171-177; **Kotlyar, 1975:** 7-19; **Tsulaia, 1975;** **Paichadze, 1989:** 11-60; **Papaskiri, 1976:** 121-123; **Papaskiri, 2009:** 205-208; **Papaskiri, 1982:** 116-123; et al.).

This is an incomplete list of the foreign sources, which refer to the unified Georgian Kingdom and Georgians as “Abkhazia” and “Abkhazs.” It is safe to say that there is no written foreign source regarding the events of the 11th-12th in which these words would have different meaning.

The Georgian sources, in the 11th-12th cc. and later, usually meant Western Georgia and its population under the words “Abkhazia” and “Abkhazs,”² although, there are also some referrals where the words “Abkhazia” and “Abkhazs” mean the territory of Saeristavo of Abkhazia proper and the people living there. The Abkhazs are mentioned in the *“History and Eulogy of Monarchs”* when depicting the ceremony of greeting Shirvan-

¹ In different times the words “Obezi,” “Obez’,” “Obezhanin” were identified with the present-day Abkhazia and Abkhazs by *Simon Basaria, Mikhail Skripil’, Shalva Inal-ipa, Vadim Kozhinov*, et al. (**Basaria, 1923:** 6; **Legend of the city of Babylon, 1953:** 130-136; **Inal-ipa, 1976:** 53; **Kozhinov, 1991:** 3), although the main propagandist in this case is Alexei Papaskiri, who dedicated several monographs to this issue (**Papaskir, 2005;** **Papaskir, 2002.** For the critical evaluation of his views, see: **Paichadze, 1989:** 11-60).

² For example, we will cite several places from different Georgian chronicles: *“The King too turned back and departed for Abkhazia”* (**Matiane, 2008:** 285; **Matiane Kartlisa, 2014:** 157); *“...the Sultan sent him back to Bagrat’ in Abkhazia”* (**Matiane, 2008:** 292; **Matiane Kartlisa, 2014:** 160); *“Shortly thereafter Bagrat’ passed through his kingdom, including Abkhazeti, Hereti and K’akheti”* (**Sumbat, 2008:** 370; **Sumbat’, son of David, 2014:** 217); *“She went sometimes to Abkhazia, settled affairs there, and hunted in splendid places – Geguti and Ajameti”* (**History and Eulogy, 2008:** 468; **History and Eulogy, 2014:** 270); *“Queen Rusudan, constrained by hardships, remained in Kutaisi and in Abkhazia”* (**Chronicler, 2008:** 542; **Hundred Years’ Chronicle, 2014:** 327); *“...this man came from Abkhazia to give his life for his friends...”* (**Chronicler, 2008:** 567; **Hundred Years’ Chronicle, 2014:** 343); *“...the son of Rusudan fled the same night and came to Abkhazia”* (**Chronicler, 2008:** 573; **Hundred Years’ Chronicle, 2014:** 346); *“David, the son of Rusudan escaped to Abkhazia... departed to Abkhazia, and the son of Lasha was at that time in Tbilisi”* (**Chronicler, 2008:** 575; **Hundred Years’ Chronicle, 2014:** 347); *“David implored Sumbat’ not to report him, but sent him to Abkhazia...”* (**Chronicler, 2008:** 575; **Hundred Years’ Chronicle, 2014:** 347); *“He addressed Sargis Jaq’eli with a request to give him passage, because he was going to appear before David, the King of Abkhazia, to be a mediator...”* (**Chronicler, 2008:** 600-601; **Hundred Years’ Chronicle, 2014:** 363). Emphasis added – Z.P.

shah Aghsartan (Akhsitan I).¹ The Saeristavo of Abkhazia is mentioned among the provinces, which were gathered by *Vardan Dadiani* during the revolt of *Giorgi Rusi* (Prince Yuri, first husband of Queen *Tamar*, son of Russian Prince *Andrey Bogolyubsky*).²

From the other sources, where the word “Abkhaz” may mean ethnical Abkhaz, we should pay to the colophons of the manuscript dated by 1040. They mention *Giorgi Abkhaz, son of Mitsitsivai* (**Metreveli, E., 1976: 136**. Emphasis added – Z.P.). *Elene Metreveli* decided that this *Giorgi, son of Mitsitsivai*, was Western Georgian, since he “writes well in Georgian” and is a “skilful scribe.” According to her, this was another proof that in that period word “Abkhaz” meant Western Georgian (**Metreveli, E., 1976: 136**). Her viewpoint was supported by *David Muskhelishvili* too (**Muskelishvili, 1999: 127**). Although, as it was mentioned above, denoting the Western Georgians by word Abkhaz was common at those times, we think that the argument of E. Metreveli is not enough in this case. It is impossible to reject the possibility that *Giorgi, son of Mitsitsivai*, was Abkhaz ethnically based only on the fact that he was fluent in Georgian. It is strange that someone can be surprised by it. Georgian was the language of literacy for the Abkhazs in those times and throughout the later period, till the 20th c. We should remember the N. Berdzenishvili’s correct statement that culturally and historically the Medieval “Abkhaz” was as Georgian as “*Kartian, Heretian, Kakhian, Meskhan, Javakhian, Klarjian, Shavshian, Egrian, Svan, Zan, etc., or “Kartlian,” “Kakhetian,” “Gurian,” “Megrelian,” “Imeretian,” et al.”* (**Berdzenishvili, 1966a: 279-280**).

§3. Abkhazia and the Abkhazs in the 13th-15th Centuries

In the 1220s first the devastating raids of *Jalal ad-Din Khwarazmshah* and then the Mongol conquest of Georgia caused the rifts in the unified Georgian statehood. Mongols divided Georgia into tumens. There were two tumens in the Western Georgia and Abkhazia was a part of tumen, which was governed by *Tsotne Dadiani* (**Anchabadze Z., 1959: 233**). The population of present-day Abkhazia was actively involved in the all-Georgian affairs. For example, according to the chronicler, the Abkhazs participated in *Lasha-Giorgi’s* (1207-1222) campaign against the *Ganja emir* (**Chronicler, 2008: 524; Hundred Years’ Chronicle, 2014: 316**). The same source tells us that *Lasha-Giorgi “hunted in Tskhumi and Abkhazia, and settled affairs there”* (**Chronicler, 2008: 526; Hundred Years’**

¹ “...the Ers and K’akhis, and then the Kartlians, Meskhis and Torelians, the Shavshis, K’larjis, and T’aoans; after them came the Somkhitars and in the end – the **Abkhazians, Svans, Megrels, Gurians, together with the Rach’velis, Tak’verians and Marguelians”** (**History and Eulogy, 2008: 436; History and Eulogy, 2014: 255-256**. Emphasis added – Z.P.).

² “He gathered the entire Svaneti, **Abkhazia, Egeria, with Guria, Samokalako, Rach’a-tak’veri and Argveti, and drawing on the Sanigs and Kashags, forced the didebulis and military men of these lands to swear allegiance to the Russian prince in his struggle for the throne”** (**History and Eulogy, 2008: 422; History and Eulogy, 2014: 248-249**. Emphasis added – Z.P.).

Chronicle, 2014: 317). This reference is significant also because chronicler clearly distinguishes Tskhumi from Abkhazia. This is another proof that in the 1st quarter of the 13th c. they were not even a single unit administratively¹ and of course they did not represent a separate state formation (principdom) in the present-day borders of the autonomous republic. The closeness of the Abkhaz ethnic world to the Georgian royal house is shown by the fact that King Tamar gave to her son Giorgi the second name “Lasha.” According to Georgian chronicler or the editor-commentator living close to the times of Lasha-Giorgi (**Anchabadze Z., 1959:** 215), it meant the “luminary of the universe /in the language of the Apsars/” (**History and Eulogy, 1959:** 58).²

The Abkhazs were active during the reign of Rusudan (1222-1245) too. For example, Rusudan summoned “*her whole army, the Imiers and Amiers... the Ers, K’akhis, Somkhits, Meskhis, T’aoans... the Abkhazs, the Jikis and everybody from the kingdom of Imereti,*” against Jalal ad-Din (**Chronicler, 2008:** 544-545; **Hundred Years’ Chronicle, 2014:** 329). The Abkhazs participated in the process of declaring David, son of Rusudan, as the King of Georgia in Kutaisi (**Chronicler, 2008:** 543; **Hundred Years’ Chronicle, 2014:** 328). “*And the distant residents – the Abkhazs*” participated in the “Kokhtastavi coup,” the planned revolt against the Mongols (**Chronicler, 2008:** 566; **Hundred Years’ Chronicle, 2014:** 342). The activities of the Abkhaz nobility in Georgian, and not only Georgian, political processes during the Rusudan’s reign are confirmed by the chronicler’s reference regarding the Abkhaz Dardin, son of Sharvash. He is mentioned when the chronicler describes the joint campaign of the Mongols and Georgians against Ghiyath al-Din Kaykhusraw II, the Sultan of Rum. In the decisive battle of Köse Dağ in 1243 (See: **Shengelia, 2003:** 226-241), Georgians fought on both sides. Dardin Sharvashidze is singled out among the supporters of Kaykhusraw II.³ The Seljuks were defeated in this battle. “*A mighty number of the Sultan’s people fell, and among them the glorious son of Sharvash – Dardin, the Abkhazian, their commander*” (**Chronicler, 2008:** 552; **Hundred Years’ Chronicle, 2014:** 333).⁴

¹ *Roin Agrba*, the Abkhaz historian, has the similar understanding of this reference (**Agrba R., 2006:** 82).

² There is no consensus among the scholars regarding identification of “Apsari”-“Apsili”-“Apsua.” We agree with those scholars, who believe in the correctness of such identification (see in detail: **Anchabadze Z., 1959:** 213-216; **Tsulaia, 1995:** 137-139; **Gvantseladze, 1993:** 575-576).

³ “*Then Sultan Q’iasdin summoned his whole army, ... and appointed an Abkhaz, son of Sharvash, Dardin by name, to head them. For his courage he had been raised to a position of great honour by the Sultan, and he was in the firm possession of the faith*” (**Chronicler, 2008:** 551; **Hundred Years’ Chronicle, 2014:** 332-333).

⁴ When making comments on this reference, the Abkhaz historian Giorgi Amichba mentions that a great number of Georgian and Abkhaz nobles were fleeing from the Mongols and fought against them from abroad (**Amichba, 1988:** 32). It is possible in this case too, although, we think it more feasible that Dardin Sharvashidze was probably the member of retinue of

Later, following the defeat of David Narin's uprising (1249) and his moving to Western Georgia, "*the Abkhazians, Suans, Dadianis, Bedianis, the eristavi of Rach'a and the Likh-Imerelis, gathered together in a great joy and made David the King of the Abkhazians up to Likhi*" (**Chronicler, 2008: 575; Hundred Years' Chronicle, 2014: 347**). It marked the effective division of the unified Georgia into two parts. The Eastern Georgia was governed by David, son of Lasha, while in the Western Georgia his cousin, David, son of Rusudan, became a ruler. Nevertheless, it was not division in the legal sense, since David Narin and his heirs had not renounced their claims on the unified Georgian throne.

The Abkhaz historians had attempted to depict this event as the abolishment of the "Abkhazs'" Kingdom (**Gunba, 1989: 252; Ajinjal, 2014: 16-17**). Those are definitely the absurd attempts. Even if we consider the moving of David Narin into Western Georgia as the establishment of the new state formation, declaring him as the King of the "Abkhazs" was definitely the restoration of the "Abkhazs'" Kingdom, and not its abolishment. This was the return to the epoch of the Leonids (9th-10th cc.) of a kind. The chronicler's reference confirms it, as the Abkhazs are named first among those who crowned David, son of Rusudan, as the "King of the Abkhazians up to Likhi" (**Chronicler, 2008: 575; Hundred Years' Chronicle, 2014: 347**).

Naturally, the territory of present-day Abkhazia became part of David Narin's dominion. His activities are confirmed by the inscription on one of the silver icons of St. George's Church in Ilori: "Saint George of Ilori, praise and reign... the mighty and invincible... King David, son of Rusudan, by whose order this icon of the main martyr of Ilori had been embossed" (**Rapports, 1949: 95**). This is a direct confirmation that the region was a part of the all-Georgian universe at that time.

After the death of David Narin in 1293, the struggle for the power began in Western Georgia. Giorgi Dadiani used this situation, "**seized the Tskhumi Saeristavo and established his control over the whole Odishi till Anakopia. Also, Sharvashidze took over Abkhazia and Gurieli over Guria and the Eristavi of the Suans over Suaneti and established their control there and their obedience to the kings diminished**" (**Vakhushti, 1973: 801**. Emphasis added – **Z.P.**). Zurab Anchabadze incorrectly interpreted this reference of Vakhushti Bagrationi as he thought that Dadiani seized Tskhumi Saeristavo from Sharvashidze (**Anchabadze Z., 1959: 235**). Meanwhile, it is clear from this reference that all the eristavis were acting together and their main desire was to become more independent from Kutaisi throne.

There cannot be seen any confrontation between Dadiani and Sharvashidze in the 1st third of the 14th c. Their main goal (along with the other eristavis) was to consolidate hereditary rights on the saeristavos belonging to them (**Anchabadze Z., 1959: 235**). Of course, the kings of Likht-Imereti opposed this. That was the reason that the eristavis

Tamar, daughter of Rusudan and the spouse of Kaykhusraw II, who then advanced at Sultan's court (**Jikia, 2002b: 79**).

welcomed Giorgi V the Magnificent, when he came to Kutaisi, dethroned Bagrat, the grandson of David Narin, and unified Georgia once again. “*Mamia Dadiani and Gurieli and the Eristavi of the Suans and Sharvashidze of Abkhazia gathered... and blessed his kingship of Imereti and all Georgia*” (Vakhushti, 1973: 258. Emphasis added – Z.P.). This allowed Giorgi V to continue his journey and establish full control over the whole Western Georgia. Vakhushti Bagrationi gives us information that Giorgi V “*entered Odishi, moved from there to Abkhazia, where he managed the deeds and took over the fortresses.*” It is significant that Giorgi V, for unknown reasons, decided to establish royal control over the fortresses in Abkhazia. Meanwhile, he once again gave the Tskhumi Saeristavo to the Eristavi of Odishi (Vakhushti, 1973: 258. Emphasis added – Z.P.).

At the end of the 1380s, the descendants of David Narin seized the opportunity created by Tamerlan’s invasions and attempted to restore the Imereti Kingdom. The Eristavi of Imereti Alexandre, son of king Bagrat, who was deposed by Giorgi V, wanted to use Dadiani, Gurieli, Sharvashidze, and Suans, but they refused to participate in this venture, since “they still had the fear of King Bagrat (Bagrat V, the king of unified Georgia in 1360-1393) and remained loyal to him” (Vakhushti, 1973: 803). Despite this, Alexandre was able to establish the throne in Kutaisi (1387-1389), although he was not able to subdue the eristavis. His successor Giorgi also failed in this. Moreover, his attempt to establish control over Odishi ended with a catastrophe in 1392 (Ninidze, 1995: 123). Dadiani, “*with the help from the Abkhazs,*” resisted him fiercely and “*the Megrelians killed King Giorgi*” (Vakhushti, 1973: 265. Emphasis added – Z.P.). Thus, despite the difficulties caused by Tamerlan’s invasions, Bagrat V preserved the unity of the country. According to a chronicler, “Bagrat hold over Kartli, Somkhiti. The Pitiakhshs of Lore, Kakheti, Sharvan, and Samtskhe subdued to him, as well as Imeretians, Odisharis, Gurians, **Abkhazs**, Jiks, Suans, Caucasian highlanders” (Kartlis Tskhovreba, 1959: 342. Emphasis added – Z.P.).

Thus, throughout the whole 14th c. the Western Georgian eristavis supported the central government of Georgia and helped to preserve the unity of the state. At the same time, the Georgian kings relied greatly on the Dadianis and in return they helped the ascension of the Odishi Eristavis and their gradual transformation into the real leaders of Western Georgia. As it was already mentioned, the Odishi eristavis were holding the Tskhumi Saeristavo all the time and they also had influence over Sharvashidzes at that epoch. The latter always participated in the political and military undertakings of the Odishi eristavis. Moreover, according to several foreign sources, the territory of Apkhazeti Saeristavo was also a part of Odishi-Samegrelo at that time.

14th c. Arab author al-Muhibbi (d. 1384) gives us the reference that “Georgians have two kings – King David (David X, king of Georgia in 1346-1360), who rules over Tbilisi, and **Dadimani** (Giorgi II Dadiani /1345-1384/), **king who rules over Sukhumi and Abkhaz**. Both of them are called King of Georgians” (Arab Historians, 1988: 53. Emphasis added – Z.P.). Similar reference is given in Shihab al-Din al-Qalqashandi’s encyclopaedic

work: “Georgians have two kings. The first one ... is the ruler of Tbilisi... The Second one, who was called Dadiani, is the ruler of Sukhumi and Abkhaz. Both of them are called King of Georgians” (**Arab Historians, 1988: 56**. Emphasis added – **Z.P.** See also: **Tizengauzen, 1887: 214, Kiknadze, 1989: 101**). According to the reference of Giosaphat Barbaro, the Venetian diplomat who travelled in the Oriental countries in 1436-1451, the territory of Megrelia was spread to Circassia (**Mamistvalishvili, 1981a: 55; Mamistvalishvili, 1992: 49-50**). This means that the territory of Apkhazeti Saeristavo was within the borders of Odishi (**Mamistvalishvili, 1992: 50**). Giorgio Interiano (15th c.) also denotes Angaxia as the border of Georgia and Circassia. According to the researchers, Angaxia was located North to Gagra, in the neighbourhood of present-day Adler (**Mamistvalishvili, 1992: 50**).

Thus, there is all the basis to state that the North-Western borders of Odishi were spread not till the River Bzipi, as it was thought by Z. Anchabadze (**Anchabadze Z., 1959: 240**), but till the River Psou (**Mamistvalishvili, 1992: 50**). The Apkhazeti Saeristavo (even more so the rest of present-day Abkhazia) was not some kind of independent political formation with no ties with the all-Georgian political and state universe, but part of Samegrelo-Odishi. Dadianis, the rulers of Odishi, despite the high level of sovereignty, remained the main pillars of Georgian central government in Western Georgia. They were the Mandatukhutsesis (ministers of police) of Georgian Kingdom (**Takaishvili, 1913-1914: 133; Beradze T., 1967: 158; (Arakhamia, 2002: 104, 106)** and, possibly, Amirspasalaris too.¹

At the beginning of 15th c., Mamia Dadiani (1396-1412), the heir of Vameq I Dadiani (**Javakhishvili, 1967: 28; Khorava, 1996: 41; Arakhamia, 2002: 107**) confirmed his loyalty to Giorgi VII, the king of unified Georgia, and refused to support the Imeretian Bagrationis in their attempt to usurp power in the Western Georgia. In return the king once again gave to the Odishi owner the rights on Tskhumi Saeristavo (**Vakhushti, 1973: 269**). As Mandatukhutsesis, the Dadianis were responsible for the defence of state borders of Georgia. Thus, they frequently organized the military raids. The inscription in Khobi Monastery gives us information about one such campaign Vameq II Dadiani in Jiketi. According to it, Vameq Dadiani destroyed and “made useless their fortresses of Gagari and Ughaghni” (**Takaishvili, 1913-1914: 133; Mamistvalishvili, 1992: 49; Beradze T., 1973: 122**). It is possible that this raid was directed also against Sharvashidze (**Mamistvalishvili, 1992: 49**), who could be irritated with the suzerainty of Dadiani and started to conspire against him. Although it would be the typical feudal confrontation and would not mean Apkhazeti’s Eristavi’s desire of independence from the central government of Georgia. Based on the further events, we can surmise that the Eristavi of Abkhazia was just trying to end his vassalage to the Dadianis and become directly subordinated to the central government. This

¹ This is confirmed by *Petrus Gerardi*, the Catholic Bishop of Sebastopolis (Sokhumi), who refers to *Mamia Dadiani* (1323-1345) as the **Supreme Commander of Georgian troops** /“*Principes sutem hujus terrae, qui est principes militae in tota Georgia*”/ (**Petri episcopi Sebastopolitani, 1855: 818; Kiknadze, 1983: 101-102; Kiknadze, 1989: 104**. Emphasis added – **Z.P.**).

explains the fact that around 1412 (**Javakhishvili, 1967: 28; Khorava, 1996: 41; Arakhamia, 2002: 107**) “*Mamia Dadiani... decided to subdue the Abkhazs*” and “*gathered the troops of Odishi Megrelians*” and launched campaign against Sharvashidze. This raid ended with complete failure as “*Sharvashidze and the Abkhazs... stood, slayed the Megrelians and killed Mamia Dadiani*” (**Vakhushti, 1973: 278**).

Alexandre I, King of Georgia (1412-1442) immediately travelled to Odishi as soon the news of the confrontation between Megrelians and Abkhazs reached him. He was met by Mamia Dadiani’s son Liparit, who asked for pardon “as his father sinned” (**Vakhushti, 1973: 278**). It looks like Mamia Dadiani’s raid to Abkhazia was not sanctioned by the central government of Georgia. It is also possible that official Tbilisi was already concerned with the strengthening of Odishi rulers. The Georgian royal court could be even interested in removing the Eristavi of Abkhazia from the subordination of the Dadianis. Anyway, Alexandre I was able to settle the conflict. He forgave Liparit his father’s “wilfulness” and took him to Abkhazia, where the king was “**met by Sharvashidze who obeyed his (Alexandre I – Z.P.) order like the first of the kings**; managed locals and appeased them and came to Kutatisi. Here he was crowned surrounded by the nobility from Imer-Ameri and Catholicoses and Bishops” (**Vakhushti, 1973: 278**. Emphasis added – **Z.P.**).¹

In the 1st half of the 15th c. the Dadianis further gained strength. Their power practically extended throughout of whole Western Georgia. According to Giosaphat Barbaro, the Dadianis controlled Sebastopolis (Sokhumi) and Vati (Batumi) on the seashore (**Mamistvalishvili, 1981a: 55; Anchabadze Z., 1959: 239**). In the mid-15th c., the Odishi ruler became an international player too. He was an active participant of the anti-Ottoman coalition, which was organized by Giorgi VIII (1446-1466), the last king of the unified Georgia. It should be especially mentioned that Bediani (same as Dadiani) is referred as the “King of Samegrelo” /«*Bandian rex Mingreliae*»/ in Giorgi VIII’s letter sent to Rome in 1459 (**Tamarashvili, 1902: 595; Anchabadze Z., 1959: 239**). The ambassadors in Rome were referring to Bediani as the “**King of Samegrelo and Abkhazia**” /«*Bendas Megrelia et Abasiae rex*»/ (**Tamarashvili, 1902: 595; Anchabadze Z., 1959: 239**. Emphasis added – **Z.P.**).

“Rabia, the Principal of Anokasia,” also participated in this coalition. Ivane Javakhishvili considered him to be “the Principal of Anakopia” (**Javakhishvili, 1967: 68**). To Zurab Anchabadze Rabia was the Principal of “Apokazia,” i.e. “Abkhazia” (**Anchabadze Z., 1959: 253-254**). Eldar Mamistvalishvili made some clarifications on this issue. Based on Mikheil Tamarashvili’s archives, he proved that it is definitely written “Anokasia” (and not Anakopia or Apokazia) in the Latin text of the Georgian king’s letter (**Mamistvalishvili, 1992: 51**), which should mean the territory populated by Jiks and Rabia should be the

¹ Vyacheslav Chirikba, the Abkhaz linguist, who makes some attempts in the historiography in recent times, showed his complete ignorance of Georgian history when declared Alexandre I as the king of only Western Georgia (**Chirikba, 2020: 26**).

Principal of Jiketi (**Mamistvalishvili, 1992: 51-52**). Thus, since Bediani was considered as the “King of Samegrelo and Abkhazia,” he makes a logical conclusion that there was no political unit independent from Odishi on the territory of the present-day Abkhazia (**Mamistvalishvili, 1992: 52**).

The rights of the Dadianis on Abkhazia are clearly shown in the materials of Genoese colonies. As it is known, the first Genoese colonies appeared on the Black Sea shore in the 2nd half of the 13th century (**Mamistvalishvili, 1992: 52**). Soon they established 39 settlements from Tana to Sebastopolis. Seven from them were in Georgia, on the territory of present-day Abkhazia: 1. Cacary – present-day Gagra; 2. Santa-Soffia – near present-day village Alakhadze; 3. Pezonda – in Bichvinta gulf; 4. Cavo di Buxo – present-day Gudauta region; 5. Nicoffa – near present-day New Athos; 6. Sevastopoli – present-day Sokhumi; 7. Sant-Angelo – in the estuary of the River Enguri (**Fadeev, 1934: 110; Anchabadze Z., 1959: 244; Kebuladze, 1965: 89; Jikia, 2002a: 89-90**). Sevastopoli-Tskhumi was the most significant among those colonies. The residence of Genoese consul was there since 1534 (**Zevakin, Penchko, 1938: 86**). Ambrogio de Petro was the first consul mentioned in the sources (**Mamistvalishvili, 1992: 52**). It is interesting that, according to the data given in the “Annals of Genoa” for 1424, the Genoese government was confirming the consul’s appointment with Bediani (**Mamistvalishvili, 1992: 52-53**).

Moreover, Giosaphat Barbaro gives us a reference that Bediani had some claims on the Genoese revenues in Sebastopolis factory (**Mamistvalishvili, 1992: 53**). The influence of Odishi Principal is confirmed by the fact that the Genoese government tried to get his benevolence. It is mentioned in one of the official letters to the Genoese consul in Caffa (present-day Feodosia) that he deserved “the greatest praise for his attempts to live peacefully with all the local rulers and peoples and avoid confrontation with them. We are also content with your information about the hopes to establish the lasting peace with the Sebastopolis Principal Bendiano” (**Zevakin, Penchko, 1938: 113; Anchabadze Z., 1959: 246**). This was an answer to the report of Consul of Caffa (1465) in which the latter expressed his satisfaction that the “*affairs with the Principal of Samegrelo Bendiano ended well*” (**Zevakin, Penchko, 1938: 114; Anchabadze Z., 1959: 246**. Emphasis added – **Z.P.**).¹

The Dadianis were also interested in the friendly relations with the Genoese colonists. Thus, they did not want to make them angry and sometimes even ignored the interests of the local population. A significant reference is given by Pietro Geraldini, the

¹ Various sources (among them are contemporaneous foreign ones too) confirm that Tskhumi-Sebastopolis and great part of present-day Abkhazia (till Anakopia) fell within the jurisdiction of Odishi eristavis. Against this background, the attempts of some Abkhaz scholars to represent Tskhumi-Sebastopolis as the land of Sharvashidzes, are simply comical. We should mention specially *Roin Agrba*, who thinks that the Bendiano of Genoese documents is the representative of the “side branch of Sharvashidze-Chachba from the place of their origin – Bedia” (**Agrba R., 2006: 90**).

“Catholic bishop of Lower Iberia,” whose residence was in Sokhumi. According to his letter of 1330, the local population, namely, Georgians, Moslems, and Jews, expressed their anger because Dadiani allocated the separate space for the Catholic cemetery (**Petri episcopi Sebastopolitani, 1855:** 818-819; **Kiknadze, 1983:** 102-103). On the relations between the Dadianis and the Genovese colonists, see: **Mamistvalishvili, 1981b:** 75-78). Pietro Geraldí’s this reference, first of all, is interesting because it gives us the documental evidence of Georgian population in Tskhumi-Sebastopolis of that period. Meanwhile, there is no mentioning of the Abkhazs in Catholic bishop’s letter. The Abkhaz scholars do not want to acknowledge this fact to such a degree that they invent the imaginary nation of “Gum (Gumista) Abkhazs” (**Inal-ipa, 1992:** 29-30; **Chirikba, 2020:** 16; **Maan, 2020:** 351). Their “findings” are based on the odd reference in the work of dubious quality of anonymous Franciscan friar (**El Libro del conocimiento, 1999**), which mentions the Kingdom of Sevastopoli belonging to the Christian Comans («...et llegué a rreynado de Sant Estopoli, que es de cristianos comanes»). See: **El Libro del conocimiento, 1999:** 96).¹ The Georgian historian Tamaz Beradze, who used the 1912 English translation of the Spanish source, has shown its inconsistencies and proved it as unreliable (**Beradze T., 1989:** 45-47).

After the fall of Constantinople (1453), the Ottoman Turks became more active in the Northern and Eastern Black Sea Shore. Thus, the situation quickly deteriorated on the territory of present-day Abkhazia. In 1454 the Ottomans launched their first raid in the Sokhumi neighbourhood, devastated the city and the coast of Abkhazia.² King Giorgi VIII immediately gathered troops and went to Abkhazia, but the Ottomans outran him. King “returned the locals to their homes, and made fortresses, and managed them, and came to Geguti” (**Vakhushti, 1973:** 284; **Mamistvalishvili, 1992:** 54).

The territory of Abkhazia was still under the control of the ruling house of Samegrelo. Nevertheless, beginning from the mid-15th century the Jiko-Abkhaz expansion towards Sokhumi-Sebastopolis can be observed. This process was preceded by the advance of the new wave of the North Caucasian highland tribes related to the Jiko-Abkhazs. Beginning from the end of the 14th century, they started to gain ground on the territory of the Apkhazeti Saeristavo. This was a part of the process, which began in the 13th century when

¹ This passage of the Spanish author is understood differently by the English translators. For *Clements Markham*, it is “the kingdom of Sant Estopoli which is inhabited by Comanes Christians” (**Book of knowledge, 1912:** 57), while *Nancy F. Marino* translates it as “the kingdom of Sant Estopoli, which belongs to Koman Christians” (**El Libro del conocimiento, 1999:** 97). Whatever is the translation, it actually does not matter, since Cuman-Kipchaks’ settlement on the territory of the present-day Abkhazia has nothing to do with the science and belongs to the sphere of fantasies.

² *Vakhushti Bagrationi* claimed that the raid happened in 1451 (**Vakhushti, 1973:** 284), but the scholars, following the critical analysis of the sources, came to conclusion that it happened in 1454 (**Anchabadze Z., 1959:** 252; **Mamistvalishvili, 1992:** 54; **Svanidze, 1985:** 110).

the highland tribes became active at the Northern borders of Georgia and when Eastern Georgia was facing the threat from the “Ovses.” Giorgi V the Magnificent was able to repulse them and restore the state order in the 1st third of the 14th c. As for the Jiko-Abkhazs, the rulers Samegrelo-Odishi organized the preventive measures and, for a while, were able to contain the expanse of the highland tribes into the inland of the present-day Abkhazia.

The oral tradition existing among the Adyghe, confirms that the expansion of the Abkhaz-Adyghe tribes from the North Caucasus to present-day Abkhazia took place at those times. According to that tradition, which was written down by *Shora Nogmov*, the well-known Adyghe enlightener, the Adyghe chief Inal (beginning of the 15th c.) gathered his tribe in the Anapa neighbourhood and first went to Kabardia and then from there, along with Ashe and Shashe, the Abaza chieftains, entered Abkhazia. As Sh. Nogmov mentions, “after conquering Abkhazia, when being on the Dziba (the River Bzipi, according to scholars) and conducting the peace negotiations with the Abkhaz tribes, he died (1427)... He was buried there and his grave is known as Inal-Kuba (“Inal’s grave” in Abaza language) even today.” According to the tradition, Inal-Kuba was situated near village Pskhu, on the high mountain (**Nogmov, 1994: 95; Muskhelishvili, 1999: 133**). Later, Inal’s grave became the sacred ground for the Abkhazs and Abaza, who hold large festivities there (**Muskhelishvili, 1999: 133**).

There is no doubt among the historians that this oral tradition reflects the large-scale migration of the Abaza tribes (namely, the highlander Abaza-Askhars) from the North Caucasus to Abkhazia’s coast (**Muskhelishvili, 1999: 133**). It should be also mentioned that even Sh. Inal-ipa, who categorically stated that only the Apsua-Abkhazs were the aboriginal population of Abkhazia, did not deny that there was a migration of the Abkhaz-Adyghe tribes from North Caucasus to Abkhazia in the Late Middle Ages. As a confirmation of such migration, he saw the existence of the historical oral traditions about the coming certain persons and families “from somewhere in the North” to Abkhazia (**Inal-ipa, 1971: 141; Inal-ipa, 2006; Muskhelishvili, 1999: 133**).

Nevertheless, despite some difficulties, the unified Georgian state was able to stop the expanse of the Jiko-Abkhazs and retain the control over the Apkhazeti Saeristavo in the 1st half of the 15th century. The safety of the North-Western border of Georgia was endangered after the Ottoman Empire took over the North-Eastern Black Sea coast. It was against the background of the Ottoman religious and ideological expansion in the North-Western Caucasus that the Jiko-Abkhazs intensified their raids on Samegrelo-Odishi. The first example of it was the devastating attack of the Avogazs (Abkhazs) on Tskhumi-Sebastopolis in 1455. As it is evidenced by Gerardo Pinelli, the Genovese consul of Tskhumi-Sebastopolis, the Avogazs suddenly raided the city on 28 July 1455. The local population fled as the Avogazs intended to enslave them (**Mamistvalishvili, 1992: 55**). Zurab Anchabadze considered it as an uprising of the local Abkhaz population against the

Genovese (**Anchabadze Z., 1959: 248**). This conclusion was correctly objected by Eldar Mamistvalishvili, who mentioned that there does not exist even a single source that would confirm the settlement of the Abkhazs in the neighbourhood of Sokhumi in the 14th-15th cc. Thus, there is no sense in talking about the Abkhazs' struggle for the liberation from the Genovese. Even if consider the Avogazs to be the Abkhazs, and not Jiks, the character of attack on Sokhumi will not change: The city was raided by the tribe, which was hostile to the local population and whose goal was to take bounty and captives (**Mamistvalishvili, 1992: 55**).¹

The newly arrived Jiko-Abkhazs significantly differed socially and economically from the local population of the Apkhazeti Saeristavo. While the local "Abkhazs" (their ethnical belongingness is not decisive in this case) represented the part of the highly developed Georgian feudal society with the all-Georgian Christian ideology and literacy, the newcomer Jiko-Abkhazs were the devastating force with "Barbarian" mentality. They destroyed both material and spiritual values of the feudal society (**Papaskiri, 2004: 89-90**). The processes that began on the territory of present-day Abkhazia are reflected to some degree in the "*Mtsnebai sasjulo*" (*ძებნებაჲ სასჯულობა – Canonical Commandment*) the document which was elaborated in connection with the enthronization of Catholicos of "Abkhazia" (Western Georgia) Iovakime (1470-1474). N. Berdzenishvili considered it as "*the document showing the whole epoch*" (**Berdzenishvili, 1990: 608**), which underscored the deviation of the Abkhazs from the Christianity and their "return to paganism" (**Canonical, 1970: 221-233**). Nevertheless, despite the changes in the Apkhazeti Saeristavo, the

¹ It seems, this was the reason because of which *Vyacheslav Chirikba* made some amendments in Z. Anchabadze's viewpoint. He considers the raid of Abkhaz-Avogazs on Sebastopolis as "*another attempt to restore control over the capital of Abkhazian Principedom occupied by the Megrelians*" (**Chirikba, 2020: 38**). This is not the only absurd statement of V. Chirikba regarding this issue. He has an attempt to declare Sokhumi as an Abkhaz city named "Aqua" in the 15th century. As an argument he uses the map (dated 1540) of Italian cartographer *Battista Agnese*. The problem in this case is that the Italian cartographer puts "Aqua" "*close to the Mongol capital Saray*" (**Chirikba, 2020: 98**). The Abkhaz scholar considers it as the mistake from Batista Agnese, although his explanation is nowhere near to the scholarly debate. V. Chirikba claims that the Italian cartographer simply could not put the "Abkhazian Kingdom" («Abacuas regi») and the city of "Aqua" in the territory of present-day Abkhazia because he had already "*denoted there Sevastopoli as a part of "Megrelia"*" (**Chirikba, 2020: 98**). V. Chirikba also somehow "missed" that Battista Agnese has put an impressive picture of the "*Georgian King*" («*Rex Georgianias*») in the area covering the Eastern Black Sea coast (naturally, this part includes the territory of present-day Abkhazia) in his maps of 1525 and 1554 (**Battista Agnese, 1554**. Emphasis added – **Z.P.**). Meanwhile, the Russian scholar Igor Fomenko, who studied those maps, paid special attention to the specifications of this picture, and made a commentary that the Georgian king was the only significant figure in the region (**Fomenko, 2011: 182-183**).

Abkhazs were still actively involved in the all-Georgian processes in the 1460s. They, along with “Dadian-Gurieli... and Suans,” supported Bagrat Bagrationi, who declared himself as the King of Imereti (**Vakhushti, 1973:** 806. See in detail: **Gvenetadze, 2003:** 115-133). In return, as a reward from King Bagrat VI, Dadiani received “*Odishi, Gurieli – Guria, Sharvashidze – Abkhazs and Jiks, and Geloani – Svaneti, and Bagrat ruled over them*” (**Vakhushti, 1973:** 806. Emphasis added – **Z.P.**). When interpreting this reference from Vakhushti Bagrationi, the attention should be paid to distinction that is made regarding Sharvashidze. If Dadiani, Gurieli, and Gelovani consolidated their power over certain regions (subsequently, Odishi, Guria, and Svaneti), Sharvashidze did not receive a specific territory and he was declared as chieftain over the Abkhazs and Jiks. This is one additional argument to the claim that the territory of present-day Abkhazia was not a single unit administratively and the Sharvashidzes, at their best, remained as the leaders of the Apkhazeti Saeristavo. Anyway, it is evident that Vakhushti Bagrationi, who lived in the 18th century, when the Sharvashidzes were the rulers of Abkhazia (actually, in its present borders), had serious reasons for not looking at the situation of the 15th century from the prism of his time (**Papaskiri, 1998a:** 249-250).

The loyalty of the Western Georgian aristavis to King Bagrat did not last for long. After the death of Shamadavle Dadiani, who was one of the initiators of installing the independent Catholicos in Western Georgia, Vameq II Dadiani took some steps against Bagrat VI. He “gathered the **Abkhazs** and Gurieli and started attacking, devastating, and conquering Imereti” (**Vakhushti, 1973:** 807, emphasis added – **Z.P.**). The situation had improved after the formation of the Imereti Kingdom was finished during the reign of Alexandre (1484-1510), the son of Bagrat VI, although it took some time. At first, when Alexandre tried to ascend to the throne after the death of his father and “asked Dadian-Gurieli, **Sharvashidze**, and Gelovani” for help, they rejected him (**Vakhushti, 1973:** 807-808, emphasis added – **Z.P.**). It resulted in his defeat and the success of the Kartli branch of Bagrationis. In 1478-1484 Constantine II was the King of Kartli and Imereti (**Vakhushti, 1973:** 809).¹ Later, in 1484, Alexandre was able to become a king in Kutaisi. He “made a truce with Dadiani-Gurieli. Thus, he appeased Imereti and governed it firmly, and he subdued the **Abkhazs** and the Suans, although not to the level he wanted” (**Vakhushti, 1973:** 809, emphasis added – **Z.P.**).

As it is known, at the end of the 15th century the unified Georgian kingdom disintegrated into several kingdoms and princedoms. There were formed the Kartli and Kakheti kingdoms in Eastern Georgia and the Imereti Kingdom in Western Georgia. Practically independent were Samegrelo-Odishi and Samtskhe-Saatabago. As for Abkhazia, it remained within the jurisdiction of Odishi ruler, although only its part, namely, “the upper

¹ The continuation of “Kartlis Tskhovreba” preserves the interesting reference that Constantine II “subdued the Imeretians, Odisharis, **Abkhazs**” (**Kartlis Tskhovreba, 1959:** 343. Emphasis added – **Z.P.**).

Apkhazeti,” was administratively in Odishi, while “Abkhazia to Jiketi belonged to Sharvashidze, and this Sharvashidze did not obey all orders of Dadiani” (**Kartlis tskhovreba, 1959: 349**). The Sharvashidzes were able to escape from the subordination to the Dadianis and create the independent princedom only in the 17th century.

This was the ethnical, cultural, political, and state character of the present-day Abkhazia in the 11th-15th cc. As we have seen, the territory of the present-day Abkhazia was not a separate state formation in the form of “autonomous princedom” within the unified Georgian kingdom. In the 11th-12th cc., the most part of the territory of the present-day Abkhazia was administratively part of Tskhumi and Odishi saeristavos and it was populated mainly by the Georgians. According to all sources, Tskhumi, the summer royal residence of the Georgian kings, was a Georgian city in the 12th century. From the 14th century, after the Odishi eristavis established firm control over Tskhumi Saeristavo, Tskhumi-Sebastopolis became the residence of the Dadianis, who also were minting their coins there. The Abkhaz tribes were mainly settled in the Apkhazeti Saeristavo. Its Southern border was not expanding past Anakopia. The Apkhazeti Saeristavo, ruled by the Sharvashidze family, was an organic part of the all-Georgian state. Throughout 13th-14th centuries the Sharvashidzes were nearly always loyal to the central government of Georgia. Moreover, sometimes they were more loyal to Tbilisi throne than other Western Georgian leaders and were acting as their trusted supporters in the Western Georgia.

CHAPTER V. ABKHAZIA FROM THE 16TH CENTURY TO THE BEGINNING OF THE 19TH CENTURY

§1. Abkhazia in the 16th-17th Centuries

At the beginning of the 16th century the Dadianis of Odishi controlled most part of present-day Abkhazia. This is proven by the fact that *Mamia III Dadiani* (Odishi ruler in 1512-1533) gifted the “*villages of Aitarne, Arukha, and Rabitsa in the vicinity of Bichvinta as well as the Aitarne Mountain with the olive trees*” to the Catholicosate of “Abkhazia” (**Bichvinta Iadgar, 1965: 179; Antelava, 1951: 27-28; Anchabadze Z., 1959: 258; Essays, 2011: 171**). At that time the River Anakopia (present-day the Psirtskha) was the South-Eastern border of Abkhazia with Odishi Princedom. Parallel to its right bank the small mountainous range comes almost to the Black Sea. According to Vakhushti, “the small mountain of Anakopia descended from the Caucasus to the Sea” (**Vakhushti, 1973: 776**). “*Sukhumi is the land of Dadiani. It (Sukhumi) was a port in the old times. Here descends the spur of Mount Elbrus. Beyond are the Abkhazian countries. Beyond the Mountains is Circassian country*” (**Turkish sources, 1983: 57; Essays, 2011: 170**). According to this source, the South-Eastern border of Apkhazeti Saeristavo was located on the River Anakopia (Psirtskha) and the “spur of Mount Elbrus” of the Turkish source is the same as “the small mountain of Anakopia” of Vakhushti.

The River Bzipi was the North-Western border of Abkhazia. From there started Jiketi. Giorgio Interiano, the Genovese traveller, historian, and ethnographer, the author of “*La vita et sito de Zychi, chiamiti Ciarcassi: Historia Notabile*” (“Life and Country of the Zichi, Who Are Called Circassians: Notable History”), published in Venice in 1502, describes their territory in the following way: “*The Zichi (Jiks – B.Kh.), who are known by this name in Italian, Greek, and Latin, while are known as Circassians among the Turks and Tatars, call themselves Adyghe. They live... from Tana, i.e. Don... to the South along the Black Sea coast to the Buxus Cape and border Avogazia (Abkhazia – B.Kh.), a part of Colchis*” (**Interiano, 1974: 46-47; Essays, 2011: 171**). There was the Buxus Harbour (Cavo di Buxo) at the mouth of the River Bzipi. The harbour received its name because the foreigners were usually exporting the Boxwood from there.

Jiketi, which was a part of the Apkhazeti Saeristavo, separated from Georgia after the dissolution of the unified kingdom. There were numerous Adyghe ethnographic groups West to Jiketi and they were known as Circassians receiving this name from the Turks and Tatars. Due to the weakening of the royal government, the Jiks began their expansion to the South-East. The Eristavi of Apkhazeti was not able to stop them and the Jiks moved the border to the River Bzipi (**Khorava, 1996: 60**).¹

¹ It is noteworthy that Sigismund von Herberstein, the Austrian diplomat who twice travelled to Russia in the beginning of the 16th century, gives us different information regarding the North-Western border of Abkhazia. He wrote that “*Beyond the Kuban is Megrelia*” and that

To stop the raids of the Jiks, *Mamia III Dadiani* (1503-1533) and *Mamia I Gurieli* (1512-1534), with the support of *Bagrat III*, king of Imereti, organized the naval expedition to Jiketi in January of 1533. According to the sources, the expedition failed because the “cursed” *Tsandia Inalipa* and the Abkhaz host left the battlefield. *Mamia III Dadiani* was captured and killed in torture. *Mamia I Gurieli*, with his three brothers, bishops, and whatever was left from the army, were captured by the Jiks. The captives and the corpses were ransomed for a great sum by Western-Georgian Catholicos *Malachias I Abashidze* (c. 1519-1540), who specially travelled to Jiketi (**Kartlis Tskhovreba, 1959: 497; Vakhushti, 1973: 811; Life of the Georgia, 1980: 42; Khorava, 1996: 62**).

The defeat in Jiketi did not weaken the influence of Odishi. The Eristavis of Apkhazeti with their host served the Dadianis as usual. In 1547, when the Ottomans attacked Guria, *Levan I Dadiani* (1533-1572) gathered the Abkhazs and Odishians to help Guria. He camped at the mouth of the River Rioni. Unfortunately, due to the political intrigues the possessor of Odishi did not support Guria and Chaneti was left in the hands of the Ottomans (**Vakhushti, 1973: 814; Kartlis Tskhovreba, 1959: 360, 502; Beradze T., 2011: 172; Essays, 2011: 172**).

Due to the deterioration of the foreign political situation, the weakening of the royal government, and political disintegration, the Caucasian highlanders started intensive migration to Abkhazia from the mid-16th century. The new wave of the Apsua-Abkhazs, along with the migration of Jiks, resulted in the revival of paganism in Abkhazia. The Catholicosate of Abkhazia could no longer function normally in Bichvinta. Even the life of Catholicos was in danger. Because of this, Catholicos *Evdemon I Chkhetidze* had to leave Bichvinta and move to Gelati sometime in 1557-1565. From there on the residence of Catholicos was close to the political centre of the kingdom (**Lominadze, 1966: 177-186; Khorava, Vachridze, 2019: 160-161**). The raids of Jiks alarmed the Odishi Principal so much that he decided to ask for help from the Ottoman Empire. In February of 1557 *Levan I Dadiani* went to Constantinople. Along with the help against Jiks, he wanted to receive the guarantees of independence for Odishi Princedom. Dadiani recognized the suzerainty of Sultan. In return, the Ottoman Porte recognized Odishi Princedom as an independent state and gave several warships to Dadiani to organize an expedition against the Jiks (**Tardy, 1980: 76-77; Mamistvalishvili, 1981b: 150; Khorava, 1996: 67-68**).

the “Aphgazs” lived in the lower reaches of the Kuban, while the Circassians lived in the mountains (**Herberstein, 1988: 181**). Several maps of the mid-16th century (1542 map of the Black Sea by anonymous author, 1553 map of *Battista Agnese*, 1559 map of *Diogo Homem*, 1561 maps of *Giacomo Gastaldi*) place the Megrelian lands from the left bank of the River Kuban, while *Giacomo Gastaldi*’s 1561 map shows “region of Abkhazia” with “Aqua” as its political centre in the middle reaches of the River Kuban (**Gogia, 2005: 30-36**). Looks like that the European travellers and cartographers frequently designated Western Georgia as Samegrelo and were equating it with the Ancient Colchis.

Despite the help from the Ottomans, Levan I Dadiani soon revolted against them. In 1571 he raided the border regions – Batumi Sanjak, Arhavi, Gonio, and Atine. About the same time the Abkhaz ships attacked Gonio and its neighbourhood. They took a great booty and captives (**Tsurtsunia, 2012: 38**). The Ottomans took special measures to prevent such raids. The heads of border regions were prohibited to trade with Georgians. They also received orders to land “on the shores of Georgian pirates” and destroy their shelters. The punitive expedition was sent to Odishi and Abkhazia by the navy in 1571. The naval trade was essential for the Western-Georgian political formations. Along with food and common goods, they were receiving the armaments from the Ottoman Porte and *Crimean Khanate*. Thus, in order to persuade the Western-Georgian formations, the Porte often used the naval blockade. In 1573 sending the trade ships to Abkhazia and Odishi was prohibited. However, despite harsh sanctions, the contraband trade continued with the Ottomans (**Tsurtsunia, 2012: 39-41**).

After the death of Levan I Dadiani in 1572, his eldest son *Giorgi* became Odishi Principal. Soon Guria Principal moved against Giorgi III Dadiani (1572-1582), defeated him near Zugdidi, and installed Giorgi’s brother *Mamia* as a Principal. *Giorgi Dadiani* attempted to return the throne with the support of the Abkhazs, Jiks, and Circassians, but failed and had to retreat to Abkhazia. In 1578, with the mediation of the King of Imereti, Giorgi III took back the Odishi throne. In order to strengthen his position, he married the sister of the King of Imereti, who was a daughter of Kabardian Principal and was raised in Kutaisi palace (**Vakhushti, 1973: 817; Khorava, 1996: 69**).

In 1578 the new war began between the Ottomans and Iran. The Porte intended to conquer Southern Caucasus, including Georgia, which was given to Persians according to the 1555 Amasya Treaty, and put under its influence the North Caucasus. On 9 August the Ottoman commander *Lala Mustafa Pasha* defeated the Persian army in the Battle of Çıldır and conquered Samtskhe-Saatabago. From Meskheta he moved to Kartli, took Tbilisi on 24 August and established the *beylerbeylik* there. They also attacked the Georgian Black Sea Coast. In August of 1578 the Turkish navy, under the command of Haidar Pasha, Batumi Sanjakbey, approached Tskhumi. They took the city and established there *beylerbeylik* headed by Haidar Pasha himself¹ (**Svanidze, 1971: 95-113, 124; Tsurtsunia, 2012: 39; Chikobava, 2007-2008: 120-121**). The same year they restored the old Tskhumi fortress (**DuBois de Montperreux, 1937: 132**). From this time on the Turks started to refer to Tskhumi as Sukhumi.

¹ It was not accidental that *Haidar Pasha* became the Beylerbey of Sokhumi. According to Turkish historian *M. Sadik Belge*, although Haidar Pasha is known as a Circassian, he had the Abkhaz roots (**Tsurtsunia, 2012: 39**). Despite the fact that Beylerbey officially governed only Sokhumi, he, as a representative both of the region and mighty empire, should have significant influence in the neighbourhood, especially among the Abkhaz-Jiks. The Ottomans definitely wanted to weaken Odishi Princedom and were supporting its opponents.

In the spring of 1580 Sinan Pasha replaced Lala Mustafa Pasha (he became a Grand Vizier at that time) as a commander of the Eastern forces. He had the same tasks: To subjugate Georgia and build or strengthen fortresses in the conquered countries of the Southern Caucasus (**Svanidze, 1971: 140**). According to the contemporary French writer Jean-Jacques Buassard, Sinan Pasha *“with his army moved from Constantinople to Anatolia on 25 April 1580. He reached the borders of Georgia ... and installed his Beylerbeys and Defterdars in Batumi and Sokhumi to restrain the independence of Georgian Iberians”* (**Tabagoua, 1984: 113**. Emphasis added – **B.Kh.**). At the same time, the Porte replaced Haidar Pasha with other Beylerbey in Sokhumi (**Tsurtsumia, 2012: 39; Chikobava, 2007-2008: 123**).

The Turkish administration did not last long in Sokhumi. In the autumn of 1580, they left Sokhumi and the beylerbeylik ceased its existence (**Tsurtsumia, 2012: 40**). It is probable that from that time the Abkhazs took over Sokhumi. Nevertheless, the political influence of Odishi was still spreading over Abkhazia at the end of the 16th century. The Abkhaz feudals supported their suzerains, the Odishi Principals, in the long-lasting struggle for the political hegemony in Western Georgia (**Anchabadze Z., 1959: 261**). However, they mostly were interested in raids. Vakhushti Bagrationi mentions that Abkhazs' raider boats were reaching up to Guria. For example, in 1591 *“the Abkhazs raided Guria with boats. Mamia, son of Gurieli, rushed against them, defeated and annihilated”* the raiders (**Vakhushti, 1973: 823**).

Odishi and Guria Principals stopped to pay tribute to the Ottoman Empire and chose the road of disobedience. In order to subjugate Odishi and Guria, the Ottoman Porte declared a blockade of the Georgian Black Sea coast. The import of such goods as salt and iron was stopped and this resulted in great difficulties for the population (**Antelava II., 1990: 49**). The Principals of Odishi and Guria were forced to held negotiations with the Porte. In December of 1614 Mamia Gurieli (1600-1625) signed the peace agreement in Batumi and pledged to pay the tribute. Levan II Dadiani (1611-1657) also signed a peace agreement with the Ottomans in his palace in the village of Merkula (present-day Ochamchire district in Abkhazia) in February of 1615 (**Tabagoua, 1986: 46**). At that time, the Abkhazs, like other Western-Georgian political units, paid “Kharaj,” the poll-tax in their case (**Anchabadze Z., 1959: 263**).

The Sharvashidzes took advantage of the difficult situation in which the Odishi Princedom found itself in the 1610s, freed themselves from the suzerainty of the House of Dadianis, and became independent principals. The centre of the Princedom became Zupu (Likhni) (**Antelava, 1951: 28; Anchabadze Z., 1959: 261-262**). The Abkhazian Princedom was not a centralized political unit. It was divided into several parts with different rulers, although one of them still was the highest in the hierarchy.

Giovanni da Lucca, the Dominican Missionary, who travelled to Abkhazia in 1630, wrote that the Abkhazs had two princes, Karabei and Puto. This latter's residence was in Sokhumi and the first ruled the neighbouring areas, which should be Bzipi Abkhazia (**Ta-**

bagoua, 1987: 156-58, 169; **Anchabadze Z., 1959:** 239; **Essays, 2011:** 177). Later the Abkhazs already had three principals. The Theatine missionary Teramo Cristophoro Castelli who lived in Odishi Principdom in the 1640s, has written on one of the unpainted papers: *“The picture of three brothers. This is the picture of Abaz Principal’s three brothers. The elder is named Don Baslakus, the second is Salamon, the third and last is Seteman”* (**Castelli, 1976:** 194). Castelli left a note on another unpainted paper too: *“Three princes of Abkhazia. These three knights are the princes of Abkhazia, who gave us two wonderful unused churches. The residents of Abkhazia are rude to such a degree that the Prince cannot tame them, while the second able lord is Beslako Sharashia, who is older and has higher position in the country. Thus, he can rule too”* (**Castelli, 1976:** 192). Looks like that from three brothers who ruled in Abkhazia, Beslako Sharvashidze (Castelli uses Sharashia, the Megrelian form of his surname – **B.Kh.**) was the highest in the hierarchy. His brothers were Seteman and Solomon. They were the rulers of certain parts of the Abkhazian Principdom, but not of the Principdom on the whole. That is why they were called the “Prince of the Abkhazs” and not the “Prince of Abkhazia.”

To strengthen the ties with the Abkhazs, Odishi Principal *Levan II Dadiani* married *Darejan*, daughter of *Seteman Sharvashidze* (**Antelava II., 1976:** 116). According to *Ar-cangelo Lamberti* *“this lady was beautiful and possessed all the virtues that befitted the woman of her origin: She had no match in embroidering, reading, writing, generosity, and politeness. She conquered the hearts of all of her subjects with her kindness”* (**Lamberti, 1938:** 15-16). With this marriage Odishi Principal sought to preserve the good neighbourhood with Abkhazia. Otherwise he would not be able to get help from the “Abkhaz-Jik host,” which was used regularly by Odishi Principals in the second half of the 16th century (**Antelava II., 1976:** 110). From the Beginning of 1620s, *Levan II Dadiani* started to fight for the hegemony in Western Georgia. In 1622 he invaded Imereti and defeated the king. From this time till his death *Levan II Dadiani* remained the strongest force among the Western Georgian rulers (**Antelava II., 1976:** 112-119).

After the victory over Imereti *Levan II Dadiani* blamed his wife for infidelity, severely punished her – *“cut her nose off according to the Greek tradition”* (**Lamberti, 1938:** 16), and divorced her. Since *Seteman Sharvashidze* would not tolerate such insult, the Principal of Odishi decided to forestall him, gathered his host and invaded Abkhazia. *Dadiani’s* attack was so unexpected that the Abkhazs were not able to put up any type of resistance and just fled to the mountains. Odishi Principal raided the country, left his former wife there and returned to Odishi (**Lamberti, 1938:** 16-19).

Soon the plot against *Levan II Dadiani* was organized by *Simon Gurieli*, *Guria* Principal (1625-1626), *Giorgi III*, King of Imereti (1605-1639), and *Seteman Sharvashidze*. The aim was to kill him and install his brother *Ioseb* on the Principal’s throne. The assassination attempt had to be performed by a certain Abkhaz, who was experienced in such matters. The would-be assassin decided to attack the Principal during supper, but *Levan II*

Dadiani was just slightly wounded (**Lamberti, 1938: 19-20**) and fiercely punished the conspirators. According to A. Lamberti, *“while Dadiani was occupied with stifling his brother’s rebellion, the Abkhazs were systematically attacking the borders of Samegrelo, nearly completely ravaged them, captured the residents, and took them to Abkhazia”* (**Lamberti, 1938: 22**).

Levan II Dadiani gathered his host and invaded Abkhazia. As Vakhushti Bagrationi has written, *“Dadiani Levan assembled the troops and attacked the Abkhazs till he conquered them”* (**Vakhushti, 1973: 828**). According to Lamberti, the Principal of Odishi raided Abkhazia, took many captives and booty, and imposed the tribute in the form of hounds and hunting birds on them (**Lamberti, 1938: 22**). Castelli also gives us an account of those events: The Abkhazs *“live in the rough and impregnable mountains. Dadiani could not assail the mountainous regions and because of this his small squadrons attacked the Abkhazs and caused them damage throughout many years. Since these highlanders could not withstand all the hardship, they decided to stay under the heavy yoke”* (**Castelli, 1976: 51**). As we see from Castelli’s note, small detachments of Megrelian troops attacked the Abkhazs for several years and finally subdued them. Afterwards, according to A. Lamberti, Dadiani every year went to the borders of Abkhazia to receive the tribute – hounds and falcons (**Lamberti, 2020: 267**). The Georgian sources also confirm the establishment of Dadiani’s influence over the Abkhazian Princedom: *“And was Dadiani very rich and submitted to him all the Abkhazs and the Sharvashidzes obeyed and fought for him”* (**Kartlis Tskhovreba, 1959: 421**. Emphasis added – **B.Kh.**).

In a special inscription made on the Icon of Saint George of the Ilori church to celebrate the victory over the Abkhazs Levan II Dadiani says: *“When we marched against Sharvashidze to Zupu,¹ destroyed everything on this side of the bank of the River Mutsu, then went to Zupu for the second time, burnt everything on this side of the River Kapoeti and devastated it and captured and destroyed all the forts. On the river Kapoeti we were attacked by Zupuars and Sikhuar Marshanias and we defeated them and killed them; captured some and we returned victorious”* (**Grigolia, 1942: 157**. Emphasis added – **B.Kh.**). None of the two marches mentioned in the inscription were the first campaign of Levan II Dadiani against Abkhazia. They were the reciprocal attack for the numerous raids of Sharvashidze on Odishi (**Grigolia, 1942: 157**). As we see, he defeated the Abkhaz and Jik host led by Marshanias.²

The Abkhazs continued their raids on Odishi Princedom even after the defeat. Levan II Dadiani realized the danger that was coming from them. It was the reason of his

¹ As it was already said, Zupu is the Megrelian name of Likhni. When Zupu became the residence of Sharvashidzes, according to the Megrelian tradition, this name denoted Abkhazia on the whole. In this case Zupu also means Abkhazia (**Strazhev, 1925: 143; Anchabadze Z., 1959: 266**).

² Marshanias originally were called Marushianis and they were the Svans from the upper reaches of the River Kodori. Later they became the Abkhaz landlords (**Gasviani, 1991: 210**).

fierce and severe fight against them.¹ The Western border of Abkhazia was still on the River Bzipi, beyond which Jiketi was situated (**Chikobava, 2006:** 160). As for the South-Eastern border with Odishi Princedom, thanks to the references of European authors (A. Lamberti, T. Ch. Castelli, J. Chardin), for a long time the scholars thought that it was on the River Kodori (**Anchabadze Z., 1959:** 261-262; **Jamburia, 1973:** 297). However, this turned out to be incorrect.

In May of 1637, in order to punish the Principal of Odishi, the Ottomans sent the naval landing force in the vicinity of Kodori Cape and raided the Dranda Temple and its neighbourhood on the **right bank of the River Kodori** (**Beradze, 1989:** 61. Emphasis added – **B.Kh.**). About the same time, in November of 1639, the embassy of Mikhail Romanov, king of Russia (1613-1645), arrived in Odishi Princedom. Fedot Elchin and Pavel Zakhariyev, the Russian ambassadors travelled throughout Odishi beginning from the villages on the right bank of the River Kodori and the Black Sea to the rivers Tskhenistskali and Rioni. They met Levan II Dadiani and returned to their homeland in 1640. The Russian ambassadors compiled a detailed description of Odishi Princedom which clearly shows that the territory West to the River Kodori belonged to Odishi both politically and ethnically (**Gamakharria, 2014**). Thus, the border between Abkhazia and Odishi Princedom was not on the River Kodori in the 1630s and 1640s. Looks like that the European authors were talking about the borders of the Ancient Colchis and automatically applied the references of the Antique sources to their epoch.

In 1630 the Italian Missionary Giovanni da Lucca travelled to Abkhazia. His ship arrived in Sokhumi on 21 May: *“We already were in the Antique city of Scisornum where the River Absi divides Abkhazia from Samegrelo”* (**Tabagoua, 1987:** 157). “Scisornum” was equivalent of Turkish “Eskisumun” (“Old Sukhum”), while the River Absi is the same as the River Besleti (Basla). The Medieval Tskhumi was situated on the left bank of the River Besleti (Tskhomis Tskali), between the rivers Besleti and Kelasuri. Meanwhile, Sokhumi was situated on the right bank of the River Besleti, from its mouth to the Turkish fortress (**Khorava, 1996:** 95; **Chikobava, 2006:** 156-157). At that time Tskhumi had lost its significance and was practically deserted. According to Giovanni da Lucca, there was a residence of one of the Abkhaz Principals in Sokhumi. In October 1649, the ship with Arcangelo Lamberti on board, travelling from Odishi to Crimea, entered the “port of the Abaskhs” called “Sokhumi” (**Lamberti, 2020:** 348).

It seems, Levan II Dadiani was not able to maintain the border with Abkhazia on the River Tskhomis Tskali (Besleti) and in the 1640s it moved to the River Kelasuri. He tried to fortify this border (**Khorava, 1996:** 94; **Chikobava, 2006:** 157-158). In the last years of his

¹ From this point the most interesting evaluation of Levan II Dadiani is given by *Peshangi Khitarishvili*, the Georgian poet of the 17th century: *“Has taken Abkhazia to get the tribute; Went to Zupu (here Likhni – B.Kh.) in the summers, stayed there for a while; Shed blood of Jik and Alan all the time; Punished the perfidious and awarded the faithful”* (**Peshangi, 1935:** 84).

rule Levan II Dadiani had to conduct defensive measures towards the Abkhazs. His Campaigns to Abkhazia did not achieve their goal and could not eliminate the danger to the North-Western borders of the Princedom. Moreover, the Abkhazs intensified their attacks on Odishi. The “Abkhazo-Jik” host, which was frequently used by Odishi Principals in the 16th century and beginning of the 17th century, now was completely in the Sharvashidze’s service.

With the purpose of defending the Princedom from the Abkhazo-Jik raids, Levan II Dadiani started to build and strengthen the fortifications on the new border with Abkhazia. According to A. Lamberti, from the North-West Samegrelo was protected by the mountains, *“but from the seaside in some places there were neither forests, nor marshes and an enemy could easily penetrate those places. For their protection several wooden fortresses were built and guarded by men armed with rifles. In one place, which is called Olushe, the mountains are open and enemy could easily penetrate it and devastate the country, with great expenses there was built the wall with the length of 60000 steps, wall with several towers, where the guards armed with rifles are positioned”* (Lamberti, 1938: 166). J. Chardin also confirms that Samegrelo *“from the North was defended by the 60-mile wall”* (Chardin, 1975: 107). It is said in Abu-Bakr’s (d. 1691) insertion to Kâtip Çelebi’s *“Jihan Numa:”* *“Abkhaz is the name of the main tribe... which in Moslem countries is called Abaza in our times... Their borders are spread from Sochi to the River Kodori”* (Kâtip Çelebi, 1978: 132-133). Meanwhile, at the map of Caucasia in Kâtip Çelebi’s *“Jihan Numa”* the border between Abaza and Samegrelo is fixed on the River Kelasuri and the system of fortifications is depicted there too (Kâtip Çelebi, 1978: 56). Vakhushti also mentions the fact of building the fortifications by Levan II Dadiani: *“East to Anakopia” from the sea to the mountain the great wall was built by Levan Dadiani to stop the Abkhazs* (Vakhushti, 1973: 782). The scholars are absolutely right in identifying this wall with the Kelasuri Wall (see in detail: Beradze T., 1971).

Some Abkhaz scholars deny that the Kelasuri Wall was built in the 17th century and that its function was to defend from the attacks of the Abkhaz. They call it the “The Great Abkhazian Wall” (Gunba, 1977; Gunba, 1989: 201-213). However, the facts prove the opposite. There is a legend on A. Lamberti’s map at the place where the system of fortifications is depicted: *“The wall against the Abkhaz invasions.”* There is a similar legend on the *“Map of Colchis, i.e. Samegrelo”* (1654) at the place where the wall is depicted: *“60-mile length wall built against the Abkhaz invasions”* (Beradze T., 2013: 53-54).

In the 1630s-1640s the Ottoman Porte considered Abkhazia as its vassal country, although no Turkish garrison was stationed there. Thus, the Ottoman political suzerainty was of a formal character. In 1641 the Turkish traveller Evliya Çelebi visited the Black Sea Coast. He refers to the Abkhazs as Abazas and considers under this name both Abkhazs and Abazas. According to him, the seaside Abkhazia was subjugated, but the Ottoman influence could not penetrate into the mountains. The human trade of the captives was

widely spread: “Abazas fight with each other, abduct the children and women, sell the captives, and live by this income” (**Evliya Çelebi, 1971: 102**). He also mentions that “the Abazas are kidnapping Megreles, Megreles kidnap Abazas, and sell to the traders” (**Evliya Çelebi, 1971: 96**). Evliya Çelebi himself bought two captive boys in Abkhazia and when he arrived in Crimea, he already had 18 Georgian slaves, either bought or received as a gift from the Ottoman nobles (**Evliya Çelebi, 1971: 122**).

After the sudden death of Levan II Dadiani in 1657, the government was usurped by his cousin Vameq Lipartiani, who was helped by Alexandre III, King of Imereti (1639-1660). This was followed by harsh confrontation. Many Odishian lords opposed the usurpation. Abkhazia also did not want to recognize Vameq and stepped up against him (**Borromeo, 1964: 25-26**). The opposition leader was Liparit Dadiani, Levan II Dadiani’s nephew. He enjoyed the support of Akhaltsikhe Pasha and Kaikhosro Gurieli. The decisive battle took place near the village of Bandza in 1658. Liparit lost and fled to Constantinople (**Gorgijanidze, 1925: 268; Kartlis Tskhovreba, 1959: 432; Vakhushti, 1973: 833-834; Khorava, 1996: 99-100**). It seems that Vameq III Dadiani (1657-1661) was able to subordinate Abkhazia at that time as the Abkhazs fought on his side in the Bandza Battle. It is noteworthy that Vameq’s brother Giorgi Lipartiani was married to the daughter of Abkhaz Principal (**Castelli, 1976: 80**). This marriage, probably, first and foremost, was a political one, and it played a great role in making peace between the Abkhazs and Odishi Principal. To the commemoration of the victory at Bandza Solomon Sharvashidze ordered to emboss the Bichvinta Gospel and made the following colophons on it: “*The Holy Virgin of Bichvinta, with Your prayer and help to the King and Dadiani we have won over Gurieli and Liparit Dadiani and because of this we embossed this... Gospel;*” “*This... Gospel was embossed by us, Sharvashidze Solomon and our son Azraqan (Arzaqan – B.Kh.) for Your glory and our long live and raise of Azraqan and for the salvation... of our eternal soul*” (**Description of Manuscripts, 1949: 74**).¹ The Abkhaz participation was not contained to the Battle of Bandza only. In 1659 the Abkhazs – their Principal Sharvashidze and the Anchabadzes – were in Vameq III Dadiani’s host when the latter invaded Guria to punish Kaikhosro Gurieli (**Bakradze, 1889: 163**). Thus, the Odishi Principal once again could use the armed forces of the Sharvashidzes, whose vassal obligations included helping the Dadianis with their host.

In 1660, after the death of *Alexandre III*, King of Imereti, the chaos spread over Western Georgia. *Vameq III Dadiani* briefly usurped the Kutaisi throne but then Vakhtang V Shah Nawaz, King of Kartli (1658-1675) came to Western Georgia, took over Kutaisi, and then marched on Odishi. Vameq III fled to Svaneti. His wife Elene Gurieli tried to get help from Solomon Sharvashidze, the Principal of Abkhazia, but the latter refused and said that

¹ Solomon Sharvashidze was the brother of Beslako and Seteman Sharvashidzes. He and his son Arzaqan are also mentioned in the Georgian inscription on the silver paten of the Likhni Temple (**Sakhokia, 1903**).

he would not fight against the king (**Peshangi, 1935: 73-74**). Although Vakhtang V was the king of Kartli, the Principal of Abkhazia considered him, as well as the king of Imereti, as the king of Georgia. Thus, he recognized their suzerainty and considered his Princedom to be an inseparable part of Georgia. Vakhtang V occupied the fortresses of Odishi and entered Zugdidi, the political centre of the Princedom. On the Principal's throne he installed Shamadavlé, the nephew of Levan II Dadiani, who took the name of his uncle as a ruler. It was in Zugdidi that "*Sharvashidze with many presents and Abkhazs*" came to the king and confirmed his subordination (**Vakhushti, 1973: 836; Anchabadze Z., 1959: 267**). The king once again subjugated Abkhazia to Odishi. According to *Peshangi*, "*all the Abkhazs came*" (**Peshangi, 1935: 83**). Looks like that not only Solomon Sharvashidze, but the other "*Abkhaz lords*" also came to greet Vakhtang V in Zugdidi.

In 1664-1666, Macarios III, the Patriarch of Antiochia and his son Paul, Archdeacon of Aleppo visited Odishi. Paul of Aleppo's notes on Abkhazia shed light upon lots of things. According to him, "*Abkhazana is two countries; the residents of one are subjects of Dadiani and are called Christians, although they have not been baptized. They worship holy icons and have respect to Churches. They are not baptized because they have no arch-priests and priests. The residents of the other country are pagans. Near them live Alans, Abazgs, Zichi, Circassians. They are the sworn enemies of the Megrelians, and abduct and enslave them*" (**Asatiani, 1973: 75**). This shows that although Vakhtang V considered Abkhazia to be a vassal land of Dadiani and ordered the Abkhazs to subordinate to Dadiani, the latter had influence only on a part of Abkhazia, namely on Solomon Sharvashidze's Princedom, which directly neighboured Odishi.

The Ottomans also decided to interfere in Western-Georgian matters. In 1672 Pasha of Akhaltsikhe invaded Imereti and captured Kutaisi. He summoned Levan III Dadiani there. Levan III Dadiani asked for help the Principal of Abkhazia. The Abkhazs really came to Odishi, but instead of helping Levan III Dadiani, they devastated and ravaged everything on their way. They captured people and cattle. The population fled looking for shelter. On 20 September 1672, the Abkhazs ravaged and burnt the sea port and market Skurcha (Isgauri, Tkauru) in the mouth of the River Kodori. Raiding in that way the Abkhazs came close to Anaklia and returned to Abkhazia with big booty, 1200 captives and a lot of cattle at the beginning of October (**Chardin, 1975: 206-209, 215-216; Khorava, 1996: 108**).

The permanent feudal wars weakened the defensive abilities of Odishi. The North-West border of the Princedom, specially fortified by Levan II Dadiani, gradually came to decline, as it was no more guarded by anyone. During Chardin's visit in Odishi (1672) the border of the Princedom officially still was on the River Kelasuri, but the Kelasuri Wall itself, at least at the sea shore, was practically destroyed due of the exposedness and carelessness. Because of the raids of the Abkhazs, the estuary of the River Kodori was practically deserted (**Chardin, 1975: 107; Khorava, 1996: 109-110**).

The new wave of the Abkhaz raids on Odishi began in the 1860s (**Vakhushti, 1973: 842**). The Abkhazs freely roamed not only in the borderline regions, but in the inner parts too. Anika Kortodze (Kortua) writes in the colophon of the Tsaishi Gospel: *“Than the Abkhaz host came... attacked the temple and we were ... frightened.”* Nevertheless, she managed to take out and save the icons and the Tsaishi Gospel. Around the same time the Abkhazs ravaged the Tsalenjikha Temple too (**Takaishvili, 1913-1914: 188, 222**). Giuseppe Maria Zampi, the Theatine missionary, who lived in in Odishi at that period, wrote at the beginning of the 1670s: *“Megrelia is not Megrelia any more, as the wars impoverished, destroyed, and devastated it... Nobody has the cattle and everyone lacks food... Not a single person can feel himself safe nowadays, as they are under the threat of Abkhazs’ raid; even the ships that used to come to Kavro (Tkauru, Skurcha in the estuary of the River Kodori – B.Kh.) and Morbila (village of Merkula – B.Kh.), are heading to Anargia (Anaklia – B.Kh.) out of fear. The fear of the Abkhazs exists on the land till Futskuri, as they often rob that area, and that is why our people hide in the woods during the night and have guards in the daytime”* (**Tamarashvili, 1902: 204-205, 655; Essays, 2011: 190**). Dositheos, the Patriarch of Jerusalem (1669-1707), was broken-hearted: *“Dadiani... was so weak, that the Abazgians devastated his lands, ravaged churches and monasteries: Mokvi, Khibi, Kiachi, Zugdidi and the whole country from Dioskuria to the Hippius (the River Tskhenistskhali – B.Kh.) and The Phasis (the River Rioni – B.Kh.)... Dadiani was so helpless, that he had no strength to drive the Abazgians out”* (**Dositheos, 1847: 46**). The Abkhazs ravaged not only the neighbouring Odishi, but raided Guria too (from the sea). Giorgi III Gurieli (1664-1684) *“killed the Abkhaz pirates numerous times”* (**Vakhushti, 1973: 840**),

The devastating raids of the Abkhazs on the Odishi Princedom were led by the Saustan (Bagrat) Sharvashidze, the Principal of Abkhazia (**Antelava, 1951: 38**). He also made gifts to Bichvinta Holy Virgin and mentioned this in the colophon of the Bichvinta Gospel (**Description of Manuscripts, 1949: 74**). It was at those times that the vassal relations of the Abkhazs with Odishi had ended. In the 1670s the Sharvashidzes became free from the subordination of any kind to the Dadianis. Thus, the process of formation of the Abkhazian Princedom had ended (**Okujava, 2002: 24**).

In 1681 the Abkhazs occupied the North-Western part of Odishi from the River Kelasanuri to the River Ghalidzga. Vakhushti wrote about it: *“There was a great disaster in Odishi... mostly from the Abkhazs who used to come in boats and on land and capture the Odishians, occupied the territory to the River Egrisi (Ghalidzga – B.Kh.) and settled there... and there were no bishops in Dranda and Mokvi”* (**Vakhushti, 1973: 845**). This account shows us that the Abkhaz raids differed from the usual feudal wars waged by Imereti Kingdom and Odishi and Guria princedoms where the main goal was the hegemony in Western Georgia. The Abkhazs were taking lands and settling there. It is also noteworthy that the Dranda and Mokvi eparchies ceased their existence after the occupation of those regions by the pagan Abkhazs.

From the end of the 17th century, due to the situation in the North-Western part of Odishi, the clergy began moving the ecclesiastical books, icons, crosses, and other church utensils to the inner districts. For example, the icon of Saint George from Kiachi monastery was taken to the church in Obuji, while the Kiachi icon of the Archangel was moved to the village of Choga, The Mokvi gospel (1300) was brought to Martvili. One of the two Mokvi icons of the Holy Virgin was moved to the Zugdidi church, while another to the Khobi Monastery. The icon of the Blachernitissa, which was the main object of worship of the Dadianis, was moved from Bedia to Martvili (**Khorava, 1996: 112-113**).

In summer of 1681 Levan III Dadiani died. Odishi had no Principal and even a legal heir for the throne. (Levan III Dadiani's son was a hostage of Gurieli who killed him upon getting the news of Principal's death.) The Odishi nobility started to think about choosing the new principal. The unofficial ruler at that time was *Katsia Chikvani* who was dreaming about becoming Principal and was fiercely crushing the opponents (**Vakhushti, 1973: 845; Khorava, 1996: 113-114**). *Sorekh (Savarekh) Sharvashidze*, son of the Abkhazia's Principal *Saustan Sharvashidze*, decided to use the complicated situation for his personal benefit and claimed the Odishi throne. In October-November of 1681 he marched to Odishi and proclaimed himself as Principal, although he did not control the whole territory of the principedom (**Tamarashvili, 1902: 208**). We can assume that Sorekh Sharvashidze had a certain legitimate right on the Odishi throne and supposedly he was related to the Dadianis from his mother's side (**Khorava, 1996: 114**). A part of the Odishi nobility did not recognize his claims on the throne. In such a critical situation died Katsia Chikvani, who was replaced by son Giorgi, the ruler of Salpartiano. Like his father, *Giorgi Lipartiani* also dreamed of the principal's throne and was dealing harshly with his enemies (**Vakhushti, 1973: 845**). Vakhushti Bagrationi described the situation in Odishi of those times as follows: "*There was a calamity in Odishi because of Giorgi Lipartiani, who was killing and selling the captives, but most of all from the Abkhazs as they came with host and devastated the country...*". It seems, Sorekh Sharvashidze tried to extend his power on the whole territory of Odishi. Meanwhile, Gurieli repeatedly tried to occupy the throne of Odishi Principal. In order to end their claims, Giorgi Lipartiani, with the help from the Pasha of Akhaltsikhe, got consent from the Sultan on appointing Levan, the illegitimate son of *Levan III Dadiani*, who was then in Akhaltsikhe, as a Principal of Odishi. Thus, in 1683 *Levan IV Dadiani* (1683-1691) ascended the throne of Odishi, but the actual ruler was Giorgi Lipartiani (**Vakhushti, 1973: 850**). His rule, albeit nominal, would extend on all the parts of Odishi except the territory to the North-West from the River Enguri ruled by Sorekh Sharvashidze.

There was no end to the internal warfare in Western Georgia. *Archil*, the former king of Imereti once again attempted to take back the Kutaisi throne. In 1689, he came to Odishi, moved from there to Abkhazia, and stayed at Zupu for a while. "*Sharvashidze honoured him as a king...*" (**Vakhushti, 1973: 851**). The Principal who hosted Archil, had to

be *Zegnaq Sharvashidze*. This reception went beyond the traditional hospitality and clearly had political significance as Sharvashidze greeted Archil as a king (**Khorava, 1996: 115**). Although Sorekh Sharvashidze took over the North-Western part of Odishi, it was not annexed to Abkhazia and remained as Odishi. Moreover, its ruler was called Odishi Principal. Sorekh Sharvashidze did not obey the Principal of Abkhazia. Because of his disobedience, the Abkhazs raided and devastated his lands in April of 1685 (**Tamarashvili, 1902: 209-210**). After the death of Sorekh, this part of Odishi (from the River Kelasuri to the River Enguri) was annexed to Abkhazia by Zegnaq Sharvashidze. Upon his death, Zegnaq Sharvashidze's sons divided their father's lands. *Rostom*, the eldest among them, received the territory between the rivers Bzipi and Kodori and the title of the Principal of Abkhazia. *Jikeshia*, the middle son, got the territory between Kodori and Ghalidzga which later was named Abzhua ("the middle country" – direct translation of the Georgian name of this territory). *Kvapu*, the youngest brother received the lands between the rivers Ghalidzga and Enguri.

Thus, the border of Abkhazia moved to the River Enguri at the end of the 17th century. The territory given to *Kvapu Sharvashidze* was so devastated, that he had to move from Zupu several noble families. namely the Anchabadzes, the Emukhvaris, the Inalishvilis, the Marghania, the Zvanbais, the Lakerbais, and the Akirtavas. The Sharvashidzes living in those territories were the descendants of *Kvapu Sharvashidze* (**Chichinadze, 1897: 393-394**). Of course, the nobility that settled between the rivers Ghalidzga and Enguri brought some peasants with them. Nevertheless, there were no significant ethno-demographical changes and the main population remained Georgian.

At the same time, the human trade continued on those territories. The Abkhazs also continued to expel the population. It is said in Grigol Lordkipanidze's (Western-Georgian Catholicos) donation book to Bichvinta (1706) that "*in Nazhanevi, the Catholicos' village, during Catholicos Nemsadze, the population was expelled, the rest were sold by Kvap (Kvapu – B.Kh.) Sharvashidze*" (**Book of Donation of Catholicos Grigol Lordkipanidze, 1970: 647-648**). The "expulsion" of the population from the Abkhazs took such scales that in the above-mentioned Nazhaneuli only six families were left. A similar situation was in the other villages on the right bank of the River Enguri. *Kvapu Sharvashidze* had to give to Catholicos Nemsadze the Book of Oath (1681-1696) that he would not sell the peasants from that time on (**Takaishvili, 1920: 36; Khorava, 1996: 119**). However, this Book of Oath did not improve the situation and "*the expulsion, ravaging and selling*" of the population continued on those territories. The Book of Grace given by Grigol Lordkipanidze to the Shushanias says: "*We... the Catholicos of Abkhazia Grigol give this Book of Grace to you priest Gabriel Shushania and your brother Mamistvali... that your family lived across the Eguri in older times and they were good gentlemen of old times, but due to the situation ... country was ruined by the Abkhazs*" (**Chitaia Gogita, 2017: 167-168**). The population between the rivers Kelasuri and Enguri either left their homes, or, after

surviving the raids, famine, and diseases, was sold to the Turks by the Abkhazs (**Kakabadze, 1922: 102**), who settled at the deserted lands. At first, they ethnically assimilated the territory between the rivers Kelasuri and Ghalidzga, then they started to do the same on the left bank of the River Ghalidzga. However, there the process did not go as smoothly (**Anchabadze Z., 1959: 297**). The Abkhazs became the dominant force among the feudals but the great majority of the population still remained Georgian (Megrelian).

Giorgi IV Dadiani (1701-1709, 1710-1724) was bothered greatly that the Abkhazs “were devastating Odishi by killings and abductions,” requested from Giorgi Abashidze (the actual ruler of Imereti Kingdom) the assistance “against the Abkhazs” (**Vakhushti, 1973: 862-863**). Abashidze and Dadiani marched against Abkhazia. The Principal of Abkhazia was forced to return part of the captured lands and the jurisdiction of the Odishi Principal was restored on the territory from the River Ghalidzga to the River Enguri, although the side branch of the Sharvashidze family remained as the local ruling dynasty there (**Khorava, 1996: 121-122**). In 1704 Kvapu Sharvashidze died in Rukhi. The Catholicos of Abkhazia came from Gelati and took the “mark” (one-time tax which had to be paid by the relatives of the deceased: the personal items and arms of the deceased, the saddled horse, serfs and lands for the church, etc.). This is the clear confirmation that despite the “retreat” from the Christianity, the representatives of the Sharvashidze House remained the flock of the Catholicos of Abkhazia.

After the death of Kvapu Sharvashidze this part of Odishi Principedom was ruled by his son Murzaqan. According to the oral narrative, he banned the human trade in his lands, severely punished the thieves and robbers, established the peace of a kind. Because of this, he was loved and respected among the population. This also explains the fact that later this part of Odishi received the name “*Samurzakano*” (**Chichinadze, 1897: 394; Zukhbaia, Zantaraia, 1988: 72-73**).

§2. Abkhazia in the 18th Century

At the turn of the 18th century Western Georgia remained in the sphere of Ottoman political influence of Turkey. Sultan approved the kings of Imereti, the principals of Odishi, Guria, and Abkhazia. All of them remained Christians and the Ottomans did not even try to convert them to Islam. The subordination to Porte was expressed in the annual payment of tribute. Unlike the secular authorities, the orthodox clergy did not depend on the Ottomans and intensively fought against the Moslem pressure (**Historical documents, 1958: 45; Chkhatarashvili, 1972: 43-44; Chkhatarashvili, 1973a: 455**). Western Georgian rulers were trying to use even the smallest opportunity to get rid of the Ottoman dependence, but the feudal wars of the second half of the 17th century strengthened the Turkish influence.

In 1702, Imereti, Guria and Odishi stopped to pay the annual tribute to the Pasha of Akhaltsikhe and thus, refused to obey the Ottoman Porte. The Abkhazs, who used to attack and rob the Turkish merchants, also followed their example. The Georgians captured several fortresses from the Turks (**Vakhushti, 1973: 863; Mehmed Rashid, 1976: 25, 581**).¹ The Sublime Porte undertook drastic measures. In the summer of 1703, the Ottomans attacked Western Georgia. Local residents heroically resisted the conquerors, but the numerical superiority of the Turks and the feudal strife among the Georgian rulers benefited the enemy. The Ottomans established their control over the fortresses in Guria, then they attacked Odishi, ravaged it, installed their garrison in Rukhi fortress, and built the fortress in Anaklia. At the same time, they sent the ships against the Abkhazs (**Vakhushti, 1973: 863-864; Chkhatarashvili, 1972: 58-61; Chkhatarashvili, 1973a: 457-458; Tabagoua, 1972: 63**). Western Georgia faced the danger of being completely conquered by the Ottomans, but the inner strife that began in the Porte forced the new Sultan Ahmed III (1703-1730) to recall the troops. The Turkish garrisons were left only in Batumi, Poti, Rukhi, and Anaklia.

In 1704, the Odishi Principal attacked the fortresses with Ottoman garrisons. He was helped by the Abkhazs. Elhaj Omer, Qadi of Kutaisi, reported in his letter from 1 September 1704 that Dadiani was no longer under the submission, that he rebelled on the land and was joined by the Abkhazs on the Sea and they together captured the fortresses of Anaklia and Rukhi. However, the Turkish army soon took back those fortresses (**Shengelia, 1982: 21, 23-27**). Nevertheless, the fight against the Ottomans continued. The Odishian host, together with the Abkhazs, attacked regularly the garrisons stationed in the fortresses. In 1714, the Turkish soldiers in Rukhi and Anaklia fortresses found themselves in great trouble because of the attacks of the “infidel Megrelian and Abkhaz brigands.” They even had to leave the Rukhi fortress, but by the end of 1719 the Ottomans captured it again and stationed 65 men there (**Shengelia, 1982: 90-92, 97**).

At the beginning of the 1720s, the Russian Empire became active in the direction of the Eastern Caucasus. Their move to the Caspian Sea region, a takeover of Derbent, and relations with the Georgian kingdoms and princedoms concerned the officials of the Ottoman Porte. In 1723 the Turks sent the additional forces to the Caucasus and forced the Russians to stop their advance in the Caspian Sea region. In June of 1723 the Ottomans seized Tbilisi, and at the same time they sent additional troops to the Eastern Black Sea coast. They also rebuilt the fortresses in Poti and Sokhumi, destroyed the Rukhi fortress and strengthened the fortress of Anaklia. Turkish garrisons were stationed in Tsikhisdziri, Anakopia, and Bichvinta (**Kâtip Çelebi, 1978: 134-135, 253; Vakhushti, 1973: 883; Burjanadze, 1959: 192-197; Chkhatarashvili, 1973a: 461-462**). 200 Turkish soldiers were garrisons

¹ These facts of disobedience were tied with the Russian plans against Turkey. The capture of the Azov fortress by Peter I in 1696 and the appearance of the Russian fleet in the Black Sea gave the definite hopes to the Western Georgian rulers. They waited for the help from the Russian fleet, but their hopes were not fulfilled.

soned in Poti, 100 soldiers with 10 zamburaks in Sokhumi, 10 soldiers in Anaklia, also 10 soldiers with zamburaks in Anakopia (**Kâtip Çelebi, 1978:** 134-135, 253; **Vakhushti, 1973:** 883; **Burjanadze, 1959:** 192-197; **Chkhataraisvili, 1973a:** 461-462).

In the spring of 1725, the Odishi Principal Bezhan Dadiani (1714-1728) and the rulers of Imereti were preparing to march against Ottomans, but failed to fulfil their plans. The same year, the Abkhazs unsuccessfully attempted to drive away the Ottomans from the Sokhumi fortress (**Chkhataraisvili, 1973a:** 467). The Russian envoy in Istanbul, A. Rumiantsev and the resident I. Nepluev reported on this issue: *“The disorders, being organized by the famous Megrelian prince Bezhan Dadiani, are getting worse and supposedly the Turkish are driven out of one of the fortresses built at the coast of the Black Sea in Abkhazia”* (**Essays, 2011:** 282). In the report of 22 June 1726, A. Rumiantsev (from Kars) was informing about the new unrests in Samegrelo and Abkhazia. In 1728, the Abkhazs besieged the Sokhumi fortress. The Turkish suspected that Russians were supporting the anti-Ottoman actions of the Georgians and that Vakhtang VI, the King of Kartli in exile (1703-1724), was orchestrating them (**Paichadze, 1970:** 63, 79). In 1728, Yusuf Bey, son of Pasha of Akhaltsikhe, reconciled with the Abkhazs, and organized a successful assassination of Bezhan Dadiani, the head of the anti-Ottoman struggle (**Chkhataraisvili, 1973a:** 469). Despite this, the fight against the Ottoman aggression continued in Western Georgia. As a result of the struggle of the Georgians and Abkhazs, the Turks were not able to achieve their goal and conquer Georgia.

In the spring of 1730, the Ottomans decided to conquer the Black Sea Coast from Batumi till the Azov Sea, and subjugate the Jiks. The campaign was led by Pasha of Poti and the king of Imereti also participated in it. The Ottomans devastated Odishi. The local population to the River Ghalidzga (border with Abkhazian Principedom) fled. According to Vakhushti, *“the Ottomans and Imeretians defeated Odishi and captured everybody they met. The Ottomans entered Ilori. However, the icons, crosses and other church utensils had been hidden in advance. They burnt churches; stripped off the roof ... and ruined the murals. Then they moved on and came to Abkhazia”* (**Vakhushti, 1973:** 886-887; **Essays, 2011:** 283). The Principal of Abkhazia resisted them but after the defeat accepted their rule. The Ottomans forcibly converted the Principal and his relatives to Islam. After that they moved to Jiketi.

The king of Imereti understood that his participation in the Ottoman campaign was bringing more troubles to his country and he decided to go back home with his army. After the departure of the Imeretians, the Abkhazs rebelled and the Ottomans had to turn back. The Abkhazs killed the great part of the Ottoman army while the others, including the commander of the army, fled by sea. In spite of the defeat, the Ottomans later restored their influence in Abkhazia. According to the Ottoman sources, the Turkish garrison of 70-100 soldiers was stationed in Sokhumi fortress (under the command of Ali Arslan Bey) in 1730-1731, and 70 soldiers were stationed in Anakopia fortress in 1731-1735 (**Shengelia, 1991:** 311-314; **Shengelia, 1988:** 274-286).

The Abkhazs were well aware of the danger awaiting them if the Ottomans established the firm control in Western Georgia. Thus, despite the confrontation with Odishi Princedom, they were fighting against the aggressors together with them. At the same time, the Abkhaz leaders were taking part in the feudal strife in Western Georgia as the allies of Odishi Principal. It can be explained, on the one hand, with the joint struggle of Odishi and Abkhazia against the Ottomans, and, on the other hand, with the close relations between the princely houses of the Dadianis and Sharvashidzes (**Khorava, 1996: 129**).

Soon, the Ottomans removed their garrisons from Anakopia and Bichvinta and reinforced the Sokhumi fortress. In 1737, there sat the double-crescent Pasha, who also had under his command the Anaklia fortress (**Burjanadze, 1959: 123, 225-226**). As a result of the Ottoman invasions and feudal strife, Western Georgia was completely devastated. The same situation was in Abkhazia, where the inner struggle had also begun. The Abkhazian principals were not able to control the situation. Human traders were spreading terror in the seaside and the Abkhazs were especially distinguished among them. While the Abkhazs fought against the Ottomans, some of them participated in the human trade and were pirates and robbers. According to Vakhushti Bagrationi, they “*were attacking the ships of the Ottomans, and more Odishi and Guria than the Lazs and Chans*” (**Vakhushti, 1973: 785**). At the same time, Abkhazia itself was becoming the object of the attacks of the neighbouring highlander tribes. Its central regions were often attacked by Tsebeli, Dali, Pskhu, and Akhchipse independent communities (**Tornau, 1864: 45; Inal-ipa, 1958: 78, 81**). According to the narrative, which was written down by *Constantine Machavariani*, during one raid the neighbouring highlander tribes, with the help of Tsebeli and Dali inhabitants, ruined Dranda, Merkheuli, and Kvitouli and with the great booty and prisoners returned to the North Caucasus. *Jikeshia Sharvashidze*, the Principal of Abkhazia, went to the North Caucasus himself. After the successful negotiations, on his way back, he ran into the group of robbers in the woods and was killed (**Machavariani, 1913: 246**).

After the death of Jikeshia, his son Manuchar ascended the throne. At that time, the Ottomans subjugated Abkhazia and Jiketi and began to actively intervene in the internal affairs of the princedom. They supported the opposition. In the 1730s, they toppled *Manuchar Sharvashidze* and sent him to Constantinople with his two younger brothers, *Zurab* and *Shervan*. There they were forcible converted to Islam. The rule of Abkhazia was given to *Aslan-Bey Gech* of Jik origin, who was also the commandant of Sokhumi. From this time on, the Dzapshipa family, which was in the opposition to the Sharvashidzes, thanks to the support of by Aslan-Bey Gech, gained great influence. The Dzapshipas took the Sokhumi vicinity, the territory between the rivers Psirtska and Kodori, and appropriated some income sources, belonging to the Principal (**Khorava, 1996: 131**).

The Sharvashidzes soon found a common language with the Ottomans. In 1744, Manuchar Sharvashidze was the Bey of Batumi, *Zurab Sharvashidze* was the Bey of Sokhumi, and Shervan, who got the title of a Pasha, was ruling the Rioni (Poti) fortress

and Chaneti up to Rize (**Chkhatarashvili, 1973a: 469**). According to some data, Zurab Sharvashidze was met with great honour in Abkhazia, but the Abkhazs demanded from him to become Christian again. He ascended the throne only after being baptized in Ilori church (**Machavariani, 1913: 247**). It seems that the tradition, which obligated the Principal of Abkhazia to be the Christian, was still alive.

Zurab Sharvashidze had no heirs, so he brought back his nephew, the son of Manuchar Sharvashidze, *Kelesh Ahmed Bey (Kelesh-Bey)*, who had been in Constantinople from his young age as a hostage, and announced him as his heir. Soon, the ruler of Abkhazia brought another nephew, the son of Shervan, *Bekir-Bey*, to whom he passed over the ruling of Abzhua region (the territory between the rivers Ghalidzga and Kodori). The Principal of Abkhazia married Kelesh-Bey to the representative Dzapshipa family, to reconcile with them and to weaken their opposition (**Khorava, 1996: 131-132**).

In the middle of the 18th century the River Ghalidzga was the border of Abkhazia with Odishi in the South-East. In the North-West it bordered Jiketi along the River Bzipi /Kapoetis Tskali/ (**Vakhushti, 1973: 783; Khorava, 1996: 132**). Samurzakano, the territory between the rivers Ghalidzga and Enguri, was officially a part of Odishi Principdom, but was ruled by the representatives of the branch of the Sharvashidzes. Thus, the Georgian sources used the terms “*upper Abkhazia*” or “*Samurzakanoan Abkhazia*” for the designation of Samurzakano (**Khorava, 1996: 132**). Nevertheless, it remained a Georgian region. One of the bright examples of loyalty in that period, is Khutunia Sharvashidze, Samurzakano Principal, who showed great bravery in the Khresili Battle in 1757, when the united Georgians army under the command of Solomon I, the king of Imereti (1752-1784), defeated the Ottomans.

In the 1760s the Turks had their garrison only in Sokhumi fortress. The description of the Imereti Kingdom, which was written by Metropolitan *Maksimé Kutateli* in 1769, gives us information that Sokhumi was the port and fortress, where the Ottoman garrison was stationed (**Tsagareli, 1891: 28**). In 1770, the Russian officer Yazykov, in his report, among the Black Sea coastal fortresses mentions Aku (Sokhumi), where the Ottoman garrison was stationed and all the inhabitants were the Turks (**Tsagareli, 1891: 261**).

In 1768 the Russo-Turkish war (1768-1774) began. The South Caucasus was one of the theatres of this war. Solomon I and Erekle II were counting on the Russian support in expelling the Turks from Georgia. In 1769, the Russian expedition corps entered Georgia and moved to Poti the next year. As soon as the Russian troops entered Megrelia, the Ottomans left the Rukhi and Anaklia fortresses, which were quickly taken by Odishi Principal (**Tsagareli, 1891: 175, 261 380, 382**). Then, the commander of the Russian corps, General *Tottleben* and the Principal of Odishi besieged the Poti fortress. In February of 1771, Solomon I informed General Tottleben that Zurab and Kelesh-Bey Sharvashidze were planning to attack the Russian corps to lift the siege. The Abkhazs actually attacked the Russians and captured their horses (**Macharadze, 1997: 42-45**).

In the summer of 1771, the Russian corps once again besieged Poti, but again unsuccessfully. The Odishian host also took part in the siege. Among the Odishians were the Samurzakanoans, headed by their Principal *Levan Sharvashidze*. At the same time the Abkhazs rebelled against the Ottomans. They were led by Zurab Sharvashidze, the Principal of Abkhazia, and Levan Sharvashidze, the Principal of Samurzakano, who came to aid. The Abkhazs took the Sokhumi fortress after a fierce battle and banished the Turks from there. However, soon the disagreement arose between Zurab and Levan Sharvashidze and the latter sold the fortress back to the Turks. After that, the Ottomans did not trust Zurab Sharvashidze and supported Kelesh-Bey, although they did not risk removing Zurab from the Principal's throne (**Khorava, 1996: 161; Tsurtsumia, 2012: 58**).

In the 1770s the Turkish garrisons were expelled from the Imeretian fortresses. After the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (July 10, 1774) it became clear for the Ottomans that they were losing control over Imereti and tried to strengthen their positions in Odishi. With this purpose, they helped the campaign of the Abkhaz "lords" against Odishi. Zurab, Kelesh-Bey and Bekir-Bey were also aided by Levan Sharvashidze, who defied his suzerain (**Dadiani, 1962: 180**). "*The whole Abkhazia gathered with their lords, Jiks, Alanians, Circassians and other foreign troops... on horses and on feet... armed with guns and cannons*" and marched against Odishi (**Chkhataraisvili, 1973b: 665**). According to several literary sources, it was Kelesh-Bey and not Zurab Sharvashidze, the commander in this campaign (**Khorava, 1996: 162**). Probably, the Ottomans had the agreement with Kelesh-Bey about the campaign and Zurab Sharvashidze had to join them. The Principal of Odishi, *Katsia II Dadiani* (1758-1788) asked for help Solomon I. The king of Imereti quickly grasped the situation, gathered his troops and went to Odishi (**Khorava, 1996: 162**).

The battle took place near Rukhi in March of 1780. The defeat in the Battle of Rukhi ended the Abkhaz attacks against Odishi. From the very beginning the Georgians perceived this battle as a fight between Christianity and Islam. The bravery of the Georgians saved Odishi from the Abkhaz-Jik-Circassian ("the slaughterers of Christianity") "religious brotherhood." It was clear at that time that the Abkhazs, Jiks, and Circassians were backed up by the Ottoman Porte and the Crimean Khan (**Khorava, 1996: 163**).

§3. The Social and Economic Situation of Abkhazian Princedom in the 17th-18th Centuries

The Princedom of Abkhazia was not a strictly centralized political unit. It was divided into several parts and had several principals, although one of them had the senior status. The Principal of Abkhazia (Ah in Abkhazian) had supreme military and administrative power. The whole population considered themselves his vassal. Nevertheless, the power of the Principal of Abkhazia was limited since the other principals were subordinated to him only nominally. The possessors of other princedoms were in nominal dependency

from the Possessor and spreading of the power to the small Abkhazian possessions depended only on his strength. In fact, he was “primus inter pares” (“First among equals”) (Dzidzaria, 1988a: 212). This was caused by the existence of the village communities (“Akita” in Abkhazian). They stood somewhere between the communal and feudal units. The whole Abkhazia was divided into Akitas, headed by lords (Kraevich, 1870: 3-5; Kudryavtsev, 1922: 16; Dzidzaria, 1988a: 212). Akita consisted both of privileged (Atauad /from Georgian Tavadi – lord/ and Aamsta /Aznauri/ and unprivileged (all types of the free peasants and serfs/ parts of the population. The head of Akita was Atauad, who was called Akhilapshu (Lord, Protector, Senior, Guard). Every member of Akita was Khipsh /needing patronage/ (Kraevich, 1870: 6-7; Kudryavtsev, 1922: 16).

Although the 16th-17th cc. Abkhazia was a feudal country, the feudal relations here were not as developed here, as they were in the neighbouring Odishi. Feudalism was undoubtedly primitive in Abkhazia and it did not know the worst forms of serfdom (Grigolia, 1990: 129). The social structure in Abkhazia was similar to the one of Georgian feudalism and represented its variation. The social terms of Georgian origin prove it. “Atauad,” the Abkhaz term for the lord definitely derived from the Georgian word “tavadi.” The system of *Satavado* was formed in Georgian when Abkhazia was part of the unified feudal kingdom of Georgia. That is why the Georgian term found itself in the Abkhazian language. Only the king could give the title of *Tavadi*, thus the Abkhaz *Tavadis* considered themselves to be the representatives of all-Georgian feudal aristocracy.

Highly developed feudal relations and culture was the trademark of Abkhazia in Medieval times, but the situation has changed in the 16th-17th cc. The Georgian and foreign sources, which depict the religious (thus, social) life of the Abkhazs, clearly show it. The decline of culture is seen in the lifestyle too, which for the foreign authors is similar to the one of the Circassians. *Giovanni da Lucca* writes: “*The Abkhazs (“Abkhaza”, “Abatsa” live in the mountains, which are extended to Circassia. There are no cities in this country, but there are many villages in the mountains. The Abkhazs are scattered at the seaside. Their lifestyle is the same as of the Circassians. The forests are the secluded places for them and they do not leave them. Because they do not have other place to live, except forests, they have a few heads of cattle and lack materials for sewing their clothes. They are content with the wine made from honey, animals, and products that grow in the forests. Wheat is not growing at their place. The salt is not used here*” (Tabagoua, 1987: 169-170).

Later, in the 18th century, J. Güldenstädt also noted, that “*the Abkhazs by their family life are closest to the Circassians. They mostly are engaged in cattle-breeding. Their agriculture is limited to growing foxtail millet. In the highland mountains they grow small amount of spring wheat and barley*” (Güldenstädt, 1964: 51). According to A. Lamberti, “*the Alans and Jiks have the same customs, as their neighbouring ... Abkhazs*” (Lamberti, 1938: 169). Vakhushti also noticed that “*the clothes, and arms, and armours of the Abkhazs and Jiks are similar to the ones of the Circassians*” (Vakhushti, 1973: 787).

The Abkhazs lived by clan settlements in the hills (**Anchabadze Z., 1959: 291-292**). According to A. Lamberti, *“the Abkhazs do not live in the cities and fortresses. There will gather 10 or 20 families from one clan, who will choose the place on the hill, where they will build cabins... They will surround the chosen place with good fence and deep ditch... because they are afraid of the raid. Not the foreigners, but the Abkhazs themselves are attacking and robbing each other... Usually they conduct raids during the nights and will capture and take anyone whom they can see. To avoid this... in the dangerous times the Abkhazs don their armour, keep the spear in hand, put the shield at the head of the bed and sleep in that way”* (**Lamberti, 1938: 168**). Evliya Çelebi refers to the Abkhazs as Abazas. According to him, the Abazas living at the seaside have houses *“covered with reed; a cluster of ten houses is called a Kabak, the four sides are circumvallated like a castle, and their dogs watch like lions around it, they are obliged to do so, as all their dwellings are in the woods, and each village is afraid of the other”* (**Evliya Çelebi, 1850: 57**).

Thus, we can observe a certain decline of the social and political system and culture. Z. Anchabadze names the political break-up, feudal conflicts, domination of natural agriculture as the reason for such decline (**Anchabadze Z., 1959: 300**). Of course, all these factors could negatively affect the development of country, but they could not radically transform the faith and lifestyle to the ones of the Caucasian highlanders. This kind of metamorphosis cannot be explained by the hardships that Georgia experienced in the 13th-15th centuries (break-up of the unified feudal kingdom, invasions of the foreign enemies, feudal strife, etc.), because all the Georgian political units were practically in the same situation and conditions. All those hardships could result in the distortion of Christianity, decline of agriculture, scattering of the population, revival of the primitive forms of feudal relations, but they could not have been so wide-spread and universal. Neighbouring Odishi was facing the same difficulties as Abkhazia, but there was no regress of the social system in Odishi as it was in Abkhazia. As for the serfdom, it becomes even stronger (**Lominadze, 1966: 229; Grigolia, 1990: 130**). The decline of the socio-political system and culture in the 16th-17th centuries' Abkhazia can be explained only with the new wave of the Western Caucasian highlanders and their settlement in Abkhazia (**Lominadze, 1966: 229; Berdzenishvili, 1990: 613-614; Grigolia, 1990: 130**).

Thus, due to the migration of the highlanders, radical ethnical changes happened in Abkhazia in the 16th-17th centuries. The ethnic image of the population had completely changed. The merging of the migrating highlanders with the local population resulted in the formation of modern Abkhaz (Apsua) ethnicity. The results of the highlanders' migration clearly showed from the 15th century when the aboriginal population of Abkhazia could not absorb the migrating masses socially. The latter overrode the local population. *“The Abkhaz”* is no longer Georgian culturally and politically (**Khorava, 1996: 87**). In the 17th-18th centuries the Abkhazs became the ethnos with barbaric mentality, primitive lifestyle, and pagan religion. Those Abkhazs are no longer the successors of the old Abkhazs, the *“cultural and historical Georgians”* and creators of the great political and cultural re-

naissance of the feudal Georgian state. The civilization connection between them is broken in the lower circles which represented the bulk of the population. Only among the Abkhaz feudals are the traditions of the Georgian culture preserved. As it was mentioned by N. Berdzenishvili, A. Lamberti's depiction of the Abkhaz lady, the daughter of Sharvashidze, shows that the house of the Abkhaz feudal is "Georgian" not only because of Christianity, but of the common culture too (**Berdzenishvili, 1990: 610-614**). It is noteworthy, that the Abkhaz ladies that married the Odishians, Imeretians, or Gurians, have the typical Georgian names (*Darejan, Tinatin, Rusudan*, etc.). It was because of this that N. Berdzenishvili coined the term "present-day Abkhazia" (**Berdzenishvili, 1990: 610**), by which he attempted to differentiate the "old" and "new" Abkhazia.

When talking about the migration of the new wave of Abkhaz-Adyghe highlanders to Abkhazia, it is interesting to study the Abkhaz folklore: Historical, ethno-genetical, and genealogical narratives. They point to the long and difficult process of formation of the Abkhaz (Apsua) ethnos, in which both local and non-local clans participated (**Bgazhba Kh., 1964: 249; Inal-ipa, 1958: 103-105; Inal-ipa, 1976: 175; Zukhba, 1988: 201-202, 215; Antelava N., 2006: 56**). The narratives of several Abkhaz clans tell us about their migration from the Western Caucasus. The Avidzbas, the Ampars, the Ashubas have the genealogical narratives which recount such migration from the North Caucasus (**Zukhba, 1988: 214**). Even the Abkhaz scholars have found out that the following families came from the North Caucasus: The Achbas, the Marshans, the Kapbas, the Adleibas, the Inapshbas, and others (**Inal-ipa, 1976: 175**). Sh. Inal-ipa, who studied the Abkhaz ethno-genetical narratives, concluded that they reflect the real history (**Inal-ipa, 1958: 201-212**).

The newly arrived masses overpowered the local population and the Abkhaz nobility also were "Abkhazized," although they mostly preserved the Georgian variations of their surnames: *Sharvashidze (Chachba), Anchabadze (Achba), Marshania (Marshan), Inalishvili (Inal-ipa), Emukhvari (Emkhaa), Marghania (Maan)*. In Medieval times there were no Abkhaz *Tavads* and *Aznauris*, there was only Georgian nobility. That is why the Abkhaz nobility had the Georgian suffixes (-dze, -iani) in their surnames. Despite the "Abkhazization," most of the Abkhaz nobility preserved the Georgian language and mentality. Vakhushti was writing about his contemporary (18th c.) Abkhazs: "*They have their own language, although the nobles know Georgian*" (**Vakhushti, 1973: 786**). The nobility that "returned to paganism" was joined by the nobility of the migrated population: *The Achbas, the Inal-ipas, the Dzapshipas, the Mikanbas, the Zvanbas, the Chabalurkhvas*, etc. They also somehow fell under the influence of the Georgian culture.

The principals were using the migrated highlanders as soldiers in their struggle for expanding their land, especially against Odishi. It was because of their service that the Abkhazs were able to seize North-Western Odishi. The aboriginal population was seeing the only way of saving their lives in "Abkhazization," which resulted in their adoption of the language, religion, and traditions of the highlanders. That is why that a significant part of the Abkhazs have Georgian surnames today.

A great part (the lower circles) of the aboriginal population in the lands that were seized by the Abkhazs simply ceased their existence. They either fled, or were killed, enslaved, or sold (**Kakabadze, 1922: 102**). It is interesting that the new term was coined to denote the slave in the Abkhaz language. It was ethnonym “Agrua,” which means “Megrelian” in the Abkhazian (**Gvantseladze, 1993: 317**). According to Baron *Tornau*, the slaves (“Agrua”) were of two kinds in Abkhazia: Local-born (i.e. the descendants of the aboriginal population) and new ones, who were taken in war or during the raids (**Tornau, 1864: 58**).

The old Georgian ecclesiastical documents clearly show the ethnical structure of North-Eastern Odishi (the territory between the rivers Enguri and Kelasuri), which was captured by the Abkhazs. The persons named in those documents are Georgians (Megrelians) both by their given and family names. This confirms that this territory was Georgian both politically and ethnically (see in detail: **Khorava, 2011: 194-197**).

The Ethno-political changes on the territories captured by the Abkhazs resulted in changes of the Georgian geographical names: Anakopia and the River Anakopia became Psirtskha, the River Aghatsostskali – Aapsta, the River Zupu – Khipsta, the River Mutsistkali – Mchimta, the River Tskhomistskali – Basla, a village of Khopi – Khvap, a village of Aghatso – Aats, a village of Marmariskari – Marmal Abaa (Abaa means tower or fortress in Abkhazian), a village of Kelasuri – Abgidzira (cornel in Abkhazian), a village of Ghalidzga – Beslakhuba, a village of Tiliti – Abaazhvakhu (the hill of the old fortress in Abkhazian), a village of Shkatskari – Adzubzha (**Tskhadaia, Khorava, 2016**). Many of the Abkhaz names are just the translations of the Georgian (Megrelian) names (see chapter I of this book).

§4. Abkhazia at the End of the 18th and the Beginning of the 19th Centuries. Abkhazia’s Entry into the Russian Protectorate

At the end of the 18th century, the Ottomans sought to strengthen their positions in Abkhazia and tried to get rid of the pro-Georgian Principal Zurab Sharvashidze. They inspired Kelesh-Bey against his uncle. According to N. Dadiani, “*Zurab Sharvashidze, the ruler of Zupu (Bzipi Abkhazia) and his nephew Kelesh-Bey, the ruler of Sokhumi and its vicinity,*” had fought with each other. Zurab Sharvashidze asked for the help of Katsia Dadiani, the Principal of Odishi. Dadiani immediately gathered host and sent it to Abkhazia under the command of his brother Giorgi. “*As they came to Abkhazia, they defeated and destroyed Zurab’s enemies, and then came up to the Tskhomi fortress*”. In spite of the desperate resistance of the garrison, Giorgi Dadiani took the fortress and subjugated the rebels Zurab Sharvashidze once again (**Dadiani, 1962: 181; Essays, 2011: 290**).

Thus, Zurab Sharvashidze managed to save his authority with the help of Odishi Principal. Of course, it was also in the interests of Katsia II Dadiani to have the pro-Georgian Zurab Sharvashidze than pro-Turkish Kelesh-Bey as a Principal in Abkhazia. At

that time Abzhua, the territory from the River Ghalidzga to the River Kodori, was still ruled by Bekir-Bey, while the Sokhumi fortress and the territory from the River Kodori to the River Gumista (Gum Abkhazia) remained under the authority of Kelesh-Bey. Zurab was the owner of Bzipi Abkhazia, the lands between the rivers Gumista and Bzipi, and was the suzerain of other parts of Abkhazia.

Despite the defeat, the Ottomans were trying hard to carry out their plans towards Abkhazia. Their next attempt was successful. In the mid-1780s Kelesh-Bey dethroned Zurab Sharvashidze and became Principal of Abkhazia. Following the political reasons, the new ruler moved the principal's residence from Likhni, the old political and administrative centre of the Princedom, to the Sokhumi fortress, where the Turkish garrison was stationed (**Antelava, 1951: 82; Dzidzaria, 1988b: 22; Tsurtsunia, 2012: 64**). According to the characterizations from the contemporaries, Kelesh-Bey was the brave, sagacious and wise person, who had a great influence not only on his subjects, but on the Western Caucasian highlanders as well (**Khorava, 2011b: 290**).

Kelesh-Bey was a strong ruler. He immediately started to strengthen Principal's authority: he defeated and subjugated his cousin Bekir-Bey, who was supported by the influential feudal family of Anchabadzes. Kelesh-Bey also subjugated Marshanias, the owners of Tsebeli, and tried to extend his influence on Samurzakano too. In the struggle for the consolidation and centralization of the princedom, he used the support of the Ottomans to the maximum extent. At the same time, the Principal established close relations with the Jiks and Ubikhs (**Fadeev, 1934: 143; Dzidzaria, 1988b: 22, 27-28**). Thus, Kelesh-Bey had strengthened his position and became the plenipotentiary ruler of Abkhazia (see in detail: **Zakaraia, 2003: 62-91**). He had the troops with the strength of 10,000 men and had the fleet composed of the "well-armed galleys" (**Inal-ipa, 1956: 20-21**). The king of Imereti and the Principal of Odishi were taking into account Kelesh-Bey Sharvashidze's strength (**Dzidzaria, 1940: 8**).

Kelesh-Bey had close relations with the Ottoman Porte. At the same time, his authority was somehow limited by the commander of the Ottoman garrison stationed in the Sokhumi fortress. The Porte was paying great attention to protecting and preserving the Sokhumi fortress and port. By the order of Selim III (1789-1807) the shipyard was constructed in Sokhumi, where the battleship "Kilid ul Bahir" was built for the needs of the Ottoman fleet. After it, the shipyard was closed. Officially it happened due to the remoteness from the imperial centre, deficiency in the qualified workers and workforce (**Tsurtsunia, 2012: 66-67**), but it is probable that the Porte was afraid that the Abkhaz principals would use it for their goals.

In the 1790s, the feudal strife began once again in Western Georgia. Kelesh-Bey was also involved in it. Solomon II, the King of Imereti (1789-1810), decided to unite Western Georgia. The foreign political situation was also favourable for it. The Ottoman Porte, which supported the centrifugal forces, was weakened and could not control the

political processes in Western Georgia. Solomon II, who was calling himself “the King of the Lower Iveria and the Other Lands”, used the situation for his benefit. Solomon Li-onidze, his closest associate was writing that “*Abkhazia had belonged to Imereti from the ancient times.*” The same applied to the Poti Fortress too (**Dumbadze, 1957:** 134-135; **Essays, 2011:** 292). Meanwhile, the rulers of Western Georgian princedoms considered themselves independent and did not recognize the suzerainty of the King of Imereti. In 1792, with the support of Solomon II, the coup was organized against Grigol Dadiani. He was dethroned and replaced by his younger brother Manuchar. Grigol Dadiani fled to Samurzakano (**Dadiani, 1962:** 186; **Rekhviashvili, 1982:** 220).

In 1794, David son of Giorgi, a pretender to the Imereti throne, invaded the kingdom and reached Kutaisi. Manuchar Dadiani with Odishi-Lechkhumi host came to help the king. Meanwhile, Grigol Dadiani, marched from Samurzakano against Solomon II. According to *Niko Dadiani*, “*at that time gathered the Samurzakanoans and the Abkhazs to help Grigol Dadiani, whom they saw unjustly expelled.*” King Solomon defeated Grigol Dadiani, who requested the help from the Principal of Abkhazia. Kelesh-Bey with the Abkhaz host marched to Odishi and made camp in Khibula. At the same time, Solomon II, who received the military support from Erekle II, king of Kartli-Kakheti, defeated David son of Giorgi on 24 October 1794. The latter fled to the camp where Grigol Dadiani and Kelesh-Bey were waiting. The latter decided to avoid the fight against Solomon II and returned to Abkhazia (**Dadiani, 1962:** 186-188; **Khorava, 1996:** 167-168).

In 1798, Grigol Dadiani took back the Odishi throne. Solomon II still tried to annex the Odishi Princedom. In the summer of 1802, Solomon II defeated Grigol Dadiani once again. The ruler of Odishi again asked for the help of Kelesh-Bey Sharvashidze, “*who held the whole of Abkhazia till the Ghalidzga and was gaining strength in Dadiani’s possessions in Samurzakano...*” (**Dadiani, 1962:** 192). Kelesh-Bey demanded a hostage in return. Grigol Dadiani had to send Levan, his son and the heir to the throne. After that, Kelesh-Bey, with the army of 20,000 soldiers and 3 cannons marched to Odishi and camped by the village Abedati (near Martvili). In the autumn of the same year Solomon II invaded Odishi once again and began to annex it. Kelesh-Bey again decided not to fight against the king, made the truce and returned to Abkhazia (**ACAC, I, 1866:** 577; **ACAC, II, 1868:** 340; **Dadiani, 1962:** 192; **Khorava, 1996:** 169). Grigol Dadiani figured out that he would not be able to defend himself from the King of Imereti and decided to enter under the protection of Russia. In December of 1803, he presented the petition to the Russian administration of Eastern Georgia (**Dadiani, 1962:** 192-193).

As it is known, the Russian Empire breached the treaty of 1783, annexed the Kartli-Kakheti Kingdom in 1801, and established the Russian administration there (**Dumbadze, 1973b:** 825-827). After it, Russia started to think about the incorporation of Western Georgian political units too. *Pavel Tsitsianov*, the Russian Commander-in-Chief in the Caucasus (1802-1806), was given the instructions to use all the possibilities for the annexa-

tion of the Western-Georgian formations (**Lominadze R., 2000:** 127). At the same time, due to the certain reasons, the Russian authorities were careful and abstained from the direct annexation of them. In 1803, Grigol Dadiani, signed the “Pleading Points” in which he declared himself the Principal of Odishi and Abkhazia (also of Lechkhumi and Svaneti). The depiction of Abkhazia as a part of Odishi was the aim of giving the title of Mokvi Bishop to Pafnoti Khoziashvili, who was sent as an envoy to Russia by Grigol Dadiani (**Gama-kharia, 2005:** 343). On 2 December 1803 Grigol Dadiani signed the Treaty of Protectorate and gave an oath of loyalty to the Russian Emperor (**Khorava, 1996:** 170).

A little earlier, Grigol Dadiani notified P. Tsitsianov that “*Kelesh-Bey Sharvashidze, the Principal of Abkhazia, was also seeking the Russian protection.*” He also alleged that Kelesh-Bey was not dependent on the Ottomans and that he himself asked Grigol Dadiani to be his intermediary with Russians. P. Tsitsianov offered Grigol Dadiani to advise Kelesh-Bey either to send his representative to Tbilisi or make the written request about entering the Russian protectorate. With that, Kelesh-Bey had to declare that he was defending Poti and Anaklia not because of money he was getting from the Ottomans, but as his possessions, which he was ready to hand over to the Russians. P. Tsitsianov gave his word to Grigol Dadiani that the request of Kelesh-Bey would be complied and he would get the “protection.”

The annexation of Samegrelo Princedom had cleared the way to the Black Sea coast for Russia. At the same time, it would apply pressure on the Imeretian king. On 25 April 1804, Solomon II had to accept the terms of Russian protection. The Treaty of Elznavuri also included the Guria Princedom as it was declared a part of the Imereti kingdom (**Dumbadze, 1973a:** 855-856). Emperor Alexandre I (1801-1825) approved the Elznavuri Treaty and Dadiani’s “Pleading points” on the same day, 4 July 1804. According to this act, the Odishi Princedom, Guria Princedom, and the Imereti Kingdom became the autonomous units of the Russian Empire. Soon, P. Tsitsianov appointed General Pyotr Litvinov to the position of the “*ruler of Megrelia, Imereti, and Guria*” to fulfil the treaty with the king and principals (**ACAC, II, 1868:** 545). After Russia established its control over the greater part of Western Georgia, Abkhazia could not be left outside this process. Kelesh-Bey saw very well that Russian positions were strengthening, while the Ottoman Porte was entering the deep crisis. He understood that Russia would seek control over Abkhazia too, as it was the historical part of Georgia (**Antelava, 1951:** 98-99; **Kortua, 1964:** 187). Thus, he also decided to establish close relations with Russia. However, he was careful and did not officially stop relations with the Sublime Porte. It was a kind of political double-crossing (**Antelava, 1951:** 98-99). Nevertheless, the confrontation with the Ottomans was already taking its shape and the Russian administration in the Caucasus was looking at it thoroughly (**ACAC, II, 1868:** 190).

However, by that time, Kelesh-Bey’s relations with the Russian administration in the Caucasus became complicated. On 23 October 1804 Grigol Dadiani died. His heir, 12-

year-old Levan, was Kelesh-Bey's hostage. The leaders of Samegrelo Princedom requested Levan's release, but Kelesh-Bey asked for a huge ransom. When P. Tsitsianov heard about it, he ordered Major General I. Rieckhoff, the commander of the Russian armies stationed in Imereti and Megrelia, if Kelesh-Bey did not release the hostage, *"to march with all his military forces on Sokhumi and take it, destroy the fortress completely, and rescue Levan and install him on his throne"* (Dadiani, 1962: 194). In March of 1805, I. Rieckhoff with his detachments and Megrelian host crossed the River Inguri and went into Samurzakano for about 20 kilometres. He took few hostages and made the Samurzakano nobility swear an allegiance to Russia. The further advance was prevented by bad roads, so the General turned his units in the direction of Anaklia fortress and on 28 March he took it. At the same time, he started to prepare the naval attack on Sokhumi. Kelesh-Bey, who became afraid of the Russian advance, set Levan free on 2 April, sent eight hostages as a sign of obedience, and asked to stop the hostilities (ACAC, II, 1868: 510). On 16 April 1805, General I. Rieckhoff reported to P. Tsitsianov that the Abkhaz lords, from whom he took hostages, and also those, who were under Dadiani's subordination up to the River Ghalidzga, gave an oath to Levan Dadiani and became the subjects of Samegrelo Princedom once again. They also asked for the Russian protection. The only exception was Bezhan Sharvashidze, whom Rieckhoff could not convince and who fled to the mountains (ACAC, II, 1868: 514).

The Ottoman Porte could not leave unanswered the Russians activities towards Abkhazia. Although Kelesh-Bey was holding the Anaklia fortress, it formally belonged to the Ottomans and their garrison was stationed there. The Porte sent a protest note to St. Petersburg. Alexandre I had to apologize to the Ottoman Sultan because of the incident and acknowledged that it was a mistake and misunderstanding (Kortua, 1964: 111). In July of 1805 the Ottoman Reis Efendi met General P. Litvinov and categorically demanded from him to evacuate the Black Sea coast *"from Sokhumi to Batumi"* (ACAC, II, 1868: 518). The Emperor ordered P. Tsitsianov to return the Anaklia fortress to the Ottomans. A. Italinski, the Russian ambassador in Turkey, also got instructions to assure the Porte that that unpleasant incident was caused by a sudden mistake (Kortua, 1964: 111). The Ottomans accepted the Russian apologies. In the October of 1805 the Russians gave back Anaklia to Kelesh-Bey and also paid him 1000 rubles. At the same time, P. Litvinov categorically demanded from the Porte to forbid Kelesh-Bey the human trade activities (ACAC, II, 1868: 534; Kortua, 1964: 111). Thus, due to the harsh protest from the Ottomans, the Russian government avoided the further deepening of the conflict with the Porte.

On 9 July 1805, Levan V Dadiani (1805-1840), the new Principal of Odishi (Samegrelo), swore his allegiance to Russian Empire. *Manuchar* and *Levan Sharvashidzes*, as the rulers of Samurzakano, which belonged to Odishi, joined him and also took an oath of loyalty to the Russians. The book of oath was written in Georgian and it said: *"We, the signatories, the Abkhazian lords, Samurzakano owners, together with our land and nobili-*

ty, have entered the service of His Imperial Majesty the Most Gracious Russian King, and we swear the Almighty God and Saint Gospel that we will be the loyal slaves and servants of His Imperial Majesty and will never betray Him, and also if we hear about the betrayal and disobedience of others, we will swiftly inform about it where needed. If we do not act this way as it has been written above, may we be cursed by God and the Saint Gospel. We, the servants of the Almighty King, **are also the servants of the Sovereign Levan Dadiani, as we with our lands had always belonged to Samegrelo Sovereign Lord Dadiani**” (ACAC, II, 1868: 527; Essays, 2011: 296. Emphasis added – B.Kh.). Thus, Samurzakano, where the influence of Kelesh-Bey was clearly seen from the end of the 1790s, once again recognized the suzerainty of Odishi Principal.

The entrance of Samurzakano under the Russian “protection” and the strengthening of Russian positions in Western Georgia, cast doubts in Kelesh-Bey that the alliance with the Ottomans could give him any dividends. Thus, he began an open confrontation with the Porte. In 1806, he granted asylum to *Tayyar Pasha* from Trebizond, who was accused of the high treason and decided to escape in Russia (ACAC, II, 1868: 534, Kortua, 1964: 111). Tayyar, the Pasha of Chaneti, reneged from Sultan Selim III and was trying to persuade the other Pashas of the Central Anatolia to change their allegiance. He corresponded with the Russian authorities and promised to put the Eastern Black Sea Coast and whole Anatolia under their protection (ACAC, II, 1868: 885). When Tayyar Pasha’s betrayal was exposed, Sultan ordered to execute him, but Pasha was able to flee to Abkhazia (Jaubert, 1997: 92). It seems that he knew about Kelesh-Bey’s pro-Russian and anti-Ottoman feelings and trusted him. Tayyar Pasha continued his negotiations with the Russians from Sokhumi. He was offering his mediation to Kelesh-Bey and helped him to put Abkhazia under Russian protection. This would mean that Russia would take commanding positions on the Eastern Black Sea Coast (ACAC, II, 1868: 872; Dzidzaria, 1988b: 32-33). Sultan ordered Kelesh-Bey to execute Tayyar Pasha, but the Principal of Abkhazia refused to obey the order. Then Sultan turned to the Abkhaz feudal lords – Dzapshipa, Marghania, and others and told them to exert pressure on Kelesh-Bey. Otherwise, he threatened to start the war (Dzidzaria, 1988b: 33).

In May of 1806, Kelesh-Bey requested to put Abkhazia under the Russian protectorate and defend it from the Ottoman aggression. However, the Russian authorities, still refrained themselves from open relations with Kelesh-Bey, because he was the Ottoman subject. However, the Russians considered it useful either to recruit Kelesh-Bey, or at least to neutralize him and persuade not to have relations with the Imeretian king, as it would harm significantly the Samegrelo Principedom (ACAC, III, 1869: 190, 194).

At the same time, Kelesh-Bey, with the mediation of General I. Rieckhoff, reconciled with the Principal of Samegrelo and established friendly relations with Samegrelo principedom. In the letter, written on 20 May 1806 Kelesh-Bey informed Nino Dadiani, the Queen of Samegrelo: “We will be your well-wishers and we will not participate in any

matter that can harm or ruin you, let me be your well-wisher, the enemy of your enemy, and a friend of your friend" (**ACAC, III, 1869: 190; Essays, 2011: 297**). Along with that, the Abkhazian Principal's son Sefer Ali-Bey was baptized and he married Tamar Dadiani, sister of Grigol Dadiani (**ACAC, III, 1869: 202, 209; Consolidation, 1904: 541**). This meant the establishment of the political union between Abkhazia and Megrelian principedom, which was under the Russian protection and marked the change of Kelesh-Bey's political orientation. It was obvious that he had firmly decided to enter the Russian protection and he put this question for discussion at the popular gathering in June of 1806. The gathering, as usual, took place in the village of Likhni and it agreed to Kelesh-Bey's political course (**ACAC, III, 1869: 191-192, 574**).

This fact strengthened the positions of Abkhazia's Principal. The Sublime Porte tried to subjugate the disobedient vassal by military force. For a long time, the Ottomans sought for the pretext to invade in Western Georgia and it was decided that the time had come. In the beginning of June of 1806, Sultan ordered the pashas of Akhaltsikhe and Erzurum, under pretence of Kelesh-Bey's punishment, to attack Imereti and Samegrelo and to establish control over the Black Sea Coast. The Ottoman fleet would also participate in the campaign (**ACAC, III, 1869: 517-518**). In July of 1806, the Turkish naval squadron consisting of 11 ships, under the command of Iuruk Bairakhdar, sailed to the coast of Abkhazia. The commander of the squadron tried to persuade several Abkhaz feudal lords, including Manuchar Sharvashidze, the ruler of Samurzakano, to support him but his attempts were unsuccessful. Kelesh-Bey asked the Russian authorities to help, but official St. Petersburg was still careful in the Abkhazian affairs. Nevertheless, the Caucasian command of the Russian army received an order from Alexandre I, to block the Turkish army if it would march to Abkhazia through Samegrelo (**ACAC, III, 1869: 192-193; Essays I, 1960: 133-134**).

Kelesh-Bey was able to gather 25 thousand warriors in order to repel the Turkish aggression. Among them just 10-12 thousand were the Abkhazs, the others were hired Circassians. On 25 July 1806 the Turkish squadron approached Sokhumi, but soon the Turks became convinced that the city was well protected and that Kelesh-Bey was going to resist them. Thus, the Ottoman fleet went back. It became clear for the Porte that the attack on Imereti or Samegrelo, under any pretext, would be understood by the Russians as the break of the treaty, because these lands were under the Russian protection. Therefore, the Ottomans refrained from sending the armies on land and the pashas of Akhaltsikhe and Erzurum did not march on Abkhazia. As Tayyar Pasha mentioned, from that time on the Principal of Abkhazia *"stopped obeying Sultan's orders"* (**ACAC, III, 1869: 191-193, 519-521**).

Soon the political situation worsened in Abkhazia. The Turks used the discord in Principal's family between Kelesh-Bey and his eldest son *Aslan-Bey*. Kelesh-Bey deprived Aslan-Bey, whose mother was his first wife, Dzapshipa's daughter, from inheritance and

appointed his second son Sefer-Bey (from Leiba, his second wife of low origin) as his heir. The pro-Ottoman group led by Esheran Dzapshipas and Aslan-Bey, with the support of the Porte, organized the coup against the Principal. The conspiracy failed. Kelesh-Bey severely punished the conspirators. He invited three brothers Dzapshipas for the negotiations and assassinated them. The other representatives of this clan fled to Tsebeli. Kelesh-Bey annexed their land and joined them to his own possessions. This was done according the tradition, which deprived the brigands of all rights on property (**Pakhomov, 1953: 231; Dzidzaria, 1988b: 38-39**). With such decisive measures, Kelesh-bey was able to stabilize the situation in the principedom.

In such a situation the Russian authorities, who were awaiting the beginning of the war with the Ottomans, tried to reward everyone who had a kind attitude towards Russian Empire. *Andreas von Budberg*, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, informed *Ivan Gudovich*, the Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasus and Georgia (1806-1809), of Emperor's decision to recognize Kelesh-Bey as the Russian subject as soon as the relations with the Porte would be cut (**ACAC, III, 1869: 193**). In that case there would be no obstacles for sending Kelesh-Bey the official charter and investiture from St. Petersburg.

Russian authorities were greatly interested in seizing the Eastern Black Sea Coast including Abkhazia. The imperial government was worried that they controlled only a small part of the seaside from the left bank of the River Enguri to the right bank of the River Rioni. There was only a single fortified place, namely Kulevi (Redut-Kale) on the Russian-controlled coast and even it was hastily built. Meanwhile, the Porte hold the vast territory from the Anapa Fortress to the River Enguri and from the left bank of the River Rioni with numerous fortresses, including Sukhum-Kale, Isgauri, Anaklia, Poti, Batumi, and Gonio. That is why A. von Budberg wrote to I. Gudovich on 25 September 1806: ***“All these fortresses belonged to the Kingdom of Georgia from the ancient times. Thus, it is impossible not to wish to annex all these places... and subdue the highlanders, the tribes living across the River Kuban, who are finding the shelter in Anapa and in other Turkish fortresses”*** (**ACAC, III, 1869: 525-526, Essays, 2011: 299**. Emphasis added – **B.Kh.**).¹

¹ As it can be seen from A. von Budberg's letter, the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Empire had a fairly clear view of the borders of historical Georgia at the beginning of the 19th century. It was undoubtedly based on the knowledge of relevant historical sources. It was based on this knowledge that the Russian authorities claimed that all the above-mentioned fortresses, from Sukhum-Kale to Gonio, *“belonged to the Kingdom of Georgia from the ancient times”* («...издревле принадлежавшая к царству грузинскому»). Moreover, A. von Budberg's letter shows that the Russian authorities even considered Anapa itself to be clearly a territory historically belonging to the Kingdom of Georgia. Against this background, the “wise” statements of Russian President V. Putin that Abkhazia joined Russia in 1810 as an “independent principedom” and that “no Georgia existed at all, it was the Tiflis Governorate” («Никакой Грузии не было, это была Тифлисская губерния»), are simply ridiculous (**Putin, 2019**. On this see also: **Gamakharia, 2019**).

In October of 1806, Kelesh-Bey sent Tayyar Pasha to Crimea and granted him right to be the intermediary between him and the Russian authorities on the issue of Abkhazia's entrance under the Russian protection. The Principal of Abkhazia also gave Tayyar Pasha the terms on which he was ready to enter the Russian protection. Tayyar Pasha passed those terms, composed of eight articles, to Armand-Emmanuel duc de Richelieu, the General-Governor of Novorossiya. According to Kelesh-bey's terms, the Abkhazs were ready to serve loyally to the Emperor if they were recognized as Russian subjects; Kelesh-Bey had to be left as the Principal of Abkhazia; he had to receive the rank and corresponding salary; His favourite son (Kelesh-Bey had six sons) Sefer-Bey also had to be given the rank and corresponding salary; Kelesh-Bey was ready to send his another son to St. Petersburg for education (actually, the latter would be a hostage); Kelesh-Bey demanded a reward for 30 Abkhaz noblemen; in case of the war with the Porte, he had to be supplied with provisions; Kelesh-Bey's fortress had to be strengthened by cannons and the gunners had to be also sent there; Kelesh-Bey demanded to allow the Abkhazs to continue the human trade without which they could not exist. In exchange, the Principal of Abkhazia promised that he, with 6,000 warriors, would continue his service to the Russian throne on the Georgian borders and near Tbilisi. He also was ready to give the timber for ship-building; several places for the harbours, which would provide good shelter for the Russian fleet during winters. A. von Budberg, in his letter to A.-E. de Richelieu from 14 November 1806, stressed the importance of Kelesh-Bey's becoming the Russian subject and gave the recommendation to sign the preliminary agreement on the presented terms (**ACAC, III, 1869: 191-192, 194-195**).

On 24 December 1806, Sultan declared war on Russia. On 7 January 1807, A. von Budberg gave special instructions to I. Gudovich regarding the war and ordered him to invite Kelesh-Bey to fight against the Ottomans (**ACAC, III, 1869: 531-532**). The beginning of the new war (1806-1812) with the Porte gave the Russians an opportunity to solve the issue of Abkhazia. At the beginning of the war, the Principal of Abkhazia informed the Russians that the Turks had intentions to attack Kulevi. At the same time, the Principal of Abkhazia asked for the troops if such a need arose (**ACAC, III, 1869: 196**).

France, the ally of the Sublime Porte, was also at war with the Russian Empire. Thus, Emperor *Napoleon I* and *Charles Maurice de Talleyrand*, the Minister of the Foreign Affairs, were trying to form the strong anti-Russian coalition. In the instructions to General *Sebastiani*, the ambassador of France to the Porte, Talleyrand wrote: "*It is necessary for the Turkish naval squadron to act in the Black Sea, where the Russians cannot resist them. We also have to direct the Persian efforts towards Georgia. Get from the Porte the order to the Pasha of Erzurum to move all his forces against that province. Stay in good relationships with the Abkhazian prince and persuade him to participate in the great diversion against the common enemy. May that prince, Pasha of Erzurum, Persians and the Porte attack Georgia, the Crimea and Bessarabia at the same time*" (**Ioannisyan, 1958: 145; Essays, 2011: 300**). Obviously, Talleyrand knew Kelesh-Bey as the vassal of the Porte

and the owner of the significant military potential, which had to be used. That may explain the Russian hesitancy in trusting Kelesh-Bey. They thought that he was double-crossing them.

The hostilities in the Caucasus started with the Turkish attack on Redut-kale (Kulevi) on 8 February 1807. The Russians were able to repel the attack, but they also failed to achieve their goals to take the Black Sea Coast fortresses of Anapa, Sokhumi, and Poti. In May of 1807, the Russian and Georgian troops, under command of General I. Rieckhoff, unsuccessfully tried to take Poti (**Kortua, 1964: 160-170**). Kelesh-Bey was waiting and did not take part in any of these campaigns. In his 14 July 1807 letter, I. Gudovich demanded from Kelesh-Bey to prove his allegiance to Russia by entering the war against the Ottomans. Otherwise, he would not get the protection from the Russian Emperor (**ACAC, III, 1869: 197-199**).

In August of 1807, a truce was announced between Russia and Turkey. According to it, the Russian forces were staying in Georgia, their positions were strengthening at the Eastern Black Sea Coast, and they were preparing for taking over the coastal provinces, including Abkhazia (**Kortua, 1964: 185**). In such a situation, the Principal of Abkhazia was waiting for the news that he was accepted as the Russian subject (**FPR, 1965: 49**) and he was ready to give shelter to the Russian fleet in Sokhumi harbour (**FPR, 1965: 50**).

The Sublime Porte no longer could subdue its rebellious vassal and organized the conspiracy against him. Their main accomplice was Aslan-Bey, son of the Principal, who was expelled from the court. Aslan-Bey, with the group consisting of the Abkhazs and Jiks, was raiding the seaside villages in Samegrelo Principedom. Then he, as a prodigal son, went back to Kelesh-Bey and made peace with him. However, it seems that he already made up his mind and wanted to remove his father and half-brother Sefer-Bey from his way (**Dzidzaria, 1940: 16**). On night of 2 May 1808 Aslan-Bey, together with Bezhan Sharvashidze, killed Kelesh-Bey in his Sokhumi Palace.¹ During the attack *Batal-Bey*, the youngest son of

¹ In the recent years, the Abkhaz historians published several researches in which they try to acquit Aslan-Bey in the murder of his father. According to them, the Ottomans, local feudal opposition and the house of Samegrelo Principal were all interested in the death of Kelesh-Bey, and while Aslan-Bey really was a part of conspiracy, he never killed his father. They claim that sources do not give all the information to answer the question: Who killed Kelesh-Bey? (**Lakoba S., 1999; Gumba M.V., 2014; Gumba M.V., 2017**). They forget that Giorgi (Sefer-bey) Sharvashidze was declared an heir to his father's throne while Kelesh-Bey was still alive and healthy and that Aslan-Bey had already participated in the coup against his father. Thus, the events of 1808 were not accidental in his biography. However, the most significant part in the viewpoint of Stanislav Lakoba and Mikhail Gumba is the fact that they accuse Nino Dadiani, the actual ruler of Samegrelo Principedom in the involvement in the internal affairs of Abkhazian Principedom. Nino Dadiani's efforts and the support of the Russian administration of the Caucasus really ensured Giorgi's (Sefer-Bey) accession to throne of the Abkhazian Principedom, but it is inexplicable why her involvement on the part of the Christian and pro-Russian Giorgi

Kelesh-Bey was wounded. Aslan-Bey captured the Sokhumi fortress and declared himself the Principal of Abkhazia and the subject of the Ottomans. The Sublime Porte was swift in its reaction and supported Aslan-Bey with military and financial aid (**ACAC, III, 1869: 200; Consolidation, 1902: 41; Dadiani, 1962: 197; Essays I, 1960: 137**).

Sefer-Bey (Giorgi), who was the heir to the throne, was in Zupu (Likhni). He attempted to seize Sokhumi with his forces, but failed and decided to move to Samegrelo (**Dadiani, 1962: 197**). Since Sefer-Bey did not have enough support in Abkhazia, he decided to defeat Aslan-Bey and take back the Principal's throne with the help from the Russians. On her part, *Nino Dadiani* also persuaded him that the best means for assertion his rights on the Principal's throne was to fulfil his father's wish and become the subject of the Russian Empire. She promised him her help in negotiating the terms with the Russians. Sefer-Bey listened to Nino Dadiani, through her connections got in touch with the local Russian administration, and informed them about his firm decision to become the Russian subject (**ACAC, III, 1869: 200, 201-202; Dadiani, 1962: 197; Essays I, 1960: 137**). Nino Dadiani also contacted the Russian authorities and attempted to help his ascension to the Principal's throne. She asked Emperor to put Abkhazia under Russian protectorate, because *Sefer-Bey (Giorgi) Sharvashidze* was a member of the House of Samegrelo's Principal and previously this province belonged to Odishi (**ACAC, III, 1869: 201-203**).

During the armistice (1807-1809), while the peace negotiations still continued, Russia could not openly engage in the Abkhazian affairs. However, it did not mean the refusal from the attempts to gain a foothold in Abkhazia (**Kortua, 1964: 261**). I. Gudovich received orders from St. Petersburg to start the process of taking Abkhazia under Russian protection, but he was not speeding the process up and waited for the end of negotiations with the Porte. I. Gudovich did not openly send the forces to help Sefer-Bey, but he ordered *I. Rieckhoff*, in order to frighten the Abkhazs, to demonstrate such willingness without crossing the borders of Abkhazia. At the same time, he informed Sefer-Bey that Emperor would make him the Russian subject. I. Gudovich also instructed Nino Dadiani and Manuchar Sharvashidze to help Sefer-Bey (**ACAC, III, 1869: 208-209**).

(Sefer-Bey) against pro-Ottoman and Moslem Aslan-Bey can be considered a problem for the Abkhaz historians. This was an ordinary political interest. The court of Samegrelo Principal had no interest in the removal of Christian and already pro-Russian Kelesh-Bey, especially after he reconciled himself with the Megrelians and formed an alliance with them. Giorgi (Sefer-Bey) was already declared an heir to the Abkhazian Principal's throne, thus there was no need to get rid of him. It was the Ottoman Empire which was interested in Kelesh-Bey's removal and the Sublime Porte supported Aslan-Bey after Kelesh-Bey's assassination. It was Aslan-Bey who got the most benefits from his father's death as he, albeit briefly, ascended to the Principal's throne. Thus, there are many unanswered questions after reading S. Lakoba's and M. Gumba's books. The detailed answer to their claims demands the special publication which will be prepared soon.

In the beginning of August of 1808, the combined forces of Samegrelo and Abkhazia, along with the Russian regular units (following the orders from I. Gudovich, I. Rieckhoff allocated part of his troops to participate in the campaign), under the overall commandment of *Niko Dadiani* tried to take Sukhumi fortress, but without any success. However, they forced Aslan-Bey to set free the Kelesh-Bey's third wife (Rabia-Khanum Marshania) and son Batal-Bey, who was wounded during the assassination of Kelesh-Bey. According to N. Dadiani, they "*took hostages throughout the whole Abkhazia from the border with Jiketi to the River Ghalidzga, border of Dadiani's lands, and handed them to Sefer-Bey and then returned to Odishi in peace*" (**Dadiani, 1962: 197; Essays, 2011: 303**). Meanwhile, Aslan-Bey was supported by his relative Kuçuk-Bey Sharvashidze, the commandant of the Poti fortress, who brought three ships to Sokhumi. Three hundred Circassians had also arrived to help him. Bezhan Sharvashidze, a fierce opponent of Russia and one of the members of the coup against Kelesh-Bey, also fought together with Aslan-Bey (**ACAC, III, 1869: 207, Essays I, 1960: 138; History of Abkhazia, 1986: 75**). Aslan-Bey had significant supporters among the local feudal lords too. One of them was his brother Hassan-Bey, who ruled in Bzipi Abkhazia. Ali-Bey Sharvashidze, the ruler of Abzhua, also helped him. Both Hassan-Bey and Ali-Bey hated Sefer-Bey and feared that he would become the Principal of Abkhazia because of the Russian support (**Mayevsky, 1896: Appendix 1, 42**).

The unsuccessful attempt of taking the Sukhumi fortress convinced Giorgi Sharvashidze (Sefer-Bey) in the need of signing the so-called "*Pleading Points*," the agreement on entering the Russian protection. The text of the "*Pleading Points*" was drafted in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, then it was translated into Georgian and the translation, as the original, was sent to Giorgi Sharvashidze. On 12 August 1808, the Principal of Abkhazia, together with his loyal nobles, signed the Georgian text of the "*Pleading Points*." With this document Giorgi Sharvashidze requested to give him hereditary rights on Abkhazia and accept him, with his lands, as a Russian subject (**ACAC, III, 1869: 209; FPR, 1965: 526**). This text of the "*Pleading Points*" with Giorgi Sharvashidze's signature and seal, also with the signatures of the Abkhaz nobility, was sent to Russia. Here is this text:

"To the Most August Monarch the All-Gracious King our humblest Petition and delivery of myself with my country by this letter in the following way:

- 1. I, the rightful heir and the owner of Abkhazia, consciously am joining and becoming a slave and a servant of the Most Gracious Monarch of Russia Emperor Alexandre Pavlovich and the successor to his throne as his faithful servants.*
- 2. From now on, with this letter, I commit myself and Abkhazia and everyone in Abkhazia into hereditary serfdom and slavery of the throne of the Most Gracious and Sovereign monarch of All Russia and the successor to his throne, within the creed of the first faith of ours, as our ancestors were Christians by the Greek canon.*

3. *Let his Imperial Majesty with his kindness be gracious with me and mark me with the sign as the other princes of the Imperial throne are marked as slaves.*
4. *By the holiest benefaction and grace of His Imperial Majesty I to be given the charter which will ascertain and proof my inheritance, for me to be the prince and ruler of my country and my son and his sons to be forever the rulers and owners of the inherited possessions by the grace of whoever be with happiness and strength the King on the Imperial throne, and also my inheritance and rule to be conducted by the holiest grace charter with the signature and seal of the Most Gracious King of ours.*
5. *Protect my country by the army of Our Most Gracious and Sovereign King Our Emperor.*
6. *With the mercy and love of mankind of his Most Gracious and Sovereign King Our Emperor, let me have the same benefit and grace which had my heir and owner of Abkhazia Kelaish Ahmad Bey my father.*
7. *With all the zealousness till the last drop of my blood I will name myself and wish loyalty and slavery and will give forever the oath and pledge **to be obedient to the Governor General of Georgia** with my loyal and faithful slaves and servants and give the woods for ships as the Ottoman Porta was receiving it, also the ores of gold and silver which are found in my country and of which whatever decides to give to me with his generous kindness the Most Gracious and Sovereign King of ours.*

With the most subject and ardent sincerity I commit myself and my country to the Imperial throne of Russia pledge and oath and with the faith of the Greek canon, in which we sign this way:

Prince Sharvashidze Giorgi”.¹

The fact that the most significant diplomatic document, with which the Abkhazian Princedom was entering under the protection of the Russian Empire, was composed and signed in Georgian, undoubtedly confirms that the Principal House of Abkhazia belonged to the all-Georgian national, state, and cultural world (**Paichadze, 1999: 217**).

In June of 1809, *Alexandre Tormasov*, the new Governor General of Georgia (1809-1811), was informed from St. Petersburg that it was already decided to accept Sefer-Bey as Russian subject and soon the insignias of the investiture would be sent. Emperor Alex-

¹ There are some differences between the Georgian and Russian texts of the “Pleading Points.” Since Giorgi Sharvashidze and other Abkhazian feudal lords signed the Georgian version, it is the authentic one. Thus, in this book the translation of the Georgian text is given (**Sakhalkho Ganatleba, 1989**). The English translation of the Russian text is given in: **Essays, 2011: 303-304**) – editor’s note.

andre I awarded Giorgi Sharvashidze the order of Saint Anna of the 1st (the highest) class and fixed the pension of 2500 rubles annually. His stepmother Rabia-Khanum Marshania (the wife of Kelesh-Bey) received 1500 roubles as an annual pension. It was assumed that the emperor's such gracious attitude would have an influence on the Abkhaz lords and raise the authority of Sefer-Bey (**ACAC, III, 1869**: 204; **Berdzenishvili, 1965b**: 408). Thus, Abkhazia was recognized as the Russian protectorate (**Kortua, 1964**: 263).

Although the Russians recognized Giorgi Sharvashidze as the Principal of Abkhazia, he had no real authority and power in Abkhazia. That is why A. Tormasov ordered to Major General Dimitri Orbeliani to secure support from the Abkhaz feudal lords (**ACAC, IV, 1870**: 206). Meanwhile, Aslan-Bey still enjoyed political and financial support from the Porte. Nino Dadiani informed D. Orbeliani that the ship with gifts and money arrived in Sokhumi from Constantinople. The Ottomans promised Aslan-Bey all possible help in his fight against the Russian armies stationed in Samegrelo. Manuchar Sharvashidze informed Russians that Kuçuk-Bey Sharvashidze, the commandant of the Poti fortress, had asked for help from the North-Eastern Black Sea coastal tribes and it seemed that this army was already gathering to protect Poti and then to capture Redut-kale and Anaklia. A. Tormasov ordered D. Orbeliani to take all the necessary steps for the protection of Redut-Kale and Samegrelo and also to attempt the estrangement of certain Abkhaz feudal lords from Aslan-Bey (**ACAC, IV, 1870**: 202-203, 389-390).

On 12 August 1809, the Russian detachments under the command of D. Orbeliani marched from Redut-kale towards Poti. The hosts of Samegrelo and Samurzakano commanded by Niko Dadiani and Manuchar Sharvashidze also participated in the campaign. Levan V Dadiani and the Bishops of Chqondidi and Tsaishi were accompanying the Megrelian troops (**ACAC, IV, 1870**: 390-391, 392; **Dadiani, 1962**: 199; **Mikhailovsky-Danilevsky, 1849**: 172; **Kortua, 1964**: 248). It is noteworthy that the Abkhazs supporting Sefer-Bey were fighting along with the Megrelian and Gurian forces at Poti (**Berdzenishvili, 1965b**: 408). The capture of the Poti fortress strengthened the Russian influence in Western Georgia. On 11 January 1810 A. Tormasov informed Jean Baptiste de Traversay, the Minister of the Navy of Russian Empire that after the capture of Anapa and Poti it was time to take Sokhumi. Russia considered capturing Sokhumi and whole Abkhazia as the most significant for establishing its domination in the Black Sea basin. This would have not only military, but political and economic importance too. The Russian authorities hoped that with taking control over Sokhumi they would weaken the alliance between the Ottoman Porte and the highlanders. Thus, the latter would limit the aggressive actions against Russian Empire. The annexation of Abkhazia would end the Turkish attacks from there and, with the control of Anaklia and Sokhumi fortresses, Samegrelo would be secured. Ships would freely sail to Crimea. Also Russia would have the necessary timber for the ship-building (**ACAC, III, 1869**: 209; **Kortua, 1964**: 257).

On 17 February 1810 Emperor Alexander I approved Giorgi (Sefer-Bey) Sharvashidze as the Principal of Abkhazia on the provision of his recognition of Russian su-

preme authorities and internal autonomy (**ACAC, III, 1869: №571**). However, it was the formal recognition since the authority in Abkhazia belonged to Aslan-Bey who was sitting in Sokhumi fortress. Giorgi Sharvashidze could not take over Abkhazia with only his forces. Thus, on 8 June A. Tormasov asked Nino Dadiani to send the host from Samegrelo, at least 1000 warriors, under the command of Manuchar Sharvashidze. According to him, such a campaign was essential until the Russian army and fleet would reach Sokhumi and it would be considered as a service to the Russian Emperor from Samegrelo's Principal's House (**ACAC, IV, 1870: 396-397**). The naval squadron composed of six ships was formed in Sevastopol at the beginning of June (**ACAC, III, 1969: 398; Kortua, 1964: 264**) and it left for its destination on 19 June 1810.

On 26 June 1810, A. Tormasov sent a letter to Levan V Dadiani. The Russian Governor General expressed his hope that Megrelia would support Sefer-Bey and F. Simanovich, the Provisional Governor of Imereti, in taking the Sokhumi fortress. A. Tormasov wanted to take the fortress in the summer of 1810. He repeated to the Principal of Samegrelo that the participation in Sokhumi's capture, while securing Samegrelo from the attacks, would be also considered a service to the Emperor. A. Tormasov also requested from the Principal to assure Sefer-Bey to gather as many Abkhazs as he could (**Kiria, Saria, 1967: 30**). However, A. Tormasov's plans were not fulfilled. Solomon II started rebellion in Imereti and the troops stationed there, as well as the host of Samegrelo, were not able to participate in the campaign to capture Sokhumi.

In the morning of 8 July 1810, the Russian naval squadron reached Sokhumi. They started shelling the harbour and sank seven Turkish ships. On 10 July the Russian troops landed on the shore and first took the city and then the fortress. The Turks fled from the North-Western gate (**ACAC, IV, 1870: 425; Mikhailovsky-Danilevsky, 1849: 266; Kortua, 1964: 264; Dzidzaria, 1988b: 46**). Aslan-Bey was not in Sokhumi at that time. Before the beginning of the battle, he left with 4 thousand troops to help Solomon II. He was going to attack Samegrelo and paralyse its forces, thus preventing Levan V Dadiani from helping the Russian troops in Imereti. Upon receiving news of the Russian attack on Sokhumi fortress, Aslan-Bey immediately went back, but the fortress was already in the hands of Russians, therefore, he had to flee to the mountains (**ACAC, IV, 1870: 328; Dumbadze, 1973a: 873; Kortua, 1964: 264-265**).

By the beginning of August of 1810, General F. Simanovich was appointed as the ruler of Imereti. His jurisdiction was extended on the Western Georgian princedoms too. As A. Tormasov informed F. Simanovich, he was officially named the ruler of "Imereti, Megrelia, Guria, and Abkhazia" (**ACAC, IV, 1870: 324**).

On 23 August 1810, Giorgi Sharvashidze signed the oath. It meant the entrance of Abkhazia under the protection of the Russian Empire (**ACAC, IV, 1870: 425**). Essentially it was the beginning of the process of the annexation of the region. In October, accompanied by the squadron of Russian soldiers, Giorgi Sharvashidze came to Sokhumi from Redut-kale. In front of the nobility, elder men, and other people, he swore an allegiance to

the Russian Empire. After that, in the solemn ceremony, he was handed the princely insignias and the charter on his approval as a Principal of Abkhazia. According to A. Tormasov, *“the Abkhazs attending the event were mesmerized with such a new performance and officially accepted Sefer-Ali-Bey as their legal ruler”* (ACAC, IV, 1870: 425).

The capture of Sokhumi and the establishment of the Christian ruler as a Principal had a great significance for Russia. Russia was getting a foothold at the Eastern Black Sea Coast. Taking the Sokhumi fortress and expelling Aslan-Bey was not as much Sefer-bey's victory over his half-brother, but Russia's victory over the Ottoman Porte (Kudryavtsev, 1922: 158). Giorgi Sharvashidze chose the Sokhumi fortress as his residence. He enjoyed self-government only in internal affairs. For the protection of the Principal, the Russian command left three hundred soldiers in Sokhumi. Russians wanted to strengthen his government and subdue the Abkhaz feudal lords to him. A. Tormasov wrote to Nino Dadiani, that the Russians had assisted Giorgi Sharvashidze and would continue to help him out of respect to her. The Commander-in-Chief of Georgia instructed the actual ruler of Samegrelo to help Sefer-Bey in winning over his people and strengthening his positions. A. Tormasov was interested what kind of authority had Sefer-Bey; whether he had any supporters who would help him to increase his influence with the assistance of the Principal's House of Samegrelo and Russian forces; what kind of actions were taken by Samegrelo Principedom in this direction and whether they still needed the Russian troops (ACAC, IV, 1870: 398-399).

At the beginning of the 19th century, the North-Western border of Abkhazia was the River Bzipi, because the Jiks had seized the territory from Gagra pass to the River Bzipi (Khorava, 1996: 135-136). In the South-East the border went along the river Ghalidzga, which was separating Abkhazia from Samegrelo Principedom. The Northern border was nominally going along the Greater Caucasus range, while from the West it is bounded by the Black Sea. At the time of entering the Russian protection, Abkhazia did not represent an integral political unit and it was divided into the independent regions. The power of Principal Giorgi Sharvashidze was spread only to Zupu or the Bzipi Abkhazia (among the rivers of Bzipi and Gumista). The Gum Abkhazia (between the rivers Gumista and Kodori) and Abzhua (between the rivers Kodori and Ghalidzga) belonged to the other representatives of the house of Sharvashidze. The mountainous regions, namely Tsebeli and Dali in the middle and upper reaches of the River Kodori, and Pskhu in the middle reaches of the River Bzipi were the lands of Marshanias, who neither recognized Giorgi Sharvashidze's (1810-1821) authority, nor entered the Russian protectorate (ACAC, IV, 1870: 425). Meanwhile, following the example of the Principal of Abkhazia and being under his influence, *Levan Tsanba (Tsanubaia)*, the ruler of the Jiks, also entered the Russian protectorate and recognized the supremacy of the Principal of Abkhazia (ACAC, IV, 1870: 426, 429).

CHAPTER VI. THE RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL CHARACTER OF PRESENT-DAY ABKHAZIA IN THE 4TH-18TH CENTURIES

§1. Christianity in Abkhazia. Catholicosate of “Abkhazia” (Western Georgia) in the 9th-18th Centuries

One of the topics, which the Separatist historiography is trying to falsify, is the history of the Catholicosate of Western Georgia (Abkhazia). For the first time this issue was brought forward in 1917 when the restoration of the autocephaly of the Georgian Church on 25 (O.S. 12) March 1917 raised the issue of the legal status of Sokhumi Eparchy. The publication of *Mikhail Tarnava's* report (**Tarnava, 1917**) made at the Abkhaz Church Congress (24-27 May 1917) was the first instance of the falsification. In this report, M. Tarnava presented the Catholicosate of “Abkhazia” as the “*Abkhaz National Church.*” Thus, the author has given the historical “proof” to the demand for the creation of an independent Abkhaz church (**Gamakharia, 2011: 5-8**). During the era of Soviet atheism, the separatists paid less attention to church topics, but since the second half of the 1980s, in the context of the rise of separatism, it again became relevant). However, the contemporary separatist historiography does not go far beyond the “claims” of M. Tarnava.

The separatist historiography has one “small problem” in “proving the historical justice” of secessionist demands: The existence of old Georgian temples with Georgian epigraphy, Georgian books, and Georgian clergy and the absence of Apsua-Abkhaz cultural heritage, Apsua-Abkhaz epigraphy, literature, and liturgy. Nevertheless, they try to declare the Catholicosate of Western Georgia (Abkhazia) as the “Abkhaz” national church organization (**Papaskiri, 2017a: 69-108; Papaskiri, 2017: 39-68**).

Christianity in Abkhazia was widely spread in the 4th century. There already was eparchy in Bichvinta at that period and its bishop Stratophilus was present among the participants of the 1st World Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325. There is a reference from Procopius too: “*These Apsilii are subjects of the Lazi and have been Christians from ancient times*” (**Procopius, 1962: 73**). According to his other reference, Byzantine Emperor Justinian I (527-565) converted the Abazgoi to the Christianity and “*...also built a sanctuary of the Virgin in their land, and appointed priests for them, and thus brought it about that they learned thoroughly all the observances of the Christians...*” (**Procopius, 1962: 81**). The Sebastopolis (Abazgian) Eparchy, which absorbed the Bichvinta Cathedra, had to be founded around that time too. The lists of eparchies (*Notitiae Episcopatum*) of the Constantinople Patriarchy, which were compiled during the reign of Emperor Heraclius (610-641), mention Sebastopolis autocephalous Archbishopric of Abazgian Eparchy and the *Ziganeos* (Gudakva) Bishopric of *Lazica* Eparchy: “*Επαρχία Λαζικής, ὁ Φάσιδος, ὁ Ροδοπόλεως, ὁ τῆς Ἀβισσηνῶν, ὁ Πετρῶν, ὁ τῆς Ζεγανέων*” (**Georgica, 1952: 130, 140**). Emphasis added – J.G.).

The condition of the Christianity in Abkhazia in the 2nd half of the 7th century is depicted by *Theodosius of Gangra*, who refers to the “Christ-loving” Lazs and Abazgoi and their countries with “Christ-loving rulers” (**Theodosius, 1941**: 45, 50). According to the viewpoint established in Georgian historiography, the separation of the Western Georgian Church from the Constantinople Patriarchate should have been completed in the 880s-890s (**Berdzenishvili, 1966b**: 45; **Kudava, 2000**: 47; **Kudava, 2002**: 565; **Koridze, 2003**: 9-10; **Gamakharia, 2005**: 105-108; **Papaskiri, 2017a**: 95; **Papaskiri, 2017**: 58). The autocephaly of the Catholicosate of “Abkhazia” sped up the “nationalization” of the Church – complete transition to Georgian liturgy, and resulted in the revival of the spiritual and cultural life in Western Georgia, including Abkhazia. The Georgian language was dominant in Abkhazia itself. “*By the beginning of the 9th century, Western Georgia, or the “Abkhazs” Kingdom, became a country of Georgian written culture and literacy. It was against this background that the formation of Catholicosate of “Abkhazia, the independent ecclesiastical organization of Western Georgia, took place”* (**Papaskiri, 2017a**: 91-92; **Papaskiri, 2017**: 58).

From the beginning of the 11th century, when the process of unification of Georgian lands and the formation of a unified state was basically completed, the Catholicosate of “Abkhazia” became subordinated to the Mtskheta Catholicos. It is thought that is the reason because of which the Catholicos of Kartli was called the Catholicos-Patriarch (**Papaskiri, 2017a**: 95-96; **Papaskiri, 2017**: 58). In the 11th-12th centuries the existence of two Catholicoses (“*The Catholicoses, “both Catholicoses”*”) is also documented (**Hundred Years’ Chronicle, 2014**: 151, 317, 322; **Gvenetadze, 2003**: 38-42). The Catholicos of “Abkhazia” managed the Western Georgian eparchies, including Dranda, Mokvi, and Bedia cathedrals. The patriarch of Georgia was called “the Elder” while the Catholicos of “Abkhazia” was called “the Junior” (**Koridze, 2002**: 6). The territory of present-day Abkhazia is covered with temples built in the 10th-14th centuries. It is noteworthy that Kelesh-Bey Sharvashidze, the Principal of Abkhazia, admitted in 1806 that these temples were built by Georgians: “*When there was one king in Imereti and Georgia, Abkhazia was also under the control of those kings, not the Ottoman Porte, as it is evidenced by the churches they have built here”* (**ACAC, III, 1869**: 193).

Churches and monasteries in Abkhazia are one of the bases and an integral part of Georgian spirituality. First and foremost, we should mention the *Bichvinta Cathedral* and the eparchies of *Dranda* and *Mokvi*. The Greek eparchy of Gudakva was replaced in 999 by the *Bedia* Eparchy, which was founded by Bagrat III in 999 (**Matiane Kartlisa, 2014**: 147). Bedia became sort of a symbol of the kingdom's wealth and Bagrat III's greatness. He is buried there. Dozens of other temples of all-Georgian importance including *Likhni*, *Ilori*, *Msighkva*, *Anukhva*, *Khuapi*, *Anakopia*, *Bombora*, *Kamani*, *Tsebeli*, *Kiachi*, *Tiliti*, *Lashkendar*, *Chkhortoli*, *Ghumurishi*, and many others were also built in the 10th-14th centuries. The temples in Abkhazia are decorated with Georgian inscriptions (**Silogava, 2004**; **Akhaladze, 2005**).

For centuries, *Bedia* remained one of the most advanced ecclesiastic centres in Georgia. During the reign of *David the Builder* (1089-1125) there existed an exterritorial seat of *Bedieli-Alaverdeli*. Like several other similar seats (*Chqondideli-Matsqvereli*, *Chqondideli-Samtavneli*, *Chqondideli-Ujarmeli*) the main mission of *Bedieli-Alaverdeli* was to consolidate the political and spiritual unity of Georgia. From 1118, after the death of *Giorgi Chqondideli-Mtsignobartukhutsesi*, this position was given to his nephew *Svimon*, “who at that time was the bishop of *Bedia* and *Alaverdi*. Resembling in everything his mother’s brother, *Giorgi*, he was a man of exceptional perfection and wisdom” (**Life of David, 2014: 182**).

The introduction of the *Chqondideli-Mtsignobartukhutsesi* position limited the self-government of the Catholicos of “*Abkhazia*” to some kind. Nevertheless, he played a major role in the ecclesiastical and political life of Georgia. The accomplishments of the Catholicosate of “*Abkhazia*” are the final separation of Western Georgian Church from Constantinople, the replacement of Greek eparchies with Georgian ones, the transition of the entire liturgy into Georgian, the development of Georgian literature. Catholicosate supported kings of the “*Abkhazs*” in their struggle for ecclesiastical and state unity of Georgia. From the second half of the 13th century, when the disintegration processes began in Georgia as a result of the policy of the Mongol invaders, the Catholicos of “*Abkhazia*”, which remained part of the united Georgian Church and under the common subordination to the Georgian Patriarch, again acquired real functions.

The Catholicoses of “*Abkhazia*” participated in the political and ecclesiastical life of Georgia. Catholicos of “*Abkhazia*” was the main figure after the Patriarch during the coronation of the Georgian kings (**Code and Implementation, 1965: 51-53**). Moreover, it was the Catholicos of “*Abkhazia*” who conducted the process of the coronation of King of Georgia in 1225. This happened after the capture of Tbilisi by the Khwarazmians, when the royal court had moved to Western Georgia. It was then that the Catholicos of “*Abkhazia*” crowned the young *David VI son of Rusudan*, as the King of All Georgia, in Kutaisi (**Hundred Years’ Chronicle, 2014: 328**).

The first Catholicos of “*Abkhazia*”, whose name is mentioned in the Georgian sources, is *Svimeon*, the Catholicos at the turn of the 12th century (**Koridze, 2002: 4-6**). *Eustatius*, mentioned in “*Dzeglistsera*” (the main document adopted at 1104 Council of Ruisi-Urbnisi), is probably the Catholicos of “*Abkhazia*” (**Japaridze A., 1999: 36-37**). In the second half of the 12th century, the Catholicos of “*Abkhazia*” was *Nikoloz* (**Georgian Historical, 1984: 106**). In the 1240s the Catholicos of “*Abkhazia*” was *Arseni Bulmaisidze*; in the 1370s-1380s – *Daniel*. In 1390, King George I of Imereti (1389-1392) appointed *Arseni* as Catholicos of “*Abkhazia*” (**Vakhushti, 1973: 803**).

The role and place of the Catholicosate of “*Abkhazia*” and its hierarchs was changing according to the political situation. The break-up of the unified kingdom into separate kingdoms and princedoms at the end of the 15th century made it impossible to preserve the ecclesiastical unity. According to the decision of *Bagrat VI*, the king of Kartli-Imereti

(1466-1478, king of Imereti as Bagrat II in 1463-1466), and *Shamadavle Dadiani*, the ruler of Odishi (1470-1474), from the first half of the 1470s the Catholicosate of "Abkhazia" became independent. *Michael IV*, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch (1454-1478), who was in Western Georgia at that time, ordained *Ioakimé*, the *Bishop of Tsaishi-Bedia*, as Catholicos of "Abkhazia." The information about these events is given in "*Mtsnebai Sasjuloi*" ("*Canonical Commandment*"), which was approved by Michael IV. *Sharvashidze*, the *Eristavi* of Apkhazeti, is not even mentioned in this document. Although the seat of the Catholicos was still in Bichvinta, within Apkhazeti Saeristavo, nobody asked his opinion regarding the appointment of Catholicos of "Abkhazia." According to "*Mtsnebai Sasjuloi*," the borders of Catholicosate were spread "*on this side of the River Chorokhi, this side of Ovseti, of this side of the Pontus Sea, where the borders of Great Bichvinta lie*" (**Canonical, 1970: 223; Gamakharia, 2005: 872**). It should be mentioned that the separation of the Catholicosate of "Abkhazia" from Mtskheta was not the result of schism of a kind. It was caused by political situation in the country.

The Georgian historical sources give us scarce information regarding Catholicos *Ioakimé* and his two successors, *Barthlomé* and *Stephané*. Much more data exists about *Malachia I (Abashidze)*. He was appointed as Catholicos of "Abkhazia" by Bagrat III, king of Imereti (1510-1565) in 1519 and stayed in his seat till the beginning of 1540s. In those times was composed *The Great Iadgar of the Catholicosate of "Abkhazia"* ("*Bichvinta Iadgar*"), one of most significant monuments of Georgian canonical law (**Bichvinta Iadgar, 1965: 176-183**). It contains the list of the gifts from Western Georgian kings and principals, the property of Bichvinta Eparchy, the legal norms protecting the clergymen and serfs, the colophons of secular persons and clerics. According to *Bichvinta Iadgar*, the borders of Catholicosate of "Abkhazia" were the following: "*The Catholicos blesses the perish between Likhi and Caffa, and between the border with Russia and Chaneti*" (**Bichvinta Iadgar, 1965: 180**).

"*Bichvinta Iadgar*" is certified by the signatures of eight Catholicoses of "Abkhazia", beginning with *Malachia I* and ending with *David Nemsadze* (1673-1696). Meanwhile, the separatist falsifiers of the history of the Catholicosate of "Abkhazia" not only do not use *Bichvinta Iadgar* as a source, but they do not even mention it. *Joseph (Ioseb) I (Machutadze)* ascended the throne of the Catholicos of "Abkhazia" around 1541. In 1557-1578 it was occupied by *Evdemon I (Chkhetidze)*. Due to the permanent invasions of the Jik-Abkhazs the situation in the Apkhazeti Saeristavo (present-day Gudauta and Gagra districts) became unbearable. Thus, Catholicos *Evdemon I* had to leave the residence in *Bichvinta* and transfer the Catholicos' seat to the Church of St George in *Gelati (Lominadze, 1966: 164-240)*. This church was officially handed over to him in 1569. The Catholicoses of "Abkhazia" also had a residence in *Shkhepi* (near Senaki) until the middle of the 18th century (**Vakhushiti, 1973: 781**). There is an opinion that *Shkhepi* was the summer residence of the Catholicos of "Abkhazia" (**Kelenjeridze, 1918: 108**).

Evdemon I is connected with convening the Church Council of Western Georgia at the turn of the 1560s. The Council adopted “Catholicos’ Canon,” the important monument of Georgian law (**Gamakharia, 2005:** 183-184, 892-896). The Church Council was chaired by Catholicos-Patriarch of Kartli Malachia and the Catholicos of “Abkhazia” Evdemon I, which emphasized the unity of the Georgian Church. Along with other clerics, the meeting was attended by “*Bedieli, Mokveli, and Drandeli*” (**Vakhushti, 1973:** 824). In 1568, by the decree of Evdemon I, the icon of the Mother of God of Bichvinta was painted. It became the most sacred object of the Catholicosate of “Abkhazia.” At first the icon was rested in Bichvinta Cathedral, which remained canonically a Catholicos’ cathedral, then it was moved to Gelati.

After the death of Evdemon I, the throne of the Catholicos of “Abkhazia,” during several decades (1578-1614) was held by *Ekvtime I (Sakvarelidze)*. He was engaged in extensive cultural and educational activities in both Western and Eastern Georgia. This great clergyman is referred to in historical sources as “*the Patriarch of Abkhazia and All Georgia, the Catholicos*” (**Catholicos-Patriarchs, 2000:** 141-142). In 1614-1639 Malachia II (Gurieli) was the Catholicos of “Abkhazia”. From 1625 he became the Principal of Guria. *Malachia II's* reign coincides with the dominance of Levan II Dadiani in Western Georgia, including Abkhazia. He tried to convert the newly arrived Jik-Abkhazs to the Christian faith in Apkhazeti Saeristavo. According to Dositheos II, Patriarch of Jerusalem (1669-1707), “*Levan, who reigned there (Abkhazia – J.G.) for a long time, after the year of 1600 baptized 40 thousand Abkhazs and gave them a bishop too*” (**Dositheos, 1847:** 28). The Ap-sua-Abazas did not embrace the Christian faith. According to Giovanni da Lucca, who had been in Bichvinta at the end of the 1620s, it was only there that a Georgian priest conducted liturgy (in Georgian). Meanwhile, he also mentions that to the South-East from Sokhumi, there were eparchies of Dranda, Mokvi, and Bedia, and Kiachi (present-day Jgerda) and Tshipuria churches. All of them belonged to the Samegrelo Princedom (**Tabagoua, 1987:** 155-181).

Malachia II periodically visited Bichvinta, where the Holy Myrrh was boiled. *Gabriel Gegenava*, the Ambassador of Samegrelo Princedom in Moscow in 1638, said at various meetings that their patriarch Malachia lived in the Bichvinta monastery (**Gamakharia, 2014:** 225, 232). Malachia II, along with the Theatine missionary *Teramo Cristophoro Castelli* was in Bichvinta in 1634-1639 and observed the restoration work that was carried out in the Bichvinta Monastery. Cristophoro Castelli calls Malachia II “*the Patriarch of Iberia*” and writes: “*By the order and decree of the Patriarch of Iberia, the Abkhazs bring a pillar to repair the Church of St Andrew the Apostle*” (**Castelli, 1976:** 177).

Catholicos *Malachia II* expanded the church lands. According to the Great Book of Bichvinta compiled by him in 1621 (it is not even mentioned in the researches of Abkhaz scholars), describes 24 farms under the administration of the Catholicos of “Abkhazia” to the South-East of Sokhumi, i.e. in the Samegrelo Princedom. The book mentions hundreds

of serfs with their surnames and all of them are clearly Georgian. Meanwhile, to the North-West of Sokhumi, i.e. in the Apkhazeti Saeristavo, none of the farms belonging to the Catholicos of “Abkhazia” were functioning at that time (**Gamakharia, 2005: 198-199**). In 1640-1657 the Catholicos of “Abkhazia” was *Maxim I (Machutadze)*. He travelled several times to Jerusalem and took gifts to Georgian monasteries there. For his contribution Maxim I was depicted between the frescoes of saint kings Mirian (4th c.) and Vakhtang Gorgasali (5th c.) in the Monastery of the St Cross in Jerusalem (**Catholicos-Patriarchs, 2000: 149**). Presumably, he was buried in the same monastery.

In the second half of the 17th century, the throne of the Catholicos of “Abkhazia” was held by *Zakaria (Kvariani)* in 1658-1660, *Svimon (Chkhetidze)* in 1660-1666, *Evdemon II (Sakvarelidze)* in 1666-1669, *Ekvtime II (Sakvarelidze)* in 1669-1673. They managed their flock from Gelati and, due to the existing situation, could not visit Bichvinta at all. The same can be said about *David (Nemsadze)*, the Catholicos of “Abkhazia” in 1673-1696. It was during his times that the Sharvashidze princely house and Apsua-Abkhazs, who had “returned to paganism,” completed the seizure of the lands of the Samegrelo Princedom from the River Kelasuri to the River Enguri. Nevertheless, *Kvapu Sharvashidze*, one of the main organizers of these destructive processes, swore allegiance to the Catholicoses of “Abkhazia” *David Nemsadze* (1673-1696) and *Grigol Lordkipanidze* (1696-1742). He officially recognized them as his spiritual father and sought to repent his sins (**Takaishvili, 1920: 35-36; Kakabadze, 1921: 88**).

Georgian Christian population was annihilated in the occupied territory. Those who stayed, were either killed, or sold to the Ottomans or enslaved. The rest fled to other parts of Western Georgia (**Gamakharia, 2005: 276-283**). The same fate befell the Georgian clergy. Many Orthodox clergymen were killed in “new” Abkhazia. From those who escaped, some were sheltered by Catholic missionaries and saved from death.

As a result of radical changes in the ethno-political situation on the territory of present-day Abkhazia, Georgian churches and monasteries, including religious and cultural centres of all-Georgian importance (Bichvinta Cathedral, the eparchies of Dranda and Mokvi, churches of Likhni, Anukhva, Anakopia, Kiachi, Tchala (Tchlow), Tiliti, and others) have been destroyed or ceased to function. According to Vakhushti Batonishvili, “*there were no more bishops in Dranda and Mokvi*” (**Vakhushti, 1973: 845**). The palaces of Dadiani and Bishop “were destroyed by the Abkhazs along with the temple” in Mokvi in 1678 (**Seleznyov, 1847b: 162-163**). *Dositheos II*, Patriarch of Jerusalem, who arrived in Georgia in 1677, witnessed the desecration of Christian temples by the pagan Apsua-Abkhazs (**Dositheos, 1847: 31, 46**). The farms of Catholicos were first looted and then completely destroyed. The situation was different only between the rivers Ghalidzga and Enguri, where the Georgian population remained and which was returned to Samegrelo Princedom in the beginning of the 18th century. The Bedia Cathedral and the Ilori Temple continued to function there.

Thus, the ecclesiastical history of Abkhazia in the 8th-17th centuries is, on the one hand, a history of the flourishing Christianity and of the establishment of Georgian Christian centres and the blossoming Georgian culture in Medieval times. On the other hand, this is a tragic story of the extermination of the local Georgian population, clergy, Christian centres, places of Georgian culture, the expulsion of the Catholicoses of “Abkhazia” from Bichvinta as a result of the onslaught of Jik-Abkhazs with barbaric mentality in the 16th-17th centuries. In the 18th century, the jurisdiction of the Catholicos no longer extended to Abkhazia, although canonically the region remained as its parish and the Cathedral of Bichvinta remained the residence of the Catholicos. Pagan darkness had fallen upon Abkhazia (**Bakhia-Okruashvili, 2000: 3-42**).

In 1696-1742, *Grigol I (Lordkipanidze)*, a prominent clergyman, was the Catholicos of “Abkhazia”. Sources refer to him as “*the Lord and High Priest of Abkhazia*”, “*the Lord and High Priest of All Abkhazia*”, “*Grigol the Shepherd... the Catholicos of All Georgia*” (**Gamakharia, 2005: 298-307**). He also had a great benevolent influence on political life, namely, in sorting out relations between the kings and principal, in banning the human trade, etc. One of the accomplishments of Grigol I was the visit to present-day Gali district at the beginning of the 18th century, freeing the peasants belonging to the Catholicosate from captivity, and settling them in Samegrelo.

Besarion (Eristavi), the grandson of King Bagrat IV of Imereti (1660-1681), was the Catholicos of “Abkhazia” in 1742-1769. The titles of this Catholicos are the following: “*The Helmsman of Likhtamers, Odishars, Pontus-Abkhaz-Guria, Racha-Lechkhumi-Svans-Ossetians-Dvals and the Whole North;*” “*The Great Shepherd of All Abkhazia and the Helmsman of Bichvinta church*” (**Historical documents, 1958: 117**). However, Besarion could not enter Bichvinta. His jurisdiction extended only to Samurzakano, namely to Bedia Eparchy. Bedia Metropolitan *Maxim (Iashvili)* participated in the Western Georgian church councils in 1759 and 1761 and, together with *Solomon I*, King of Imereti, Catholicos Besarion and other priests, signed the decisions of both councils (**Kakabadze, 1913: 3-4; Book of Donation of Catholicos Besarion, 1970: 880**). In the late 1760s Bedia Cathedral also ceased its functioning and the St George of Ilori, which was subordinated to the Tsaishi Eparchy remained as the only active church throughout Abkhazia. Later *Joseph (Ioseb) (Bagrationi)*, brother of king Solomon I, became the Catholicos of “Abkhazia” (1769-1776). Joseph is referred to as “*the Catholicos of all Pontus-North and Abkhaz-Imeris,*” “*the Catholicos and Chief Priest of Abkhaz-Imer-Guria-Samegrelo, i.e. of the whole of Lower Iveria*” (**Book of Donation of Catholicos Joseph, 1970: 896-897; Catholicos-Patriarchs, 2000: 167-168**).

Maxim II (Abashidze) is considered to be the last Catholicos of “Abkhazia” (1776-1795). His main goal was to restore the Bichvinta Cathedral. At the same time, he was well aware that without the expulsion of the Ottomans from Western Georgia achieving his aim would be impossible. Thus, he agreed to the proposal of David, king of Imereti

(1784-1789) to go to St Petersburg and negotiate with the Russian Empress Catherine II (1762-1796). The three-member mission of the Kingdom of Imereti, which consisted of Catholicos Maxim II (*Abashidze*), *Zurab Tsereteli*, and *David Kvinikhadze*, met Catherine II on 29 December 1784. However, negotiations on the defence treatise failed. Nevertheless, Maxim II remained in Russia and actively pursued his diplomatic mission. As it turns out, after the expulsion of the Ottomans from Anapa (22 June 1791), Catholicos Maxim II hoped that Russian troops would continue to advance in the southern direction, liberate Bichvinta, Abkhazia, Western Georgia on a whole, and then, by the grace of Catherine II, would restore the Bichvinta Temple. However, his hopes were not fulfilled (**Georgian State Museum, 1953**: 339). He left a testament to the future Catholicos of Western Georgia and to all the clergymen: "Use most of your activities for the conversion of Abkhazia and the renewal of the Bichvinta Church" (**Catholicos-Patriarchs, 2000**: 171). In 1792, the Catholicos of "Abkhazia" Maxim II moved to the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, where he died on 30 May 1795. He was buried there.

After the death of Maxim II, the Catholicosate of "Abkhazia" continued to function, however, as Bishop Kyrion (*Sadzaglishvili*) wrote, the process of its gradual coming under the influence of Mtskheta had already begun (**Gamakharia, 2006b**: 341). This process was helped by Dositheos (*Tsereteli*), the Metropolitan of Kutaisi, who was later consecrated as a Saint by the Georgian Church. According to some documents, Solomon II (1789-1810) appointed him as a Catholicos. (**Catholicos-Patriarchs, 2000**: 71-72; **Gamakharia, 2005**: 342). At the beginning of the 19th century, when Russia annexed all of Georgia, including Abkhazia, the Georgian Church lost its autocephaly and was subordinated to the Holy Synod of the Russian Church. In gross violation of ecclesiastical laws and in accordance with the decree of Emperor Alexander I, the powers of Catholicos of Kartli-Kakheti and Archbishop of Mtskheta *Anton II* (1788-1811) were terminated, and his title of Catholicos was revoked on 30 June 1811. According to the same decree, the head of the Georgian Church was called the Metropolitan of Mtskheta and Kartli, the Exarch of Georgia. On 8 July 1811, Metropolitan *Varlam (Eristavi)* was appointed as the first Exarch (1811-1817). On 30 August 1814, the Georgian-Imereti Synodal Office of the Holy Synod of Russia was established and it became the highest governing body of the Exarchate. Officially it started functioning on 8 May 1815. From now on, the Catholicos of Western Georgia ("Abkhazia" also ceased to exist.

§2. The Cultural Image of Present-Day Abkhazia in the Middle Ages

The cultural image of present-day Abkhazia has been one of the most visible proofs of the unity of Georgian society and culture throughout the Middle Ages. The fact that throughout the Middle Ages identical social and cultural standards and a similar system of social and cultural values were created on the territory of Eastern and Western Georgia, which differ from the geographical point of view, confirms that medieval Georgian society

was characterized by a unique sense of a unified cultural universe. Currently, the numerous and diverse material culture of Abkhazia can be generally divided into four basic groups: 1. *Ancient monuments*; 2. *Ancient manuscripts*; 3. *Religious items*; 4. *Material found during archaeological excavations* (Akhaldze, 2012: 131; Gamakharia, Akhaldze, Jojua, 2018: 70-72).

Three different stages can be distinguished when studying the cultural heritage of Medieval Abkhazia:

1. 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, when the European, Russian, and Georgian archaeologists and scholars were the first to pay attention to the material culture not only of Abkhazia, but of Georgia on the whole;
2. The Soviet era, which also can be divided into sub-periods;
3. The post-Soviet stage, i.e. from the 1990s to the present day.

At the first stage of the study of cultural heritage the travellers and the Caucasian Society of Antiquity-Lovers became interested in this problem, but their publications were mostly descriptive. Nevertheless, these works provide invaluable information about the ancient architectural forms and motifs of these monuments, the architectural elements and inscriptions preserved on them, and the various religious items associated with them. We should especially mention the works of *Marie-Félicité Brosset*, *Praskovya Uvarova*, *Dimitri Bakradze*, *Nikodim Kondakov*, *Andrey Pavlinov*, *Sergey Belokurov*, *Tedo Zhordania*, *Mose Janashvili*, *Ekvtime Takaishvili*, and others.

Our current knowledge of secular and church architecture in Abkhazia is largely based on the studies of the second stage, many of which, naturally, could not escape ideological pressure or avoid taboo subjects. From that time on, we rarely see Europeans among the researchers of the historical monuments of Abkhazia. However, local Abkhaz scholars – *Ivan Ajinjal (Jinjolia)*, *Ioseb Adzinba*, *Semyon Ashkhatsava*, *Vianor Pachulia* – became interested in this issue and joined Georgian and Russian scholars. At this stage, the fundamental works on the history of Georgian art have been written by such competent Georgian and Abkhaz scholars as *Giorgi Chubinashvili*, *Shalva Amiranashvili*, *Niko Chubinashvili*, *Vakhtang Beridze*, *Parmen Zakaraia*, *Rene Schmerling*, *Levan Rcheulishvili*, *Mariam Didebulidze*, *Khukhuti Bghazba (Bgazhba)*, *Anatoli Katsia*, *Leon Shervashidze*, and others who have made a great contribution to the study of monuments of the region. Each of them, along with the art monuments of different historical parts of Georgia, also studied the architectural motifs of Abkhazia, and today, when, because of the Russian occupation of the region, we are deprived of the opportunity to study these monuments on the spot, their works are invaluable. A palaeographic study of the inscriptions on the monuments by *Sara Barnaveli*, *Teimuraz Barnaveli*, *Tamar Khazhomia*, *Leon Shervashidze*, *Valeri Silogava*, *Giorgi Otkhmezuri*, and others should be especially mentioned. It was in the Soviet times that *Valeri Silogava* published 22 Georgian inscriptions of Abkhazia (with reference to the monument and their location) in the second volume of the *Corpus of Lapidary Inscriptions (Georgian Lapidary II, 1980)*.

Currently, when this part of Georgia is occupied by Russia, Georgian art historians, architects-restorers, epigraphists, etc., are deprived of the opportunity to work on the site. The de facto government of Abkhazia is trying to carry out the restoration work with the help of Russian scientists who have less experience of working on such monuments. To date, works on the temples of Ilori, Bedia, Dranda, Likhni, Simon the Canaanite, and Anakopia, also on Anakopia Fortress has not involved a professional architect-restorer, an expert in ancient architecture. This fact is partially confirmed by information in the Abkhazian press and media and the reports of the Russian Committee of the International Council of Museums (**ICOM Mission Report, 2011**).

Along with the “restoration” works, there are papers and books that put forward new “concepts” and “theories” about the “non-Georgianness” of Abkhazia’s cultural heritage. Although, they do not (and cannot) have the same scholarly value as the works of the previous period, it is obvious that their aim is to create “a solid scientific” basis for questioning the Georgian belongingness of the historical monuments built on the territory of North-Western Georgia in the Middle Ages. In this regard, the entirely mythologized “works” of the 1990s and early 2000s, which tie up the architectural monuments of Abkhazia with the Byzantine, Gothic, Celtic, Slavic, or Armenian architecture, but not the Georgian one, are especially noteworthy.

Since 2008, the Abkhaz-Russian cooperation in the field of cultural heritage has been intensifying. Well-known Russian art historians, *Lyudmila Khrushkova, Andrei Vinogradov, Denis Beletsky, Elena Endoltseva*, and others, are actively involved in the study of Medieval cultural monuments of Abkhazia. Among the Abkhaz authors working on this problem we can name *Anzor Agumava, David Kandelaki, Tachu Gitsba*, and others. There are a lot of statements in their works that may not be acceptable, but they at least maintain academic and scientific ethics. The same cannot be said about the “researches” of the Abkhaz writer-philologist *Denis Chachkhalia*. Although he has no professional education in either history or art history, he has recently published “epochal works” on “Abkhaz ecclesiastical architecture” and speaks ambitiously about the “*Abkhaz School of Byzantine Architecture*” (**Chachkhalia, 2011**) and its influence on the “*Architecture of Alania, Russia, and Trebizond*,” and so on (**Chachkhalia, 2016**).¹

¹ Against this background, it is not surprising that he declares Bagrati, Manglisi, Nikortsinda, Betania, Metekhi, Pitareti, Bochorma temples as the special examples of the Abkhaz national school of architecture. Moreover, according to Chachkhalia's “ingenious findings,” Archil Mindaishvili, the architect of the Tbilisi Trinity Temple, relied on the architectural forms and techniques of the “Abkhaz” Kingdom, according to which Gelati, Bagrati, and Svetitskhoveli temples were built (**Chachkhalia, 2016: 87**). The author also considers that Oshki, to which he intentionally refers to in the Armenian form as “Oshkvank” (Tao is also Armenian “Taik” for him), is a monument created under the influence of the “Abkhaz school of architecture” (**Chachkhalia, 2016: 51**).

We should also mention the joint publications of Russian and Abkhaz scholars dedicated to the issues of history and culture of Abkhazia, which outline the imperial-separatist vision of the history and culture of Abkhazia. The collective research on the art of the epoch of “Abkhazs’,” published in 2011 in St Petersburg under the auspices of the Russian Christian Humanitarian Academy, is its best example (**Art of the Abkhazian kingdom, 2015**). The authors (*Oleg Bgazhba, Anzor Agumava, Dmitry Beletsky, Andrey Vinogradov, Ekaterina Endoltseva*) make an attempt to consider the monuments of Christian art of Anakopia in the broad cultural and historical context, and present the art of the “Abkhazs’” Kingdom against the background of the Byzantine and Caucasian analogies. All the chapters of the book, except for the catalogue of epigraphic monuments, are loaded with historical material and parallels, which, with rare exceptions, aim to “wrap” the narrative of the political history of the “Abkhazs’” kingdom as of “Abkhaz” kingdom and create a solid basis for presenting it as a formation not connected to the Georgian cultural and political world. The work clearly shows the influence of the separatist conjuncture and is entirely directed towards the justification of present-day reality. One gets the impression that the work was commissioned by the imperial nomenclature and it is the continuation of the conceptual vision of history and culture of the Caucasus, which first had been expressed in the 19th century.

This concept is also supported by the joint works of *Andrei Vinogradov* and *Denis Beletsky*, including a book dedicated to the ecclesiastical architecture of the “Abkhazs’” Kingdom (**Vinogradov, Beletsky, 2015**). It is true that the work is undoubtedly valuable in terms of studying the monuments of the material culture in Abkhazia, especially regarding the previously unstudied ecclesiastical samples, but conceptually this is another attempt of completely ignoring the Medieval Georgian historical and cultural space in the history of Caucasian culture. These works are the continuation of Yuri Voronov's ideas. They gradually introduce new concepts and terms into scientific circulation: “*The Abkhaz School of Byzantine Architecture*,” “*the Alanian School of Byzantine Architecture*,” “*Pontus (Byzantine) Architecture*,” “*Abkhaz Architecture*,” “*Eastern Black Sea Architecture*,” and so on. By doing so, the Russian scholars are, in fact, questioning the existence of ancient Georgian ecclesiastical architecture not only in Abkhazia but also in the rest of Georgia. In the context of this theory, there is no cultural space left for Georgian ecclesiastical architecture. Maybe we shall ask the question, why did it happen that the powerful “Abkhazs’” kingdom, which created the “Abkhaz architecture,” failed to create the main basis of the original culture, namely the writing system?!

Despite these and other attempts, it is impossible to change the historical reality and deny that the cultural heritage of Medieval Abkhazia is an organic part of the all-Georgian civilization. This is confirmed by the factual data presented below. We will start with the monuments of Christian architecture.

The oldest Christian temples known for the scholars in Abkhazia are excavated at the site of Bichvinta ancient settlement (**Tumanishvili, 2008: 175**). Among the chronologi-

cally first monuments the special place belongs to Gagra three-nave Basilica (6th c.). It is one of the brilliant examples of the adaptation of three-nave basilicas, which were widespread in early feudal Georgia and is known as “three-church basilica” among the art historians. Such temples usually can be found in Eastern Georgia (Kakheti and Kartli) and are practically unknown outside Georgia. According the competent conclusion of *Giorgi Chubinashvili*, the three-church basilicas are the novelty of Georgian architecture (**Chubinashvili, 1959**: 161; **Didebulidze, 1977**: 25). From the historical point of view, the archaic, simple variation of the “*Bolnisi cross*,” which is depicted on the arched support of the church and is characteristic of the Eastern Georgian ecclesiastical architecture of the 6th-7th centuries, is especially noteworthy. This monument testifies to the unity and integrity of architecture in different parts of Georgia, even at the early stage of its development (**Didebulidze 1977**: 26).

Chronologically the next monument has to be the *Gantiadi Basilica* (6th-7th cc.) in Gagra Municipality. The remains of the cathedral are located in the town Gantiadi, on the sea coast in the north-west of Gagra. There was expressed a viewpoint that this is the very cathedral that the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I (527-565) built for the tribe of Abazgoi when they were converted to Christianity. In 1980 Marble fragments with the Greek inscription “Abazgia,” dating back to the 6th-7th centuries, have been found in the ruins of basilica.

Dranda Mother of God Temple (Gulripshi Municipality) is dated by the 8th century. Although this temple is different architecturally from Georgian church buildings, similar temples can be found in other historical provinces of Georgia of that epoch too. Similar – four barrel-vault cross-in-square churches were wide-spread in Byzantium in the 6th-7th centuries, but the architect of Dranda Temple has also borrowed some details from Georgian architecture, in particular, the semicircle bays above the altar are bound by small arcs (**Rcheulishvili, 1988**: 27; **Mepisashvili, 1989**: 12; **Tumanishvili, 1999**: 378).

In Gudauta Municipality, near the village Primorskoe (the Russian translation of *Sanapiro* /Seaside/, the old Georgian name of village), in 3 km from the Black Sea coast *Msikhva Mountain Monastery* was located. It is dated by the 8th-9th centuries. According to the Georgian inscriptions found in the ruins, it was dedicated to St Michael the Archangel. Msikhva Monastery is built according to Georgian architectural motifs and finds similarities with the church buildings in other parts of Georgia (**Katsia, 1967**: 65-77). Among the ruins the fragments of the roof tiles and ceramic calipter antefixes were found with the depiction of the so-called “Maltese Cross” with Georgian inscriptions (**Katsia, 1967**: 66-67). There are found 46 roof tile calipters with inscriptions. The inscriptions on the antefixes are in the double embossed frame and divide into two groups by their content. First group consists of 30 inscriptions: “*C(hris)t, have m(e)rcy on M(i)ch(ae)l, a(me)n.*” The second group consists of 16 inscriptions: “*M(i)ch(ae)l, amen*” (**Silogava, 2004**: 257-259). From a palaeographic point of view, the inscriptions have the archaic

marks typical for Georgian Asomtavruli (**Akhaladze, 2005: 140-146**). According to the architectural details and palaeographical signs, the earliest date of building Msighva Mountain Monastery and making inscriptions is the 8th century, the latest – the beginning of the 10th century. Two kilometres north of Msighva Mountain Monastery, on the slope of Mount Achanua (Chans – L.A.), another temple was discovered by Abkhaz researcher *Anatoly Katsia*, who named it after the name of the place as “Achanua Church.”

In *Akhali Atoni (New Athos)* of Gudauta Municipality, on the slope of *Iveria Mountain* stands the *Temple of Simon the Canaanite*. The present temple was built in the 9th-10th centuries, although there was an older church there, which is dated by the 7th-8th centuries. According to ancient Georgian and foreign chroniclers, Apostles of Christ, *Simon the Canaanite (Simon the Zealot)* and *St Andrew the First-Called*, preached Christianity in South and West Georgia, including Abkhazia. According to the legends, Simon the Canaanite was crucified like Christ and was buried in New Athos on the bank of the River Psirtska in 55 AD, although there exists an opinion that he was buried in Nikopsia, the north border of historical Georgia. One of the insertions of “Kartlis Tskhovreba” states that the “*tomb of Simon the Canaanite is in the town of Nicopsis, between Apkhazeti and Jiketi*” (**Kartlis Tskhovreba, 1955: 42-43**). In the 4th century a small wooden church was built on the tomb of the Apostle in Akhali Atoni. In the later centuries a temple of white stone was built there (**Tumanishvili, 1999: 379-380**). It was restored several times in the 19th-20th centuries. Although it was painted, no frescoes have survived (**Didebulidze, 2015: 53**). From the architectural decorations the relief images of the Christian symbols of fish, lion and cross attract attention. Eight Greek lapidary inscriptions survived to our days, while the Georgian inscriptions existing on the cathedral are not legible (**Vinogradov, 2011: 221-223**).

The early Medieval hall church is the *Chkhortoli Temple*, which was first built in the 9th-10th centuries (**Khvistani, 2009: 41**). The Chkhortoli church belongs to the group of apse hall churches and by design and architectural characteristics it is analogous to other Georgian hall churches, like Eredvi, Kheiti, Disevi, Kusireti, Lashkendari, Ilori. The Chkhortoli hall church is organically connected with the evolution of Georgian architecture. It is exactly within the general line of Georgian ecclesiastical architecture and expresses creative pursuit and directions common to the Georgian architecture. Considering the architectural style and analogies of the cathedral, the church should have been built in the epoch of the “Abkhazs” king Constantine (893-922). It is connected with the cultural expansion of Eastern Georgia (**Khvistani, 2009: 13-24**).

In the village of Bzipi (Gudauta Municipality), on the right bank of the River Bzipi, an architectural complex of the 9th-10th centuries has survived in the uphill territory. It includes a walled fortress and a temple. The *Bzipi fortress* consists of two parts. The cross-domed temple was in the upper part of the fortress, while in the yard of the lower part an old caravan road passed. According to the description of *Levan Rcheulishvili*, the well-

known Georgian art historian, who conducted the first scholarly research of the temple (**Rcheulishvili, 1988: 8**), only the walls and fragments of the roofing have survived (**Rcheulishvili, 2018: 11**). There is a symbolic depiction of crucifixion on the upper part of the Southern window. The doors and windows of the church are decorated with ornaments characteristic of Georgian architecture. The remains of another, an older temple can be seen to the east of the Bzipi temple (**Rcheulishvili, 2018: 22-23**). As for the Bzipi fortress, part of which is a temple, it played an important role in the defensive system of unified Georgia. It blocked roads to the North Caucasus passes.

18 km from the centre of Gudauta, on an elevated hill, the church of St Nicholas is located. It was studied by *Leo Shervashidze*, the well-known Abkhaz art critic. Fragments of the facade stone have been found there. In the centre of the slab is a *Maltese cross* with Georgian Asomtavruli inscription on it: "*C(ros)s of C(hris)t.*" The architectural forms of the two hall churches of *Khopi (Khuapi)* have parallels with numerous examples of Georgian architecture of the Early Middle Ages. The churches of Khupi (Khuapi) are considered to be the churches of the royal court. One of them, as it can be seen on the inscription preserved on it, was built by King Giorgi II of Abkhazia (922-957) in the name of St Nicholas the Miracle-Worker (**Shervashidze, 1968: 23-24; Shervashidze, 1971: 94-97**). According to *Leo Shervashidze*, the discoverer of the inscription, it gives us an account of building the church in the name of St Nicholas the Miracle-Worker to celebrate the birth of king *Giorgi II's* daughter *Guarandukht*. The following is the text of the inscription: "*Christ, here was built this holy church... by the archpriest, ... during the reign of Giorgi, when Guarandukht was born... St Nicholas, be patron before Christ*" (**Akhaladze, 2005: 148**). The Palaeographic features allow us to date the Khopi inscription as belonging to times of Giorgi II, king of the "Abkhazs" in 922-957 (**Akhaladze, 2008: 3-14**).

A three-nave domed *Mokvi Cathedral* is located 15 kilometres from Ochamchire. Its dome has fourteen-facet neck. According to the Georgian chronicler of the 11th century, Leon III, the king of the "Abkhazs" (957-967), "*built a church at Mokvi which he made into an episcopal see*" (**Matiane Kartlisa, 2014: 147**). The Mokvi Eparchy was created in the 10th century but its significance especially increased from the 13th c. The Mokvi Cathedral was considerably repaired and painted in the epoch of David the Builder. The cathedral, was rich in Georgian epigraphic monuments. The sources confirm that there were multiple Georgian inscriptions but they were destroyed in later centuries¹ and only the traces of fresco paintings can be seen today. Among the fresco inscriptions, the most important was the one seen by the patriarch of Jerusalem *Dositheos* in 1659. It mentioned the names of the *David the Builder*, King of Georgia (1089-1125), and the *Alexios I Komnenos*,

¹ In 1902 broken-hearted *Tedo Zhordania* was mentioning that "*the Georgian inscriptions became invisible in the Mokvi Temple after it was repaired, or more correctly, spoilt during the rule of last Principal of Abkhazia... Wherever they saw the Georgian inscription, they were erasing and destroying it*" (**Zhordania T., 1902: 92**).

Byzantine Emperor in 1081-1118 (**Dositheos, 1847:** 31). The chapel inscription (12th c.) is the only one that has survived till today. This inscription mentions the Bishop of Mokvi Grigol.

For centuries, a significant centre of Georgian culture had existed in Mokvi, where they copied the manuscripts and renewed the old lists. Mokvi library manuscripts that are preserved till today, give us the names of the prominent figures in Mokvi Eparchy. The prominent Georgian clerics *Grigol Magnisdze* (11th c.), *Daniel* (around 1300), *Abraam* (first half of the 14th c.), *Philippe Chkhetidze* (15th c.), *Epvtime Sakvarelidze* (second half of the 16th c., the Catholicos of “Abkhazia” in 1578-1614), and others carried out their activities in Mokvi Cathedral (**Kalandia, 2004:** 123-134; **Akhaladze, 2005:** 116). Among Mokvi antiquities the most famous is the Mokvi Gospel, which was copied (1300) at the initiative of Bishop *Daniel of Mokvi*. It has rich paintings and is embellished with skilfully performed ornaments. The Mokvi gospel was copied and illustrated by monk *Efrem* (**Description of Manuscripts, 1958:** 312-315). Among other manuscripts we should also mention *The Fasts A-446*, which was copied by deacon Giorgi in the 13th century, and the manuscripts copied by Navcratios and *Isaac Tsimtsadzes*, the well-known calligraphers of the 16th century: *Metaphrasis Q-39*, which was given by Archbishop of Mokvi *Epvtime Sakvarelidze*, *the Gospels* (Q-271 and H-1031), *Gulani* (596), and *Mokvi Gulani A-743*, which was copied by *Giorgi Zebede* by the request of Odishi Principal *Giorgi III Dadiani* and his son Leon Dadiani (**Kartvelishvili, 2014:** 214-216, 218).

Leon III, the king of the “Abkhazs” and the builder of the temple, also ordered to paint an icon depicting Mother of God in a pleading pose. Her plead is addressed to the Saviour whose name is inscribed in the right corner of the icon. The Archangels Michael and Gabriel are depicted in the left corner. The painting of the Mother of God was restored in the 19th century. Its frame with ornaments is embellished with glazed medallions of the saints. There is a Georgian inscription on the lower border of the icon mentioning Leon III, the king of the “Abkhazs” (**Chubinashvili, 1959:** №63-65, 14; **Gamakharia, Akhaladze, Jojua, 2018:** 92). Another Mother of God icon with the inscription by *Andria Sakvarelidze* is also connected with the Mokvi Cathedral. Mother of God is painted standing in the middle of the icon, on the right is John the Baptist, on the left Chief Deacon Stephané. The gilded icon is inserted in the silver frame with doors and represents a perfect example of Georgian hammered work of the epoch. There are Georgian inscriptions on the doors. The most significant among them is the prayer of *Andria Sakvarelidze*, the Archbishop of Mokvi in 1660-1666 and the ktetor of the icon. This inscription gives us an account of donating the icon of Mother of God to the Mokvi Cathedral (**Akhaladze, 2011;** **Gamakharia, Akhaladze, Jojua, 2018:** 92).

The Bichvinta Cathedral of the Mother of God is one of the most famous and popular monuments of Georgian Christian architecture. It is located in the North-Western part of Abkhazia, present-day Bichvinta, which used to be antique city of Pityus. Pityus (Bichvinta), whose name is connected with the name of the local pine relict, played a special

role in spreading Christianity in West Georgia. Bichvinta cathedral's first construction is connected with the Apostle St Andrew the First-Called who preached Christianity here and built a church in the 1st century AD. The Cathedral existed here for centuries, and it was called "St Andrew's Temple." The present domed Cathedral is the architectural monument of the 10th-11th centuries. It represents the example of the Georgian architecture, although the temple also has some similarities with the Greek architecture. Bichvinta cathedral was abandoned and ceased functioning in the 17th century. The Cathedral was struck by lightning, which seriously damaged it in the 18th century. The Archpriest *Anton Dadiani* officially asked the Russian officials to restore it, but taking the decision and conducting the restoration took several decades. On 28 September 1869 *Gabriel (Kikodze)*, who was the ruler of Abkhazian Eparchy, solemnly conducted the ceremony of consecration of Bichvinta Temple (**Gamakharia, 2005: 396-397, 476**). The restoration altered the temple: The form of the dome was changed, and the facades were plastered and whitened. In the 1960s the works were carried out in the cathedral and the temple was restored to its initial condition: The plaster was taken off, the dome regained its original appearance, the roof was replaced, and the yard was cleaned. In the beginning of the 19th century, when the Russian troops were entering Bichvinta, the Gospel written in Georgian was discovered lying open on the altar (**Dyachkov-Tarasov, 2003: 97**). Among the ancient manuscripts of Bichvinta, Georgian Gospel of the 12th century with miniatures and ornaments (**Kartvelishvili, 2014: 212-214**) and Bichvinta ladgar of the 16th century (see: **Arakhamia, 2009**) have to be mentioned especially.

There are several Greek and Georgian inscriptions in Bichvinta Temple. Among the Greek inscriptions the most significant are two mosaic-type inscriptions. One of them names Orel, the noble person, who paid for the mosaic floor in the 6th century. In the Southern corner of the Western part of the Temple there is a small, so-called Evdemon's chapel, which was completely painted. There were also Greek inscriptions (16th c.), which named *Evdemon Chkhetidze*, Catholicos of "Abkhazia" (1557-1578), and painter *Paraskeva*. Below the inscription mentioning Paraskeva, there is the depiction of a cross with explanatory Greek inscriptions and the Georgian inscriptions: "Jesus," "Christ," and "Victory" (**Kaukhchishvili T., 2004: 61**).

The most famous icon of the Temple was the Bichvinta Mother of God icon with *Evdemon Chkhetidze's* inscription. The inscription gives us information that "Catholicos of all North and Abkhazia" Evdemon Chkhetidze ordered to emboss the Mother of God icon in 1568. The icon itself was made from gold, while the setting was from silver. It was placed in Bichvinta Cathedral of the Mother of God. After the residence of Catholicos was moved from Bichvinta to Gelati, the icon was also moved to Gelati. There is a Georgian inscription on the back side of the icon which describes the history of its creation. The inscription mentions Catholicos of "Abkhazia" Evdemon Chkhetidze and Odishi nobles Mamia and Levan Dadiani. Only the Icon itself has survived and is kept in the Georgian

National Museum, while the setting does not exist anymore (**Gamakharia, Akhaladze, Jojua, 2018: 86**).

A beautiful monument of Georgian architecture, Bedia monastic complex is located 25 kilometres from Ochamchire, in the centre of the village of Bedia. Today it includes the Cathedral of the Mother of God, Archbishop's chamber, and a chapel. According to historical sources, Bedia complex was built by Bagrat III Bagrationi, the first king of unified Georgia (978-1014) at the end of the 10th century. Its construction was completed about 999. In accordance with the Georgian chronicler, king Bagrat created Bedia as "an episcopal see" (**Matiane Kartlisa, 2014: 151**).

Bedia Cathedral of the Mother of God is the main building of the monastic complex. It is located in the centre of the yard. To the west of the Cathedral, in about 40 metres, there is a chapel at the Western gate. To the south of the cathedral, the Southern gate goes to the two-storey palace of Bedia Metropolitans. The cathedral was significantly altered at the turn of the 14th century and in the 15th century. The chapel was built in the 13th-14th centuries, while the archbishop's chamber was built in the 16th century by the Metropolitan *Anton Zhuanisdze* of Bedia. This is confirmed by the Georgian Asomtavruli inscriptions carved on the tympanum of the chamber. Three layers of fresco paintings belonging to the 10th-11th, 13th-14th, and 16th centuries have been preserved in the interior of the cathedral (**Schmerling, 1957: 504-511; Shervashidze, 1980: 42-66**).

Lapidary, fresco, and carved inscriptions have been preserved on the facade, interior frescos, and religious items of Bedia Cathedral. They are written in Georgian Asomtavruli and tell us about the construction and restoration of the temple. 11 inscriptions can be fully read at the present time, while only fragments of other inscriptions have been preserved. The inscriptions mention the architect of Bedia cathedral Svimeon Galatztukhutsesi, Catholicos *Nikoloz Gonglibaisdze*, Metropolitans of Bedia: *Sopron Gonglibaisdze*, *Anton (Zhuanisdze)*, *Germane Chkhetidze*; ktetors of Bedia Cathedral during its construction and restoration: *Bagrat III Bagrationi*, the first King of unified Georgia (978-1014), Constantine son of *David Narin*, King of Likhtimereti (1293-1327), "Queen" *Rodab and her son Kakhaber* (13th c.), Odishi "Queen of Queens *Marech*" and her son, Eristavt-Eristavi and Mandaturtukhutsesi *Giorgi Dadiani*, etc. Asomtavruli inscriptions have been preserved at the following frescoes: *St Constantine*, *St Helene*, *St Basil*, *St Gregory the Theologian*, *St Stephen*, *St Zacharias*, *St Nicholas* (**Akhaladze, 2005: 21-74**). Recently, during the so-called "restoration" of Bedia Temple by the separatist regime, the fresco of Bagrat III Bagrationi and its Georgian inscription were destroyed.

The Bedia Eparchy has been one of the most important religious and cultural educational centres of the Middle Ages. David the Builder rewarded the Archbishop *Svimeon Gulaberisdze* with the honourable title of Bedieli-Alaverdeli as a symbol of the unity of Georgia and the Georgian church. Later *Svimeon Bedieli-Alaverdeli* became Chqondideli-Mtsignobartukhutsesi, the second person in the state. The Archbishop *Anton Zhuanisdze*

created rich library in Bedia monastic complex in the mid-16th century. It was a place where old manuscripts were restored, religious books were translated, and new manuscripts were added to the library. The Metropolitan *Germane Chkhetidze* specifically invited experienced calligraphers from Southern Georgia. Well-known Georgian calligraphers *Gabriel Lomsanidze*, *Ambrose Kargareteli*, and *Svimeon Euphratean (Giorgisdze)* carried out their activities at the monastery. Part of the manuscripts still exists in our days (**Akhaladze, 2005:** 46-48; 53-59). There are numerous manuscripts in *the Korneli Kekelidze Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts* which either were copied in Bedia Monastery, or simply were preserved there. The most significant among them are: *Bedia Gulani A-187*, *The Vardzia Gospel*, *The Urbnisi Gospel*, and others. In their colophons several Principals of Odishi and Archbishops of Bedia are mentioned (**Kartvelishvili, 2014:** 216, 217, 219, 220).

The most significant religious item of Bedia Cathedral is the *Bedia Chalice* (999). This is the perfect example of Georgian Medieval jewellery. The Bedia Chalice represents a round gold bowl (height – 12,5 cm, diameter – 14 cm). There are the figures of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and ten Apostles on the Chalice, as well as the explanatory Georgian inscriptions. The Georgian Asomtavruli inscription on the upper part of the Chalice gives us an account of donating this precious item to the Bedia Temple by *Bagrat III* and *queen Gurandukht* (**Silogava, 2004:** 309-315). Another inscription is also connected with the Chalice. In the 19th century the Chalice also had a golden base, which got lost. The Georgian Asomtavruli inscription on the base told us that the golden base was ordered by Bedia Metropolitan *Germane Chkhetidze* in the 17th century (**Silogava, 2004:** 315). It seems that the base was stolen twice – first in the 17th century and then in the 19th century. The Bedia Chalice currently is kept in the Art Museum of Georgia.

The Likhni village is located 5 kilometres from the centre of Gudauta. The Georgian architectural monument of the 10th century, namely, *the Temple of Dormition of the Mother of God* is located in the middle of the village. It is a cross-domed construction with three apses in the East. Later there were built open chapels to the East, North, and South of the temple. The interior and the chapel were fully covered with paintings. Some of them, as well as the Georgian Asomtavruli inscriptions are still legible. The antiquities of Likhni Temple were first described by *Marie-Félicité Brosset*, famous French Kartvelologist, who wrote down several Georgian inscriptions from the walls, including the well-known text dating back to 1066 about the appearance of the comet.

It can be said that Likhni Temple represents a collection of epigraphic monuments because its paintings include nearly 20 Georgian *Asomtavruli* and *Mkhedruli* fresco inscriptions. There are also Greek inscriptions. The inscriptions mention various historic events, representatives of the nobility and religious figures. Among the mentioned persons are the Georgian kings *Bagrat IV* (1027-1072) and *Giorgi II* (1072-1089), clerics *Vache Protospatharios* and *Ipato* (1060s), *Petrik Patrikios* (*Bagrat IV's* representative at the Byz-

antine imperial court), *Ioane Mtsignobartukhutsesi-Chqondideli* (1060-1110s) and others (**Silogava, 2004**: 198-211). As for the Greek inscriptions, they are dated by the 14th century. There are explanatory inscriptions on the frescoes of the Constantinople patriarchs and saints: St Nikephoros, St German, St Cyril, St Basil. Besides explanations, there are also Greek inscriptions denoting the Biblical texts (**Akhaladze, 2005**: 167-169).

One of the most significant religious centres of Western Georgia was Ilori St. George Church, which was built in the first quarter of the 11th century. According to Vakhushti, “*on the seaside... is Ilori church of Saint George... without a dome, small, rich, and decorated*” (**Vakhushti, 1973**: 779). The Ilori Temple was built by a local feudal *Giorgi Gurgenisdze*. This is confirmed by one of the remaining inscriptions. Ilori church is a hall-type temple. With its beautiful proportions and technique of construction, Ilori belongs to a number of monuments which best reflect the architectural and artistic inspirations of Medieval Georgia. It is a one nave construction which ends with an apse and has several extensions from Northern, Southern, and Western sides. The church was built of dressed stones and it has doors on the West and South while the interior gets the light from six windows (**Katsia, 1963**: 108). After the barbaric “restoration” conducted at the beginning of the 21st century, the so-called Russian dome was built on the church, both interior and facade were whitened, and, most significant, all six Georgian inscriptions were destroyed.

Till the end of the 20th five lapidary inscriptions in Georgian still remained on the facades of Ilori church and several graphemes of the sixth inscription were legible. Fresco paintings have not survived here because the Ilori church repaired and painted by the Principal of Odishi *Levan II Dadiani* in the 17th century was burned by the Ottomans in 1736. According to Vakhushti Bagrationi, the paintings of the cathedral were destroyed then (**Vakhushti, 1973**: 886-887). According to the inscriptions of the Ilori Temple, the church originally was built in the name of St George. The ktetors were local feudal *Giorgi Gurgenisdze*, Archbishop *Giorgi*, and priest *Giorgi Kocholava*. *Giorgi Galatozi*, layman *Michael*, and others are named among the builders of the church.

The most significant religious item of the Ilori church is the silver chalice, which was found at the end of the 19th century. It is very similar to the Bedia Chalice. Its surface is divided into eight parts by arches. The middle arch reflects the Saviour on the throne with his right hand raised for blessing and a Gospel in his left hand. The left arch depicts the Archangels Michael and Gabriel with chalice and a diskos (paten) in their hands (**Chubnashvili, 1959**: №98). The Ilori silver chalice is encircled by Georgian Asomtavruli inscription. The present location of the Ilori chalice is unknown.

There were many icons donated to the Ilori church by principals of Odishi. Among them we should single out the Ilori icon of St George (16th c.), which represents a perfect example of Georgian art of that period. The icon depicts standing St George who dons the warrior's clothes and to the right the praying Bedian Metropolitan *Kirilé Zhuanisdze*. According to the Georgian inscription on the icon, it was donated by Kirilé Zhuanisdze, Od-

ishi Principal *Giorgi III Dadiani* (1572-1582), and his wife *Tamar* (**Chubinashvili, 1959: №530-532; Akhaladze, 2011**).

In the village of *Anukhva* (Gudauta Municipality, 3 kilometres from Anakopia fortress) the Anukhva Monastery is located. In one of the sources both the village and Monastery are mentioned as "*Ainakhva*" (**Chkhaidze, 2017: 63**). The temple ruins were found in the 19th century. It represents one of the perfect examples of the 11th century Georgian architecture. By its architecture and highly artistic ornaments the Anukhva Monastery is similar to the Medieval architecture of Southern Georgia. From the epigraphic artefacts we should single out the Georgian Asomtavruli inscription on Anukhva stone cross which gives us information about the ktetor Giorgi Basilidze (**Bgaghba Kh., 1967: 15-16; Shervashidze, 1974: 183; Georgian Lapidary II, 1980: 62; Akhaladze, 1999: 366; Silogava, 2004: 261-262**). On all the sides of the stone cross the crosses are carved with the Georgian Asomtavruli inscriptions: "*St Basil*," "*St Theodore*," "*St Demetrios*," and "*St Merkile*" (**Shervashidze, 1974: 184; Silogava, 2004: 263-264; Georgian Lapidary II, 1980: 66-67; Akhaladze, 1999: 366-367; Akhaladze, 2005: 158-161**). The Anukhva Crucifix, which is kept in the Abkhazian State Museum is also of interest. According to E. Endoltseva, this stone slab, which was broken into three pieces, is restored now (**Endoltseva, 2019: illustration №12**). There is one Greek inscription ("*Crucifix*") and two Georgian Asomtavruli inscriptions: "*The King of Jews*" and "*Crucifix of Christ*" (**Schmerling, 1962: 158**).

From 1938, the Anukhva Column with round pedestal is also kept in the Abkhazian State Museum. Above the pedestal, on the column the Georgian inscription is carved: "*Christ! The Saint Archangels Michael and Gabriel*" (**Bgaghba Kh., 1967: 16; Georgian Lapidary II, 1980: 142-143; Silogava, 2004: 283; Akhaladze, 2005: 162; Akhaladze, 1999: 366**). Some scholars consider this inscription to be made in the 11th century (**Bgaghba Kh., 1967: 16**) or at the turn of the 11th century (**Endoltseva, 2019: 21**). Others think that it was carved in the 12th century (**Georgian Lapidary II, 1980: 142-143; Silogava, 2004: 283**). We think that this inscription because of its palaeographic marks could not be made before the 14th-15th centuries (for detailed proofs, see: **Akhaladze, 2005: 164-163**).

In the last years the scholars started to pay attention to the Anukhva lead seal, which, along with nine Byzantine rings and one mould, was found in the Black Sea, near Sudak (South Crimea) in 2015. On the front, along with the depiction of St George, there is the Georgian Asomtavruli inscription "*St George*." Another Georgian Asomtavruli inscription is on the back of the seal and it reads "*St George, Monastery of Ainakhva*" (**Chkhaidze, 2017: 63; Chkhaidze, Vinogradov, Gugushvili, 2019: 273**).

Near Sokhumi, the single-arch bridge is located on the River Besleti.¹ There is a Georgian Asomtavruli inscription on the Western edge of the bridge: "*Christ the Lord, glorify in both lives the invincible King of Kings Bagrat*." Although the inscription mentions

¹ There are similar bridges in other parts of Georgia too, namely the Rkoni bridge in Kartli, Dondalo bridge in Adjara, the cascade of arched bridges in historical Southern Georgia (Tao-Klardjeti).

king *Bagrat III* (975-1014), due to the great love of *Queen Tamar*, the locals, named it "*Tamari's bridge*." Both the inscription and the bridge belong to the end of the 10th century and the beginning of the 11th century. In 200 metres from the *Besleti bridge* Besleti church was located. We can see from the ruins that once here was a monastic complex. Its main building, the temple, is nearly ruined and its contours are barely seen on the land.

Among the 11th century temples great historical and cultural significance has *Tskelikari St George Church*, which is located 20 kilometres from Gali. The church was studied by Abkhaz art critic L. Shervashidze, who in special research published the inscriptions (read by *Teimuraz Barnaveli*) found in the church (**Shervashidze, 1967: 39-56**). There were found three lapidary and seven fresco inscriptions. According to their content, Tskelikari church was built at the initiative of the clergyman *Merkile* in the 11th century. The ktetors were the local feudal lords. Later the temple was altered three times during the restoration. In the 17th century the ktetor and renovator of the temple was *Chichua* family, whose one representative is depicted in the interior with the fragments of corresponding inscription (**Shervashidze, 1967: 39-56; Akhaladze, 2005: 87-95**).

The cultural image of Abkhazia would be incomplete without the monuments in Tsebelda region. Although the monastic complexes, small churches and chapels, the Tselibium fortress are in ruins today, they still show the cultural and historical character of the region. One of the earliest among Tsebelda churches has to be the *Temple of St Tevdore*. It was found by Russian archaeologist *Praskovya Uvarova* in the 1880s. Later it was visited by *Dimitri Bakradze* who described the temple and the Georgian Asomtavruli inscription: "*Saint Tevdore, have a mercy on Michael*." This confirms that the church was originally built in St Tevdore's name. By its architectural forms, ornaments, and palaeographic characteristics the temple has numerous parallels and analogies in Eastern and Southern Georgia (**Akhaladze, 2005: 173-174**).

Praskovya Uvarova also found several icons. One of them, the *icon of St Cathrine*, was damaged and the Saint has only one hand. On both sides of halo there is the Georgian Asomtavruli inscription "*St Cathrine*." There is another inscription on the lower part of the icon, which gives us information about its donator, the noble woman *Mariam*. According to icon's characteristics, it is dated by the 11th century (**Chubinashvili, 1959: 21**). Another icon was found in the ruins of the other church. Its silver frame was gilded. The depiction of John the Baptist was in the centre of the icon. On the right and left sides the Georgian inscription "*St John*" was placed. On the lower part of icon, the Georgian inscription gives us information about Saba Malelisdze, the ktetor of the icon (**Akhaladze, 2003: 48**). According to icon's characteristics, it is also dated by the 11th century (**Chubinashvili, 1959: 312**). One more icon, which was found by P. Uvarova, was made from silver. It is the icon of Apostle St Andrew and it also was damaged. On the fragments there is the Georgian Asomtavruli inscription which gives us information about *Abulasan lobisdze*, the Eristavt Eristavi and Mechurchletukhutsesi in Queen Tamar's epoch (**Siloga-va, 2004: 321**). His ancestors were from Dali-Tsebelda region and because of this Abu-

lasan built church of St Andrew in Tsebelda and donated the icon of St Andrew (**Chkhata-raishvili, 1990**, 83-105; **Akhaladze, 2003**: 50-54). In 1988 *Yuri Voronov* and *Khukhuti Bghazhba* revealed ruins of a Christian church in 4 kilometres from Tsebelda. It had one construction detail with a Georgian inscription (**Akhaladze, 2002**: 43-44). The inscription gives us information about the construction of St. George's church and "binding the door" by an unknown ktetor. According to the analysis of the inscription, the temple should have been built in the 12th-13th centuries (**Akhaladze, 2005**: 177-179).

In the 1860s L. Sharvashidze discovered church ruins in the village of Ghumurishi. There he found a stone slab with embossed and ornamented cross and an old Georgian Asomtavruli inscription. The inscription gives us the story of construction of the cross and the temple by "Queen of Queens" Sagdukht (**Silogava, 2004**: 268). According to the historical sources, the "Queen of Queens" Sagdukht was wife of Odishi Eristavt Eristavi ktetor of Ghumurishi Temple. Both the temple and inscription are dated by 11th century (**Akhaladze, 2005**: 76-82).

There are ruins of the St Barbara's church in the Village of *Dikhazurga* (Gali Municipality) which is located in the South-Eastern part of Abkhazia's foothill on the right bank of the River Enguri. Until 1952 this village was called *Didi Tsipuri*. The name of this village is mentioned in *Arcangelo Lamberti's* historical work and on the 1654 map. The latter points out the existence of the church too. According to Lamberti, "*Tsipuria Monastery was built on a plain on the bank of the Enguri. Here two churches are joined together. One was dedicated to the Mother of God and second to St George*" (**Lamberti, 1991**: 107). It seems that two joint churches existed in Tsipuria in those times. In the beginning of the 20th century two stone plates were found among the ruins of the church. On one of them a cross was depicted. On its left side a full-length standing man is shown while on the right there is an inscription in Mkhedruli mentioning the architect of the temple *Grigol Galatoztukhutsesi* (**Janashvili, 1907**: 18-20). The original temple in Dikhazurga is dated by the 11th century (**Akhaladze, 2005**: 83-86; 23-32).

In the village of *Gudava* (Gali Municipality), on the left bank of the River Okumi *Gudava Temple* is located. According to the Byzantine sources, there was an eparchy in Gudava (Gudakva) in the 7th century. Thus, there already was a temple. Historical Gudava covered the territory of present-day villages Gudava, First Gudava, and Second Gudava. In early Medieval times Gudava was a city type settlement which was encircled by a fortress and was known as *Ziganeos* (**Zakaraia, Lekvinadze, 1971**: 100-102). The Greek eparchy was closed by Bagrat III who instead created Georgian Bedia Eparchy. Originally Gudava Temple should have been constructed in the 7th-8th centuries but it was restored and altered several times in the Middle Ages. The ktetors of the restored Gudava church were local feudal lord *Rabai*, his wife *Nugamtsira* and local deacon. They are mentioned on the stone slab found in the church yard. The inscription is in Georgian Asomtavruli (**Tsiskarishvili, 1980**: 141). The inscription confirms that the restoration of the church took place in the 15th or in the 16th century (**Akhaladze, 2005**: 133-138).

The systems of military defence are an important part of the cultural image of Medieval Abkhazia. In the South-Western part of Sokhumi on a hill on the left bank of the River Besleti there is a fortress named after the first king of unified Georgia Bagrat III Bagrationi. The *Bagrati Fortress* is characterized by the construction traditions typical for the fortifications in South-Western Georgia. Bagrati Fortress was the citadel of the city during the existence of the unified Georgian Kingdom in the 10th-15th centuries. It was the residence of the Eristavis of Tskhumi. From the 16th century it lost its significance and was emptied (**Gamakharia, Akhaladze, Jojua, 2018: 102**).

The historical *Anakopia* is located on *Iveria mountain*, 20 kilometres from Sokhumi. Since 1875 it is called Akhali Atoni (New Athos). Citadel of Anakopia fortress stands at the height of 350 metres above the sea level. *Anakopia fortress* was an impregnable defence building surrounded by a stone fence. Strong walls with control towers, siege pool and lime stoves have survived till today. Inside the fortress there was a temple, which is dated by the 7th-8th centuries. Even in our times the traces of marvellous ornaments of later periods can be distinguished in the ruins. The Greek inscriptions of the St Theodore Temple give us an important information regarding its history (**Kaukhchishvili T., 2004: 69**). Anakopia was controlled by Byzantium from 1032 to 1074 and the inscriptions reflect this reality. Thus, they are dated by the 11th century. After the unification of Georgia, Anakopia fortress became one of the most significant strongholds of the country. It was restored several times. Here stood Georgian royal army, which was protecting the North-Western border of Georgia. During the excavations of Anakopia fortress there was found a coin of *Giorgi II*, King of Georgia (1072-1089), with an inscription: "*Christ! Bless Giorgi the King and the Caesar of Abkhazs and Georgians*" (**Silogava, 2004: 242-244**). After the break-up of the unified Georgian Kingdom, Anakopia at first became a residence of Abkhaz Eristavis and then of Abkhaz Principals. In the 17th century, Anakopia was captured by Turks and the residence of Principals of Abkhazia was moved to Likhni. In the 18th century Anakopia is already in ruins (**Vakhushti, 1973: 781**).

As it can be seen, the majority of the cultural monuments were created during the existence of Lazica-Egrisi Kingdom, the "Abkhazs" Kingdom, and the unified Georgian Kingdom. Beginning from the 16th-17th centuries, when Caucasian highlanders started to migrate to the territory of present-day Abkhazia, nothing new was created. Moreover, the existing unique Georgian monuments were gradually destroyed. It is proven by the fact that *Bichvinta*, *Bedia*, *Dranda*, and other temples were deserted at that time. Unfortunately, the same process repeated from the beginning of the 1990s when the most part of the local population was expelled from the territory of Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia. Due to the "restoration" conducted by the separatist government, Ilori, Bedia, Dranda, Simon the Canaanite temples were altered and had lost their authenticity. Likhni, Gagra, and Chuburkhinji temples are in poor state. The named temples were visited by the representatives of the ICOM Russian Committee. Their report mentions the poor state of the monuments in Abkhazia (**ICOM Mission Report, 2011**). The report states that

every international norm of preserving the cultural heritage is broken in Abkhazia. In accordance with the *Venice Charter* for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, the historical and cultural monument should be inviolable (**Venice Charter, 1964**). Because of the so-called “restoration,” Ilori and Bedia temples have lost their historic and aesthetic value. The unity of the past and present has been lost. The 7th article of the *Venice Charter* states: “A monument is inseparable from the history to which it bears witness and from the setting in which it occurs” (**Venice Charter, 1964**). For protecting cultural values in conflict regions, “*The Nara document on authenticity*” was elaborated at the international conference, which took place in Nara (Japan) in 1994. Its 6th article states: “Cultural heritage diversity exists in time and space, and demands respect for other cultures and all aspects of their belief systems. In cases where cultural values appear to be in conflict, respect for cultural diversity demands acknowledgment of the legitimacy of the cultural values of all parties” (**Nara Document, 1994**).

Certain groups in occupied Abkhazia, by breaking all the existing norms of international law, are trying to alter the cultural image of the region. They want to wipe out the traces of the Georgian culture, which was the main marker of the identity of Georgians and Abkhazs. Unfortunately, this is not just wiping out the Georgian traces, but also an attempt to deprive Abkhazs of their historical roots and destroy their identity. This will make it much easier to adapt them to the existing reality.

CHAPTER VII. ABKHAZIA FROM 1810 TO 1917

§1. The Princedom of Abkhazia in 1810-1864

After the Abkhazian Princedom became part of the Russian Empire, a Russian military unit was stationed in the Sukhumi fortress. Although the principal recognized the Russian protectorate, a large part of the population did not recognize the government not only of Russia, but of the Principal of Abkhazia too. The principal's power was weak, and he relied entirely on Russian military force. The Russian command, despite the repeated requests from the Principal of Abkhazia, could not decide to go deep into the country and subdue the rebellious mountainous sides of Pskhu, Tsebeli, and Dali. During that period, the Russian government tried to strengthen itself on the Black Sea coast and, in fact, did not interfere in the management of the country. At the same time, there was a powerful pro-Turkish camp in princedom, headed by principal's brother *Aslan-Bey Sharvashidze*. The latter had an important foothold among the people in the form of anti-Russian forces.

The positions of the Russian government in Abkhazia were weak. The capture of Sokhumi did not mean the conquest of Abkhazia. Moreover, Aslan-Bey supporters attacked villages, looted, kidnapped people and cattle 20 kilometres from the Sokhumi fortress. In order to prevent these disorders and to subdue the country, in December of 1810 Giorgi Sharvashidze asked Major-General F. Simanovich to send his cousin *Manuchar Sharvashidze*, the commander-in-chief of Samurzakano, to help him. F. Simanovich asked the ruler of Samegrelo, Nino Dadiani, to grant the request of the Abkhaz prince (**ACAC, IV, 1870: 339**). Nino Dadiani sent the host of Samegrelo to Abkhazia. With the help of the local Russian administration, the Samegrelo army defeated Aslan-Bey and his Ottomanophile party, after which Aslan-Bey fled to Trebizond. The Samegrelo host also subdued several communities of Jiks to the Principal of Abkhazia. Nino Dadiani reconciled with Giorgi Sharvashidze and subdued to him Bekir-Bey Sharvashidze's children, influential Abkhaz lords Soslan-bey and Ali-Bey, who hated him and supported Aslan-Bey. The ruler of Samegrelo took hostages from them and made them to swear allegiance to the emperor. By her demand *Rabia-Khanum Marshania* was negotiating with her brothers, the owners of Tsebeli, to recognize Giorgi Sharvashidze as the ruler and to bring them under Russian rule (**ACAC, IV, 1870: 405-407; Kortua, 1964: 266**).

By the end of 1811 the plague spread in Georgia. Harvest failure and famine of 1811-1812 worsened the situation. The reckless attitude on the part of the authorities was followed by Kakheti uprising. The famine and the plague spread to Western Georgia and resulted in great casualties (**ACAC, VI, I, 1870: 646, 658**). People were fleeing from Imereti and Samegrelo to Abkhazia. The human trade had intensified. *Manuchar Sharvashidze*, the owner of Samurzakano, advised *Levan V Dadiani*, the Principal of Samegrelo (1805-1840), to march to Abkhazia to establish order: "*If you do not help now, the captives will be sold and many more will be lost.*" The Principal of Samegrelo gathered an ar-

my, took with him the bishops of Chqondidi and Tsaishi and marched to Abkhazia. In Samurzakano he stopped to spend the night in the estate of Levan Sharvashidze, Manuchar Sharvashidze's brother. That night Manuchar Sharvashidze was killed by the envoys of Khutunia, Levan Sharvashidze's son. According to the Principal of Samegrelo, his life was also threatened, but he found out in time and survived (**Georgian State Museum, 1953: 136**).

Levan V Dadiani immediately returned to Zugdidi. He could not take the well-fortified Bedia fortress on his own, and Levan Sharvashidze was an influential man in Samurzakano. Thus, he asked the Russian administration for help. By the order of the governor, two hundred men with canons, as well as the host of Imereti and Guria were sent to help Dadiani. In December of 1812, Levan V Dadiani marched to Bedia. As soon as the army approached, *Khutunia Sharvashidze* fled to Tsebeli. Levan Sharvashidze realized that he could not resist Dadiani and handed over the fortress. The Principal of Samegrelo showed mercy, did not punish Levan Sharvashidze due to his old age, gave him the village of Pakhulani, and sent him there, then fortified Bedia fortress, placed his garrison there, and returned to Zugdidi (**Dadiani, 1962: 204**).

During this period, the issue of handing over Sokhumi-Kale to the Ottomans aggravated. Article VI of the Bucharest Peace Treaty, signed on 16 May 1812, allowed Russia to retain control of Western Georgia. Although, Russia used "military force" in Imereti and Abkhazia, but the population of all Western Georgian provinces had already taken an oath of allegiance to Russia, and by it the Russian authorities justified the voluntary takeover of those (**Kortua, 1964: 420-421; Dumbadze, 1973a: 876**). The situation was different around Sukhum-Kale, as it was protected by the Turkish garrison when Giorgi Sharvashidze became the Russian subject and it was taken after the military campaign. Because the Abkhazs obeyed only those who owned Sokhumi, if the Ottomans retained control of Sokhumi, the Abkhazs would break from the support of the Principal. In other words, if Sukhum-Kale was ceded, it would be impossible to bring Abkhazs into obedience and keep Abkhazia. With this on mind, the Emperor gave a directive to N. *Rtishchev*, the Governor-General of Georgia, despite the request of the Turks, not to give back Sokhumi. The latter complied with the instructions of *Alexandre I* and refused to hand over Sokhumi to the Turks on the grounds that Abkhazia was never a direct subject of the Ottoman Empire and was not even mentioned in the peace treaty (**ACAC, V, 1873: 785-786, 504-505**).

In response, the Turks began preparations for the conquest of Western Georgia by force. For this purpose, they specially strengthened Poti Fortress. On 29 June 1813, Serasker *Seid Suleiman Pasha* arrived in Poti and brought two thousand soldiers. He was given an order to conquer Western Georgia. At the same time, *Aslan-Bey*, who was in Jiketi, arrived in Constantinople. Apparently, he was promised some help. Aslan-Bey arrived in Poti from Constantinople, then with a Turkish detachment he moved to Gudava by sea, and took the village Tamishi. Giorgi Sharvashidze appealed to the Russian authori-

ties for help (**Dadiani, 1962:** 205; **Kortua, 1964:** 446). Most of the Abkhazs supported Aslan-Bey. Rabia-Khanum Marshania with her two younger sons joined him. A significant part of the nobles of Abkhazia also supported them (**Dadiani, 1962:** 205; **ACAC, V, 1873:** 798). Aslan-Bey was supported by the Ottomanophiles and anti-Russian forces of Abkhazia. The Turks supplied him with troops, military equipment, and food from Poti. On 6 July, Seid Suleiman Pasha sent troops and food, as well as money, with 17 boats to Aslan-Bey, while the second part of the army was set out to capture Sokhumi (**ACAC, V, 1873:** 798; **Kortua, 1964:** 446).

In early July, the Serasker of Erzurum demanded from N. Rtishchev to hand over Imereti, Guria, Samegrelo, and Abkhazia with all their strongholds to the Ottomans. A similar request was made to him by Serasker Suleiman Pasha of Trebizond (**ACAC, V, 1873:** 790). According to N. Rtishchev, this was an unprecedented demand that did not comply with Article VI of the Bucharest Peace Treaty and, therefore, could not be met. In a letter to Seid Suleiman Pasha, he explained that the Russians had already handed over to the Ottomans Akhalkalaki and Poti which had been occupied by force during the war, and that the Western Georgian provinces of Imereti, Guria, and Samegrelo had become part of the Russian Empire before the war. As for Abkhazia, it joined Russia during the war, but was not conquered by force, and thus, voluntarily entered the Russian empire (**ACAC, V, 1873:** 796-797). N. Rtishchev warned the Serasker of Trebizond that the entry of Turkish troops into Abkhazia under the command of Aslan-Bey and the attempt to conquer the territories he had previously claimed in the name of the Porte was a violation of the treaty, and therefore he issued an appropriate order to defend these dominions. He called on Serasker to withdraw troops from Abkhazia, otherwise he too would take adequate measures (**ACAC, V, 1873:** 797).

The expulsion of the Turks from Abkhazia was entrusted to Major *Kutiev*, the commander of the 15th Jaeger Regiment (**ACAC, V, 1873:** 798, 800). Major Kutiev's detachment, accompanied by the host of Samegrelo, crossed the River Enguri and after a one-day march arrived in Ilori. As soon as the Russian and Georgian armies approached, the Turks left Aslan-Bey and returned to Poti. Aslan-Bey fled to Jiketi.

Giorgi Sharvashidze asked for help in subduing the population of principedom, thus the army continued to advance, took hostages from the nobility in Abzhua region and forced them to swear allegiance to the Principal. Then the Russians and Georgians crossed the River Kodori, took hostages in Bzipi Abkhazia too, and made the nobles to pledge allegiance to the prince. When the army arrived in Sokhumi, Rabia-Khanum and her two youngest sons also repented. The nobles from Zupu were also invited to Sokhumi. They also had to give hostages and take the oath of allegiance.

Thus, Giorgi Sharvashidze's rule was strengthened over the whole of Abkhazia. On the advice of Levan V Dadiani, the Principal of Abkhazia held talks with the Marshanias, the owners of Tsebeli, urging them to stop the raids and not to shelter the robbers. If they

did not heed this warning, he would destroy the robbers' nest. After that, the army came back and took with them the people who had taken refuge here during the famine and the plague and were captured by the Abkhazs (**ACAC, V, 1873**: 505-506; **Dadiani, 1962**: 205). The retreating Russian and Georgian army brought Samurzakano into the obedience of *Ketevan*, Levan Dadiani's sister and *Manuchar Sharvashidze's* widow (**ACAC, V, 1873**: 506). Thus, in August, the authorities suppressed, without bloodshed, the unrest in Abkhazia and subdued a large part of the population.

The Ottomans did not give up their claims. In November of 1813, the Ottomans again demanded the return of Western Georgian provinces of Imereti, Guria, Samegrelo, and Abkhazia, as well as of fortresses Sukhum-Kale, Anaklia, and Kemkheli, but N. Rti-shchev gave a well-grounded answer to Ottoman' claims (**ACAC, IV, 1870**: 805, 807).

Against this background, the situation in Abkhazia remained difficult. The Principal, in fact, was disobeyed by his brothers and the owners of certain parts of Abkhazia. Attacks by residents of neighbouring Caucasian and Abkhaz mountain communities have become more frequent. The disorder and anarchy in Abkhazia also affected the neighbouring Samegrelo Princedom. Therefore, on 3 October 1814, Levan V Dadiani asked N. Rti-shchev for permission to organize a military campaign in Abkhazia. Its purpose was to establish the order in Tsebeli (**NCM, A-1130**: 34r). But the arrangement of the campaign was delayed, and soon it was no longer needed. In the autumn of 1815, Levan V Dadiani settled his relationship with Tsebeli peacefully. On 29 November, in Samurzakano village of Okumi, *Misost*, *Saralufu*, and *Zerepkhu Marshanias*, the landlords of the Tsebeli region, swore allegiance to *Levan V Dadiani*, promised good neighbourhood and that the human trade and other crimes against Samegrelo would not take place. The oath also meant that they would not actively resist Giorgi Sharvashidze, would stop the attacks on Abkhazia and Dadiani's Samurzakano. The text of the oath, which is compiled in Georgian, says: *"We, the undersigned, the landlords of the Tsebeli region, Tavadis Marshanias, give this letter to you, to Your Majesty – the Principal Dadiani Leon that as **our fathers and grand-fathers were loyal subjects to Your father and grandfather**, but due to some troubles were separated from each other, but now, that **You wish us to be close, and You will re-new love and mercy to us**, we believe Your true word and we swear upon the holy al-Quran, first of all, never to be against His Majesty Russian Czar, Emperor Alexandre Pavlovich and to the rulers of these territories appointed by him through Your mediation. We will obey Your orders, as much as it is possible for us, we will resist all the enemies of Russia and your Majesty, and we will never agree with them, neither with words, nor in action, we will be in a good neighbourhood with **Samurzakano, as Your Princedom's part of Abkhazia is named**, and Odishi and its population, we will never let in the opponents of the Supreme Russian throne and the runaways from Your Majesty, we will not let any disorders to be caused in the Russian possession and in Your Majesty's Princedom too: no kidnapping of captives and nothing like that. And our kinship, who are not here, we will try*

to bring here and obey according to our promise. After this oath we kiss the holy Al-Quran to prove our oath and sign: *Tavadi Misost, the son of Uchardia Marshania; Tavadi Saraluf, the son of Tulapsia Marshania; Tavadi Zerepkhu, the son of Omer Marshania*" (**ACAC, V, 1873**: 507-508).

Despite the oath taken by the owners of Tsebeli, this part remained outside the influence of the Principal of Abkhazia and the Russian government. Meanwhile, Levan V Dadiani recruited *Soslan-Bey*, son of *Bekir-Bey Sharvashidze*, to the Russian side and made him swear the allegiance to the Emperor (**NCM, A-1130**: 79 R-82V). He also actively intervened in the affairs of Samurzakano and tried to establish order there. On 20 November 1815, Levan V Dadiani, the "*Principal of Abkhazia's Samurzakano*," issued a decree banning theft, robbery, and the captive trade in Samurzakano, demanding the return of the Imeretian and Megrelian peasants who moved there during the plague and famine (1811-1812), and maintaining the order, the fulfilment of which was promised by the nobility of Samurzakano (**NCM, A-1130**: 94R-98V). The oath was signed by *the Sharvashidzes, the Anchabadzes, the Chkotuas, the Emukhvaris, the Marghanias*, and others.

At the Black Sea coast of Abkhazia Russia owned only the Sokhumi fortress, where 500 soldiers were stationed. The small Sokhumi garrison could not provide stability in this area, and the command could not increase it. The weakness of Russia's position in Abkhazia was largely due to the weakness of the Principal and his small support among the population of Abkhazia. The Principal of Abkhazia was powerless to settle the internal political feuds in his principedom on his own. He constantly complained about the disobedience of his subjects. Kidnappings, murders, robberies, and obvious disobedience to the Principal continued here. In 1817, Giorgi Sharvashidze went to Levan V Dadiani and Major General Ivan Kurnatovsky, the Governor of Imereti (1817-1820). He asked for the hosts of Samegrelo and Imereti in order to subdue the subjects through them. Dadiani and the Governor of Imereti considered it best to act peacefully and decided to send with him Colonel *Niko Dadiani*, who enjoyed great authority and influence in Abkhazia. *Niko Dadiani* reconciled the Principal of Abkhazia with his brother *Hassan-Bey*, stepmother *Rabia-Khanum Marshania*, and the owner of Abzhu *Ali-Bey Sharvashidze* with the nobility of Bzipi district. All of them subdued to Giorgi Sharvashidze. Only some lords of Bzipi district, namely brothers *Narchou, Darukel*, and *Giorgi Inal-ipas* and the Edgi Zvanbaia refused to obey the Principal. At the same time, Levan V Dadiani baptized *Ali-Bey Sharvashidze*, named him *Alexandre* and married him to *Niko Dadiani's* daughter *Caesarea* (**ACAC, VI, I, 1870**: 643-644; **Dadiani, 1962**: 209).

The temporary peace was established in Abkhazia, but soon, in April of 1818, Giorgi Sharvashidze again informed I. Kurnatovsky about the open disobedience of his subjects. The Principal of Abkhazia demanded the host of Samegrelo and about 300 Imeretian cavalrymen, to whom he would add his loyal subjects and bring the population of the principedom into obedience without bloodshed; In addition, he demanded the deployment of

Russian troops in Abkhazia, after which the Abkhazs would not dare to disobey. In his opinion, these measures could bring the Abkhazs into obedience. I. Kurnatovsky believed that Giorgi Sharvashidze was weaker than he seemed in Abkhazia as he could not even stay alone with the people, but since the government has chosen him, he was obliged to protect him. Therefore, his request for the hosts of Imereti and Samegrelo had to be granted in order to put this region under control (**ACAC, VI, I, 1870: 644**).

At the same time, the local Russian administration tried to resolve the issue of Samurzakano, which was the subject of controversy between the princely houses of Samegrelo and Abkhazia. In May of 1818 an agreement was reached between the principals of Abkhazia and Samegrelo in the presence of I. Kurnatovsky. Giorgi Sharvashidze recognized Samurzakano as the dominion of Dadiani. According to the agreement, the border between Samegrelo and Abkhazia was confirmed on the River Ghalidzga (**CHAG: Coll. 1087, List 2, Case 357, p. 14**). Therefore, the Principal of Abkhazia recognized Samurzakano as a part of the Samegrelo principedom and ended the claim of Sharvashidzes' principedom on this region.

In July of 1819 an uprising started in Imereti. I. Kurnatovsky then wrote to General Alexey Velyaminov, the Chief of Staff of the Georgian Corps: *"The spirit of the uprising is universal and obviously no one is on our side. **And Abkhaz peasants are so sympathetic to the Imereti uprising that the Imeretians just need to invite the Abkhazs.** There are also rumours that the principals are calling for joint action against us: Samegrelo – the Svans and the **Abkhazs**, and Gurieli – the Adjarians"* (**ACAC, VI, I, 1870: 537**. Emphasis added – **B.Kh.**) The uprising also spread to Guria and Samegrelo. According to the French businessman Paul Guibal, who was in Abkhazia at that time, about eight people's assemblies – "Seims" had gathered in Sokhumi and its vicinity and the issue of Imereti and Samegrelo riots was discussed. The purpose of the assemblies was to determine whether it was necessary to join the rebels. It should be noted that *"a large part of the participants of the assemblies were in favour of the fight"* (**Dzidzaria, Kacharava, 1981: 21**). In August of 1819, Georgian writer and traveller Giorgi Avalishvili visited Sokhumi. According to his observations, *"the locals (Abkhazs) are not settling down with their banditry behaviour"* for the damage of the Russian rule (**Avalishvili, 1967: 29-30**).

The authorities strongly warned the Abkhaz leader and his rebellious brothers not to give refuge to the rebels fleeing from Samegrelo to Abkhazia (**ACAC, VI, I, 1870: 630**). Nevertheless, Giorgi Dadiani, one of the leaders of the uprising in Samegrelo, found the shelter in Abkhazia in June of 1820. Levan V Dadiani demanded his extradition, otherwise threatening to *"take over the whole of Abkhazia with the help of powerful Russian troops."* It seems that Giorgi Dadiani did not feel safe in Abkhazia and fled first to Poti and then to Svaneti, where he was captured by order of the Principal of Samegrelo and handed over to the Russian authorities (**Consolidation, 1902: 525, 535-537; Khorava, 2001: 62**). In July of 1820, Russian troops brutally suppressed the Imereti uprising. Abkhazs did not take part in the uprising, but they sympathized with it.

On 7 February 2021, Abkhaz prince *Giorgi Sharvashidze* died in Likhni. It seems that the Principal understood well the balance of power in the country and asked *Hassan-Bey*, his younger brother, to take care of his wife and children before his death, and advised *Hassan-Bey* to obey the Russian authorities (**NCM, Weidenbaum Collection, №1717**). On the next day, *Tamar Sharvashidze* wrote a letter to inform Major P. Mogilyansky, the commandant of the Sokhumi fortress, about the death of *Giorgi Sharvashidze* and asked to pass the news to the governor. In addition, she requested that the eldest son *Dimitri*, who was growing up in the Page Corps in Saint Petersburg, to be sent to take over the Principal's duties (**NCM, Weidenbaum Collection, №1716**).

On 14 March, *Tamar Sharvashidze* wrote a letter directly to A. Velyaminov and asked him to send *Dimitri*, the heir to the throne, to Abkhazia. She wrote that *Dimitri Sharvashidze* did know "*neither the conduct, nor the language*" of this country, but that he would take care of the country well (**NCM, Weidenbaum Collection, №1718**). On 1 April A. Velyaminov sent a letter of consolation to *Tamar Sharvashidze*. He wrote that the principal's house would not be deprived of the emperor's protection and that the Russian troops were always ready to support them, and that no one in Abkhazia could harass them. At the end of June of 1821, *Aslan-Bey* arrived in Jiketi from the Porte. He sent a deputation to *Tamar Sharvashidze* and demanded hostages and free admission to Abkhazia. *Tamar Sharvashidze* received the *Aslan-Bey* emissaries in the Sokhumi fortress in the presence of Major *Mikhin*, the commandant of the Sokhumi fortress, listened to their proposal and told them that her father's killer would never be allowed in Abkhazia. The nobles from *Bzipi Abkhazia*, who were in *Tamar Sharvashidze's* personal regiment, agreed with her. Nevertheless, in a conversation with *Mikhin*, *Tamar Sharvashidze* stated that she was not sure of the loyalty of her subjects, so she asked that a small detachment be sent to Likhni to defend her palace (**Consolidation, 1904: 558-589**).

Meanwhile, in St. Petersburg *Aleksey Yermolov* actively supported the immediate sending of *Dimitri Sharvashidze* to Abkhazia, as there was no doubt that supporters of *Hassan-Bey Sharvashidze*, the brother of the deceased prince's government, who had been ousted by the government, would cause troubles in the absence of the prince. He considered it necessary to give *Dimitri* the rank of colonel and send him to Tbilisi. However, A. Yermolov was far from believing that "*the wild and beastly people of Abkhazia would completely submit to the new chief*" (**ACAC, VI, I, 1870: 655**), but he still did not lose hope. In August, *Dimitri Sharvashidze* was dismissed from the Page Corps, was promoted to colonel by Emperor's order and appointed as the Principal of Abkhazia (**Dadiani, 1962: 209; ACAC, VI, I, 1870: 656**). After it *Dimitri Sharvashidze* left for Tbilisi.

It was at this time that *Aslan-Bey* invaded Abkhazia from Jiketi with a detachment of 600 men. On 11 September the rebel army reached Sokhumi Fortress with flags, but the garrison opened fire and repulsed them. *Aslan-Bey* laid a siege to Sokhumi and occupied almost all of Abkhazia. In mid-September, he crossed the border with the Samegrelo Principedom, on the River Ghalidzga. *Levan V Dadiani* told *Aslan-Bey* that he would not al-

low to invade his domain and that he would protect the widow and orphans, i.e. Tamar Sharvashidze and her children (**Dadiani, 1962:** 209; **ACAC, VI, I, 1870:** 659; **ACAC, VI, II, 1875:** 746; **Consolidation, 1904:** 560; **Dubrovin, 1888:** 464-466). Meanwhile, the Principal of Samegrelo informed P. Gorchakov that he was gathering an army to defend his territory and help Giorgi Sharvashidze's widow and orphans. The governor of Imereti considered that Levan V Dadiani wanted to take advantage of the Abkhaz unrest and annex that part of Abkhazia, which once belonged to Samegrelo. Therefore, he demanded from the Principal of Samegrelo to abandon his intention of marching to Abkhazia and entrusted the care of the Principal's widow and orphans to the government (**Dubrovin, 1888:** 460; **Consolidation, 1904:** 560). It is obvious that the government was not interested in the activities of Samegrelo's Principal in Abkhazia and demanded from him only to prevent the insurgents from entering Samurzakano (**Kiria, Saria, 1967:** 38-39).

Aslan-Bey declared that he had in his possession the Sultan's order, by virtue of which he had been appointed governor of Abkhazia, and that Russia had ceded Sokhumi to him. All this had a great impact on the Abkhazs and many lords sided with him. Aslan-Bey was joined by his younger brothers Batal-Bey, Tayyar-Bey and Rostom-Bey, as well as Hassan-Bey's father-in-law *Narchou Inalishvili*, his brother *Giorgi Inalishvili*, and Ali-Bey Sharvashidze, the owner of Abzhua, which further strengthened his forces. Aslan-Bey was supported by a large number of Abkhazs, who recognized his authority and gave him hostages. His base consisted of the residents of the village Kelasuri and its vicinity, the subordinates of Hassan-Bey, as well as of residents of Bichvinta and its vicinity, and Tsebeli. A large part of the inhabitants of Bzipi district, including the residents of Likhni, remained loyal to Tamar Sharvashidze for a long time and resisted the insurgents with weapons, but then they also sided with Aslan-Bey (**ACAC, VI, I, 1870:** 659; **Dubrovin, 1888:** 464).

Thus, by October of 1821 the whole of Abkhazia was under the control of Aslan-Bey. The Russian administration in the Caucasus had begun preparations for an expedition to Abkhazia. Dimitri Sharvashidze arrived in Tbilisi at the end of September. P. Gorchakov was instructed to suppress the Abkhaz uprising and to guarantee the accession of Dimitri Sharvashidze to the throne. The army of the Samegrelo principedom was also to take part in the expedition. A. Velyaminov gave detailed instructions to Dimitri Sharvashidze. Upon his arrival in Abkhazia, he had to summon the loyal princes of the principal's house and through them spread a proclamation drawn up on behalf of the young prince. It should inform the people of Abkhazia that he had been appointed the Principal of Abkhazia, call them to obey him, and demand hostages from the feudal lords to ensure their loyalty (**Dadiani, 1962:** 209; **ACAC, VI, I, 1870:** 658-659).

Meanwhile, P. Gorchakov assembled the Abkhazian expedition force in Redut-Kale. It consisted of Samegrelo Infantry and two battalions of the 44th Jaeger regiment with 600 soldiers and two cannons, a Cossack detachment, and a cavalry militia of Samegrelo Principedom. On 21 October, Dimitri Sharvashidze left for Kutaisi, and from there, together

with P. Gorchakov and the cavalry militia of Samegrelo principedom, marched to Abkhazia. Levan V Dadiani escorted P. Gorchakov to the River Ghalidzga, the border of Samegrelo Principedom, and from there the Samegrelo army was led by Colonel *Niko Dadiani* (**Dadiani, 1962: 209; ACAC, VI, I, 1870: 659; Dubrovin, 1888: 465; Consolidation, 1904: 565-566**).

Aslan-Bey fortified with a detachment of 3,000 Abkhazs and Jiks the territory between the Kodori Cape and the village of Kelasuri (**Dadiani, 1962: 209-210**), while he himself stayed in Mokvi with the Abkhaz host. Niko Dadiani persuaded his son-in-law Ali-Bey Sharvashidze and brother-in-law Salarufu Marshania, to leave Aslan-Bey's camp and come to him. After their defection, Aslan-Bey fled from Mokvi (**Dadiani, 1962: 210; Dubrovin, 1888: 468; Consolidation, 1904: 566**). On 14 November, the army of Samegrelo, which was in the vanguard, four kilometres from the River Kodori met the strong resistance of the opponent and suffered significant losses. They were assisted by colonel *Ivane Apkhazi*, the commander of the Jaeger regiment, who captured the enemy's positions after the fight. Aslan-Bey's supporters tried to stop the attack but failed. According to N. Dadiani, a big battle, which lasted for 16 hours, took place near Ashghvara. The Russian and Georgian armies took Aslan-Bey's fortifications and drove his forces away, although they suffered considerable damage. P. Gorchakov's detachment encamped on the bank of the River Machara that night and continued the attack again in the morning.

P. Gorchakov's detachment arrived in Tubun and burned it down, along with nearby villages and Hassan-Bey Sharvashidze's palace in the village of Kelasuri. From there he arrived in Sokhumi and met no resistance there (**Dadiani, 1962: 210-211**). After the arrival of P. Gorchakov's expedition to Sokhumi, the uprising gradually subsided. Aslan-Bey fled to Jiketi. The army of Russians and Georgians stayed in Sokhumi fortress for several days, rested a bit, and marched to Likhni. The lords of Bzipi Abkhazia came to Likhni and promised obedience. Because Narchou and Giorgi Inalishvili were not among them, P. Gorchakov sent a detachment led by Niko Dadiani and Ivane Apkhazi to devastate Inalishvilis' place and bring them into obedience. Giorgi Inalishvili obeyed the commanders of the punishing squad and was forgiven the crime, while Narchou Inalishvili went into hiding. Niko Dadiani and Ivane Apkhazi were camped in the latter's house on the bank of the River Kapoetistskali (Bzipi). The punishing expedition burned Narchou Inalishvili's house and nearby villages and returned to Likhni after a small clash with the Abkhazs (**Dadiani, 1962: 211; Dubrovin, 1888: 469; Consolidation, 1904: 566**).

On 30 November, in Likhni, in the presence of Abkhaz nobility and Russian troops, P. Gorchakov solemnly declared Dimitri Sharvashidze as the ruler of Abkhazia. He was given a flag and a sword as a symbol of supreme power, and the Abkhaz nobles swore allegiance to him. P. Gorchakov defended the principal in Likhni with two hundred soldiers of the Samegrelo Jaeger Regiment. After that he considered his job done in Abkhazia, returned to Sokhumi with an army of Russians and Georgians, and from there arrived in Redut-Kale by sea with regular troops, and N. Dadiani returned to Samegrelo by land

with his host (**Dadiani, 1962:** 211; **Dubrovin, 1888:** 469-470; **Consolidation, 1904:** 566). Dimitri Sharvashidze (1821-1822) was not able to take over the kingdom with a firm hand. His government was weak and relied entirely on the Russian military force. As *Jacques-François Gamba*, the French consul in Tbilisi, noted, the Principal, who moved from Alexandre I's palace in St. Petersburg to "the paternal wooden house, who knew neither his people, nor their language, for two years looked more like a captive than a sovereign ruler." The country was ruled by his mother (**Gamba, 1987:** 86).

In 1821 eventually it became known that Aslan-bey, with the help of Pasha of Anapa, was gathering an army in the tribes on the Eastern Black Sea shore and was planning the invasion of Abkhazia to expel the Russian-appointed Principal. Dimitri Sharvashidze demanded from the lords of the Jiks, who had previously been subordinate to the Principal of Abkhazia, to forbid passage to Aslan-Bey. The Jiks refused to comply with this request and stated that they did not recognize Dimitri as the heir of the Sharvashidze House. They demanded the expulsion of the Russians from Abkhazia and Sokhumi (**ACAC, VI, II, 1875:** 437, 438; **Dubrovin, 1888:** 471). Frightened by the impending invasion of Aslan-Bey, Dimitri Sharvashidze moved from Likhni to Sokhumi fortress. In January of 1822, Aslan-Bey with Jiks and other highlanders of the Western Caucasus invaded Abkhazia and attacked the Likhni garrison. The Russians defeated him, took over the booty, and forced the invaders to retreat (**Dadiani, 1962:** 211). Defeated in the battle for Likhni (31 January – 3 February), Aslan-Bey fled to Jiketi, then went to the Ottoman Empire and settled in Trebizond. However, he did not intend to give up the fight. From the very beginning it was obvious to the Russian administration in the Caucasus that Aslan-Bey was incited by the foreign forces and that the Abkhaz unrest was caused by the Ottoman support of him (**ACAC, VI, II, 1875:** 437, 438).

Abkhazia was calm for a while, but there was still hidden tension. Dimitri Sharvashidze tried to use this period to strengthen the government and started negotiations with the opposition forces, but he showed signs of fever upon his return to Likhni. Soon his health deteriorated. Russian officers treated him with care. On 15 October, the Principal was taken to their fortress and a doctor was brought from Sokhumi, but the Principal's malaria was untreatable. *Dimitri Sharvashidze*, who was only 20 years old at the time, died on 16 October 1822 (**Dadiani, 1962:** 211; **Dubrovin, 1888:** 471; **Consolidation, 1904:** 568-569).

Since Dimitri Sharvashidze had no direct heir, the legal heir to the Abkhaz throne was his younger brother, 13-year-old Mikheil. The Russian government was interested in strengthening the house of Giorgi Sharvashidze on the throne of Abkhazia. At the same time, the government tried to encourage Tamar Sharvashidze as much as possible. At the end of November *Tamar Sharvashidze* sent *Temurkva Anchabadze* and *Thaps Marghania* to A. Yermolov with a letter, in which she, on behalf of the entire Abkhaz people, asked for the approval of Mikheil as the Principal (**ACAC, VI, I, 1870:** 661; **Consolidation, 1904:**

569). On 14 February 1823, Emperor Alexander I confirmed *Mikheil Sharvashidze* as the Principal of Abkhazia. He was promoted to the rank of Major and given a salary (**Dadiani, 1962:** 212; **ACAC, VI, I, 1870:** 662-664; **Dubrovin, 1888:** 471). A. Yermolov summoned Mikheil Sharvashidze to Tbilisi and informed him of the Emperor's order approving him as a Principal. The governor instructed him to be a just ruler, to show religious tolerance, to be calm and warm in his treatment of the people, which would bring him their love and at the same time would guarantee his happy rule, and sent him to Abkhazia (**ACAC, VI, I, 1870:** 664; **Consolidation, 1904:** 570). P. Gorchakov took Mikheil Sharvashidze to Likhni, where he read the Emperor's order in front of the Abkhaz nobility and part of the Russian army to approve him as a Principal. After that Mikheil Sharvashidze swore allegiance to Emperor. To protect him, Gorchakov left the two hundred soldiers of Samegrelo Jaeger Regiment with 2 light cannons in Likhni and returned to Kutaisi (**Khorava, 2011a:** 324).

Mikheil Sharvashidze's government was also weak. It was hard for the young, inexperienced Principal to fight the conspiracies and intrigues whose threads were falling into the hands of his strong and cunning uncle Aslan-Bey. Since Mikheil was underage, the principedom was actually ruled by his mother *Tamar Sharvashidze*. A. Yermolov advised Tamar Sharvashidze to teach Mikheil properly, and instructed the Principal to have constant contact with P. Gorchakov, who would satisfy his demands, which deserved attention and "*served the interests of the governing the Principedom and the Russian Emperor*" (**ACAC, VI, I, 1870:** 662. **Consolidation, 1904:** 570).

In March of 1823, Abkhaz and Tsebeli nobles (including Rostom-Bey) who had previously disobeyed the Russian government and the Principal of Abkhazia, swore their allegiance and loyalty to Emperor Alexandre I, Tamar Sharvashidze, and agreed to obey the Principal of Abkhazia. Meanwhile, P. Gorchakov was asked to pardon Rostom-Bey and allow him to marry Ketevan, sister of Levan V Dadiani and widow of Manuchar Sharvashidze. The Russian administration in the Caucasus, in honour of the Principal of Samegrelo, forgave him. In 1823 Levan V Dadiani baptized Rostom-Bey and married Ketevan to him (**Dadiani, 1962:** 212; **ACAC, VI, I, 1870:** 662-663). With this step, one of the influential Abkhaz lords, an opponent of the Principal's house, was reconciled.

Tamar Sharvashidze could see well that her son's rule was not solid, thus, asked A. Yermolov to strengthen the Likhni garrison. The Caucasus Command did not have sufficient forces for that, so the Commander-in-Chief refused this request. Tamar Sharvashidze from time to time reminded the Russian government of the danger that, in her opinion, threatened the princely house. Three months after Dimitri Sharvashidze's death, she informed the local Russian administration that the previous Principal had been poisoned. Tamar Sharvashidze assured the Commander of the Sukhumi fortress, Lieutenant Colonel Mikhin, both in letters and in private talks, that Dimitri Sharvashidze had been poisoned by his servant *Urus Lakvar*. The latter was arrested, but denied the charges. According to Mikheil Sharvashidze, Urus Lakvar also tried to poison him and his younger

brother Constantine. Abkhaz lords confirmed that Urus Lakvar had a connection with Aslan-Bey. There was no other evidence to accuse him. Russian officers from the Likhni garrison claimed that Dimitri Sharvashidze had become ill two weeks before his death. Doctor Vorontsov also confirmed that he had died of malaria. Nevertheless, in order to raise Mikheil Sharvashidze's and his mother's prestige, P. Gorchakov, considering that their testimony seemed completely credible, found Urus Lakvar guilty, and asked Yermolov the permission for his hanging, to which the latter agreed. In the fall of 1823 Urus Lakvar, accused of poisoning Dimitri Sharvashidze, was hanged in Likhni, at the square in front of the Principal's palace (**ACAC, VI, I, 1870: 663-665; Consolidation, 1904: 571**).

The weakness of political power in Abkhazia was exploited by the highlanders of the Western Caucasus. The Jiks and Ubykhs crossed the River Bzipi every year either from the mountains or from the Black Sea coast and invaded the country. They looted villages, took cattle and captives. Although these campaigns were not always successful, they did great damage to the country. In the summer of 1823, a detachment of thousands of Ubykhs under the command of *Sahatker Barzegi, son of Adagva*, crossed the mountain paths in Abkhazia, but the shepherds noticed him and informed the people. The Abkhazs cut the retreat roads to the Ubykhs and destroyed them completely. The leader of the raiders was also killed in the clash. After that, the Ubykhs attacked Abkhazia only in winter, usually in January or February (**Zvanba, 1982a: 15-16**). Attacks by the highlanders of the Western Caucasus forced Mikheil Sharvashidze to ask the Russian command to seize Gagra, the natural gate of Abkhazia (**Dyachkov-Tarasov, 2003: 93**). Although the Russians were aware of Gagra's strategic importance, they did not have the power to capture it. First, it was necessary to firmly establish themselves in Bzipi Abkhazia (**Dyachkov-Tarasov, 2003: 93**).

Despite measures taken by the Russian government to strengthen the government of the Principal of Abkhazia, Mikheil Sharvashidze's rule was weak. The different parts of Princedom were swept by unrest. The growth of the anti-Russian movement in the population was caused by the Russian policy. Russian officials referred to the Abkhazs as "untamed beasts" and were ready to deal with them as harshly as it was possible at any opportunity. The rebellious sentiment was intensified by spring of 1824. In such a situation, Khinkuras Marshania from Tsebeli killed Rostom-Bey Sharvashidze. This fact further aggravated the situation. In order to subdue the Abkhazs, the Russian administration decided to send a punishing expedition to some villages. On 22 May 1824, a detachment of the Sukhumi Fortress Garrison, with a strength of 225 soldiers, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Mikhin, attacked the village Akapa, where the rebels were allegedly hiding. The Russian detachment raided and burned the village down, captured Khinkuras Marshania, and retreated. The retreating detachment was attacked by Abkhazs. Mikhin and 42 soldiers were killed in the clash (**Eichwald, 2005: 217; ACAC, VI, I, 1870: 668; Dubrovin, 1888: 512; Consolidation, 1904: 572**). This case became a sign of the general anti-Russian uprising of the Abkhazs.

Aslan-Bey Sharvashidze took advantage of this, immediately arrived in Jiketi from the Porte, gathered an army and invaded Abkhazia. He addressed the Abkhazs dissatisfied with Tamar Sharvashidze's rule and called them to disobey the Principal. The rebels attacked and ransacked the lands of pro-Russian nobles. Mikheil Sharvashidze was in Likhni with his mother and siblings at that time. He correctly foresaw the gravity of the situation, sent his mother and brothers to the Sukhumi fortress, and fortified himself in the Likhni palace, which was guarded by 300 soldiers of the Samegrelo Regiment (**Consolidation, 1904: 572; Khorava, 2011a: 326**).

Those who were considered the most loyal to Mikheil Sharvashidze also took part in the uprising. The uprising in the Bzipi district was led by the noble Kats Marghania, who had a great reputation not only among the Abkhazs, but also among the neighbouring highlanders for his cleverness, courage, and strong character. Many Abkhaz princes and nobles sought friendship and connection with him (**Philipson, 1885: 191**). The uprising was joined by the influential landlord *Narchou Inal-ipa*, noble *Gid Lakrba*, Jik lord *Edigey Tsamba*, and others. The insurgents took an oath to fight to the end against Mikheil Sharvashidze and to kill all those, even their close relatives, who would break their oath. The rebels sent their people to Tsebeli, Jiketi, Ubikheti, and other Adyghe tribes, asking for help. The Caucasian highlanders gladly accepted this call and marched to Likhni. The number of rebels reached 10-12 thousand (**Consolidation, 1904: 572**).

On 8 June, insurgents besieged the Likhni Palace and fortress. They took over the church building and used it to shoot on the fortress. There was no hope of help from Sokhumi, as Sokhumi was also besieged by insurgents and awaited attack every day (**Consolidation, 1904: 574-575**). The Caucasus command ordered P. Gorchakov to suppress the Abkhaz uprising. The Likhni garrison and Mikheil Sharvashidze, before restoring his rule, were to be transferred to Sokhumi (**Dubrovin, 1888: 513-514**). Levan V Dadiani also received a letter about his participation in the military expedition. On 1 July, the expedition under the command of P. Gorchakov moved from Redut-Kale to Abkhazia. The expedition included 1400 soldiers from infantry and 44th Jaeger regiments of Samegrelo, as well as Samegrelo's host consisting of 1100 warriors under the command of Levan V Dadiani. From the sea the expedition was supported by brig *Orpheus* and frigate *Speshni*.

On 8 July, the expedition reached the River Kodori and crossed it. From the Kodori to Sokhumi P. Gorchakov was again met with strong resistance from the Abkhazs. On the evening of 10 July, he reached Sokhumi despite heavy casualties. On 16 July, P. Gorchakov used the *Orpheus* to patrol the road to Likhni along the coast and was convinced that continuing the road from Sokhumi to Likhni would result in even heavier casualties, as Abkhazs had ambushes all along the road. An especially strong ambush was arranged near the village of Psirtskha, at the old fortress of Anakopia, on which the flags of the Jiks and other Circassian chiefs were raised. Thus, P. Gorchakov decided to move a part of his troops by the sea. On the morning of 21 July, P. Gorchakov landed 800 soldiers in Bombora. On 24 July, at dawn, Gorchakov marched to Likhni. The rebels fiercely resisted the

landing forces, but they were also attacked by the Likhni garrison. As a result, the rebels dispersed. P. Gorchakov took Mikheil Sharvashidze the Likhni garrison with him and returned to Sokhumi the same evening (**Georgian State Museum, 1957:** 265; **Eichwald 2005:** 217-218; **Dubrovin, 1888:** 514-517, 575-576; **Consolidation, 1904:** 577-578). After that the uprising gradually subsided. Aslan-Bey again fled to Jiketi. As for Mikheil Sharvashidze, due to the difficult situation in the country he was forced to leave Abkhazia. P. Gorchakov moved the Principal, as well as his mother and sister, to Samegrelo. For several years the Principal of Abkhazia lived there, first in the village of Kheta and then in Redut-Kale. His expenses were covered by the Russian government (**Kraevich, 1870:** 211; **Dubrovin, 1888:** 517).

After the successful completion of the expedition, A. Yermolov wondered when a new expedition could be organized to bring the Abkhazs into obedience. On 24 August P. Gorchakov sent a report to A. Yermolov stating that Abkhazs did not obey any government; they had no farming or large livestock, they lived like the Circassians by plundering and human trading, hence they had to change their traditions. According to him, the Abkhazs could be subdued, but there would always be unrest and no end to the hostilities, which would result in the loss of soldiers. Therefore, he considered it better to build fortifications in several places on the coast of Abkhazia, namely in Gagra, Bichvinta, and Ilori. Then, a year later, Abkhazia would be fully subjugated. Otherwise, the expeditions would bring no results. A. Yermolov considered P. Gorchakov's arguments convincing and gave up on the organization of another expedition to Abkhazia (**Consolidation 1904:** 578-581).

On 1 July 1826, the Russian and the Ottoman Empires signed the *Akkerman convention*. It confirmed the terms of the 1812 Bucharest Peace Treaty. The Sublime Porte officially recognized Sokhumi, Redut-Kale (Kemkheli), and Anaklia, as a part of Russia, thus ending its long-standing claims on this region (**FPR, 1985:** 850-853).

The difficult situation in Abkhazia also affected Samegrelo. Abkhazs often looted in Samegrelo, stole goods, and took captives. According to the German scholar and traveller E. Eichwald, as soon as the Principal of Samegrelo marched to punish them, they took refuge in forests and mountains, and their punishment was possible only in winter, when they were deprived of such shelters. In May of 1826, when E. Eichwald arrived in Samegrelo, he heard that the Abkhazs were invading the Princedom again, and Levan V Dadiani had gone to pursue them and strengthen the border with Abkhazia. It turned out that as soon as the Principal of Samegrelo approached, the Abkhazs, as always, fled to the mountains (**Eichwald, 2005:** 173).

Levan V Dadiani and the Russian administration in the Caucasus were interested in resolving the situation in Abkhazia. Mikheil Sharvashidze was also thinking of the ways to return to the throne of Abkhazia. He seems to have come to the conclusion that only the authority of his uncle, Hassan-Bey Sharvashidze, who had been exiled by the Russian authorities, could help him to win over the disobedient Abkhazs. Thus, M. Sharvashidze asked Yermolov to release Hassan-Bey. On 15 January 1827, A. Yermolov filed a motion to

the Minister of Interior. He noted that after 6 years of exile Hassan-Bey would be cured of his desire to seize the Princedom and, through his influence, would greatly assist the government in Abkhazia (**Consolidation 1904**: 581-582). Meanwhile, A. Yermolov instructed Levan V Dadiani to find out what was the situation in Abkhazia and to interfere actively in resolving the political situation there. In order to complete the task, the Principal of Samegrelo sent the landlords Manuchar Chkotua and Tlaf Marghania to Abkhazia. On 14 March, they returned from the mission. According to them, the Abkhaz and Tsebeli landlords were ready to come to the village of Gufu belonging to Ali-Bey Sharvashidze and declare their obedience (**ACAC, VI, I, 1870**: 665).

In such a situation, a significant change took place in the Russian administration in the Caucasus. On 27 March 1827, A. Yermolov was recalled from the Caucasus and the next day Lieutenant General *Ivan Paskevich* was appointed as a Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasus Corps. This circumstance briefly hindered the normalization of the political situation in Abkhazia. On 30 April, some representatives of the Abkhaz nobility repented of taking part in the uprising and swore allegiance to the Russian emperor. Among those who took the oath was Kats Marghania, one of the leaders of the uprising. Levan V Dadiani and Captain Nikoloz Dadiani were sent to take the oath from the nobility (**ACAC, VIII, 1881**: 401).

Thus, Abkhazia, with the great contribution of Levan V Dadiani, again subdued to the Russian government. On 3 May, I. Paskevich ordered the ruler of Imereti Vasilii Bebutov (1825-1827) to send Mikheil Sharvashidze to Likhni. It seems that I. Paskevich was not completely convinced that peace would be maintained in Abkhazia, so V. Bebutov ordered Tamar Sharvashidze and her daughters to be taken to Sokhumi (**ACAC, VI, I, 1870**: 401). In May 1827, Mikheil Sharvashidze arrived in Sokhumi, where he was received with great honour, and Russian warships celebrated his return with a military salute (**Seleznyov, 1847a**: 180).

Despite the efforts of the Russian government, the rule of the Abkhaz Principal was weak and in fact extended only to the Bzipi district. The regions of Abkhazia and Abzhua only nominally subordinated to the Principal. The authorities of the prince were not recognized by Tsebeli, Dali, and Pskhu, the mountain regions, did not recognize the authority of the Principal of Abkhazia. Jiks and Ubykhs often ransacked the princedom from the North-Eastern shore. Kidnappings, human trading, and other crimes continued. In 1827 Mikheil Sharvashidze urged the Russian command to seize Gagra in order to put an end to the attacks of Jiks and Ubykhs on Abkhazia (**Dyachkov-Tarasov, 2003**: 94).

Hassan-Bey Sharvashidze returned to his homeland from exile in 1828. Since then, internal strife resumed in Abkhazia. Hassan-Bey did not want to play the role of a loyal vassal of Mikheil Sharvashidze. There was a confrontation between the Principal and Hassan-bey, which soon escalated into open enmity. Only the intervention of the Russian government forced the opponents to maintain an outwardly loyal relationship (**Pakhomov, 1953**: 233; **Fadeev, 1939**: 108).

In the early 1830s, after winning the wars with Iran (1826-1828) and the Ottoman Porte (1828-1829), the Russian troops intensified operations in the North Caucasus. Based on the directive of Nicholas I,¹ I. Paskevich devised a plan for the rapid subjugation of the peoples of the Caucasus Mountains, including the Abkhazs. Emperor approved this plan in October of 1829 (**Consolidation, 1889**: 123).

The plan was to subjugate the Adyghe groups living in the Western Caucasus, in Kuban region, and on the southern slopes of the Greater Caucasus. It required the construction of new fortifications along the Eastern Black Sea Coast and connecting them to the existing fortresses of Redut-Kale, Sokhumi, and Anapa. The several expeditions in Kuban region had to be also organized from the North. In order to implement this plan, the "Abkhazian Expedition" was set up with the aim of capturing the coastline from Sokhumi to Anapa, building a line of fortifications there, providing safe land routes between the forts, and eventually establishing Russian military and administrative rule in the Western Caucasus Mountains.

On 8 July 1830, the Russian landing troops sailed from Sokhumi to Gagra and seized it. After receiving this news, the "Abkhazian Expedition," under the command of General *Karl Hesse*, left Sokhumi and seized Bombora on 16 July. There the Principal of Abkhazia Mikheil Sharvashidze joined the expedition from Likhni. Then the expedition continued to advance and on 19 July captured Bichvinta. Despite initial success, the advance of Russian troops to the North-West of Gagra was hampered by fierce resistance from the Jiks and Ubykhs. At the same time I. Paskevich crossed the River Kuban and destroyed several auls of Shaphsugh. Then he built several fortresses on the River Kuban. However, the goal set by the expedition could not be fully achieved. Nevertheless, The Russians began to build fortifications on the coast of Abkhazia, namely in Bombora, Bichvinta, Gagra. Bombora became the headquarters of the "Abkhaz Expedition." These forts had to block the coastal road through which the Jiks and Ubykhs entered Abkhazia. They also had to strengthen the Russian domination in Abkhazia (**Khorava, 2003**: 93-112). The seizure of the Black Sea Coast of Abkhazia by the Russians had a significant impact on the Jiks, Ubykhs, and Abkhazs themselves. It was especially important to close the Gagra pass, which Mikheil Sharvashidze had been asking the Russian authorities for a long time.

At the same time, the Principal of Abkhazia made a claim on Samurzakano. In 1834 Mikheil Sharvashidze invaded the village of Ilori and forced the locals to swear allegiance to him. The Russian administration in the Caucasus has strongly warned Abkhazia's Principal to stop his wilfulness. The Governor-General Baron Rosen wrote to Mikheil Sharvashidze: "*Such an action serves to the increase of disorder in Abkhazia and I cannot hide*

¹ This directive was given in the Emperor's congratulations to I. Paskevich with his victory in the Russo-Ottoman War. Nicholas I called on the Governor-General of the Caucasus and the Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasus Corps to conclude equally glorious and "*even more important in terms of direct benefits*" task, namely, "*the complete subjugation or destruction of the highlanders*" (**Shcherbatov, 1891**: 229-230).

my concern at your arbitrariness in someone else's domain. The authorities know that the actual border between Samegrelo and Abkhazia is the River Ghalidzga, and since the village of Ilori is located on the left bank of the river, it cannot belong to Abkhazia. Therefore, I am obliged to ask you ... to announce in writing to all the people of Ilori that the oath on your allegiance given by them is unfounded and that they belong not to Your Highness, but to the owner of Samegrelo "(ACAC, VIII, 1881: 449. Emphasis added – B.Kh.). Mikheil Sharvashidze was forced to leave Ilori.

In 1834-1835, the Russian administration in the Caucasus built the road from Redut-Kale to Sokhumi and from Sokhumi to Gagra. Meanwhile, in 1835, two fortresses, in Ilori and Dranda, were built on the Georgian coast of the Black Sea. After laying the road from Sokhumi to Gagra (through Bombora and Bichvinta), the territory between the River Bzipi and Gagra returned to the jurisdiction of the Abkhazia's Principal. At the same time, the Russian authorities subjugated Ali-Bey and Hassan-Bey Sharvashidzes, the owners of Abzhu and Abkhazia districts, to Mikheil Sharvashidze, thus making him the sole ruler. Actually, it can be stated that the Principdom of Abkhazia had been formed only by the Russian military forces in the 1830s (Dyachkov-Tarasov 2003: 108; Khorava, 2011a: 322-333). In May of 1837, Baron Rosen organized an expedition to Tsebeli and subdued the Marghanias, who swore allegiance to Russia. From that time on, the Russian form of the name of the region – Tsebelda (meaning Tsebeli and Dali) – was adopted. At the same time the Marshanias of Dali came before Rosen and also promised obedience to him. The Russian rule was established in the mountain communities and the district of Tsebelda was created with the village of Mramba as its administrative centre (Khorava, 2006: 201-205; Essays, I, 1960: 180).

In 1839, all Russian strongholds on the Eastern shore of the Black Sea were connected by land routes. All the forts from the mouth of the River Kuban to the River Choloki, as well as Abkhazia and Tsebelda with the troops stationed there, became a part of the Black Sea Coastal Line system of defences, commanded by General Nikolay Raevsky. The coastal line was divided into two sections: I. From the mouth of the River Kuban to the mouth of the river Sochi (fort Navaginsky); II. From the mouth of the River Sochi to the river Choloki. At the same time, the head of the II Division of the Coastline was the head of the troops stationed in Abkhazia (ACAC, IX, 1884: 460-461; Khorava, 2014: 37-39). The inclusion of Abkhazia in the Black Sea coastline system was the first attempt to separate this side from Georgia.

The Black Sea coastal line was reorganized in October of 1840. Three sections were formed: I. From the mouth of the River Kuban to Gelendzhik; II. From Gelendzhik to Navaginsky; III. Navaginsky, Golovinsky, Adler, Gagra, Bichvinta, Bombora, Sokhum-Kale fortresses; Mramba, Dranda, Kvitouli, Ilori checkpoints; Anaklia, Redut-Kale, Poti, Ozurgeti fortresses and St. Nicholas Checkpoint. The head of Section III was obliged to "exercise political supervision over Abkhazia." If necessary, he also had the right to use weapons (Dzidzaria, 1988b: 50; Khorava, 2014: 39-40).

The Russian command rightly considered that the subjugation of Abkhazia would not be complete until the Jiks and Ubykhs would not be subdued. In the early 1840s, the Jiks, Ubykhs, and Shapsugh intensified their operations against the Russian troops on the North-Eastern shore of the Black Sea. In February-March of 1840, the highlanders captured Lazarevskoe, Velyaminovskoe, and Mikhailovskoe. Meanwhile, Tsebeli and Dali revolted. They called on the Pskhuans and Svans for help. In the summer, the Russian command sent an expedition to subdue the mountain communities of Abkhazia once again. The Abkhaz host, led by the Principal, also participated in the campaign. The expedition forced the Marshanias of Tsebeli and Dali to take an oath of allegiance (**ACAC, IX, 1884: 492-493; Essays, I, 1960: 180**). In July of 1840, the Russians invaded Pskhu. Russian rule was established in this mountainous region of Abkhazia and the Pskhu Superintendency was created (**Dzidzaria, 1988b: 63**).

The obedience of Tsebeli and Dali turned out to be illusory. Soon, the situation in this region became tense again. In October, N. Raevsky wrote: *“The Tsebelians are being encouraged by the Ubykhs... Part of the people in Abkhazia are ready to revolt against the principal and join the Ubykhs”* (**Lakoba S., 1990: 17-18**). It soon became known to the Russian command that the Dalians had appealed to the neighbouring highlanders for assistance and the Ubykhs had formed a detachment of thousand men to help them. The Russian command decided not to allow the unification of the highlanders and subdue Dali before them. In December of 1840, a military expedition against Dali was sent under the command of colonel N. Muravyov, Head of the III Division of the Black Sea Coastal line. The Abkhazian host and Samurzakanoan hosts also took part in the expedition. In January of 1841, an expedition stormed the Bagada narrows (the so-called “Gates” of Dali) and invaded the valley. The Dalians resisted strongly, but were defeated. Following N. Muravyov’s order, the Russians brutally devastated Dali, set fire to mountain settlements and food supplies, and expelled the population from their lands (**ACAC, IX, 1884: 496-497; Khorava, 2014: 41-42**). N. Muravyov asked the command to settle 500 Russian families in Dali to protect Abkhazia from invasions by the North Caucasus highlanders, as the road from the Kuban Basin to Abkhazia crossed the Caucasus Mountains through Dali. He also took the measures to prevent the return of local highlanders to Dali. But N. Muravyov could not obtain such permission. Then the North Caucasian highlanders settled there (**Dzidzaria, 1982: 373**) and most of the local inhabitants also returned.

In March of 1841, the communities of the coastal villages, thanks to the great contribution of Mikheil Sharvashidze, subdued to the Russians. After that, the main task of the Russian government became to strengthen its positions in Jiketi. Thus, the Russian command began to build a road and bridges from Abkhazia to Jiketi. In the summer, the Ubykh tribe of *Sashe* and the mountain tribes of the Jiks began to negotiate peace with the Russian command. In such a situation, word spread about the Guria uprising in the Western Caucasus. At that time, the Russian command planned to organize an expedition

to the Ubikh lands, but the hosts of Guria and Samegrelo did not join them, and only a small number of militiamen from Samurzakano and Svaneti came. The Russian command also did not fully trust the Principal of Abkhazia.

The news that Jiks and Ubikhs got about the Guria uprising (May-September of 1841) was distorted and greatly exaggerated. In September, the Russians brutally suppressed the Gurian uprising and were given more opportunities to fight against the Caucasian highlanders. At the end of September, the Russian command began preparing for the planned expedition against Ubikhs. Along with the troops of the III Division of the Black Sea Coastal line, the hosts of Abkhazia, Svaneti, Samegrelo, Imereti and Guria also took part in it. In early October, an expedition through Jiketi invaded Ubikh lands, destroyed several villages and reached Navaginsky (**Dyachkov-Tarasov, 2003: 121; Khorava, 2014: 44-45**). During 1841-1842 there still were unrests in Dali, Tsebeli, Pskhu, also in the villages of Guma, Jgerda, Chlow. They were severely suppressed by the Russian command (**Dzidzaria, 1982: 55, 69-70**). At the end of December 1843, the expedition under the direct command of the Abkhaz Principal again invaded and subdued Pskhu (**Essays I, 1960: 183**).

By the late 1830s, the Principal of Abkhazia tried to seize Samurzakano by putting pressure on the Russian government. In 1839, Mikheil Sharvashidze petitioned the Russian authorities to seize Samurzakano, as a former Abkhaz country, from Dadiani and hand it over to the Princedom of Abkhazia (**Tsintsadze Z., 1989: 97**). Levan V Dadiani, who was outraged by this demand, addressed the government with an extensive report. He considered the claims of the Principal of Abkhazia unfounded and noted that Samurzakano had been part of the Samegrelo princedom since ancient times and he inherited it. In addition, the Principal of Samegrelo reached agreements with Giorgi Sharvashidze in 1818 and Mikheil Sharvashidze in 1827 to prove his legal rights in this district, by which the Abkhaz rulers recognized Samurzakano as an integral part of Samegrelo Princedom (**Dumbadze, 1957: 268**). *Mikheil Sharvashidze* was refused the transfer of Samurzakano on the grounds that it had been separated from the Princedom of Abkhazia a long time ago, but according to the government's decision, it should not have remained part of Samegrelo Princedom either. The Russian government had decided to introduce the Russian rule in the newly acquired territories where it would be possible.

In February of 1840, the Russian authorities seized the territory of Samurzakano, between the rivers Enguri and Ghalidzga from the Principal of Samegrelo and introduced the direct Russian rule there. The Russian administrative-territorial unit – The Samurzakano Superintendency was created. It was directly subordinated to the Kutaisi governor (**ACAC, X, 1885: 248; Kvashilava, 2011: 288**). The feud between the rulers of Abkhazia and Samegrelo over the ownership of this region made it easier for the Emperor to make such a decision. Although during the first third of the 19th century, the Russian administration recognized Samurzakano as a part of Samegrelo, now they changed their mind. Levan V Dadiani appealed against the seizure of the Samurzakano and demanded, if not a

return of the region, at least some compensation for it. In 1847 the government gave 25 thousand silver roubles to the Principal of Samegrelo in exchange for Samurzakano. This fact upset the Principal of Abkhazia Mikheil Sharvashidze. His anger was intensified by the fact that the authorities took from his control the ports of Guda (Gudauta), Ochamchire, and Kelasuri in May of 1847. These ports were handed over to the customs, and Mikheil Sharvashidze lost significant profits which he had from smuggling. In return the Principal was given a pension – 12 thousand roubles per year. Mikheil Sharvashidze saw that Tsarism was restricting his power, which irritated him. He protested it and relinquished his sovereign rights on 10 November 1847 (**ACAC, X, 1885: 268; Esadze, 1907: 134-135**).

The Principal of Abkhazia felt that his political future was doomed, so he decided to act in advance. But his move alarmed the Caucasus command, who could not fully control Abkhazia by their own forces. In fact, the Russians made Mikheil Sharvashidze the real ruler of Abkhazia, and his power was growing in the wake of Russia's growing military presence in Abkhazia. Mikheil Sharvashidze's authority increased in the 1830s and 1840s. At the same time, the Russian government duly appreciated Mikheil Sharvashidze's contribution in subjugating the mountain communities of Abkhazia, in the fight against the highlanders of the Western Caucasus, in subduing the coastal communities of the Jiks to the Russian government in 1841, and so on. The Principal of Abkhazia had a great influence among the highlanders of the Western Caucasus (Jiks, Ubikhs, Shapsugh, Abadzekhs), thus, the Russian government still needed Mikheil Sharvashidze. *Mikhail Vorontsov* (1844-1854), the Viceroy of the Caucasus, wrote a letter to the Abkhaz leader, in which he persuaded him to give up his intention (**Esadze, 1907: 135-137**). As a result, the situation was resolved.

On 4 (16 in Gregorian calendar) October 1853, the Ottomans declared war on Russia. The Crimean War (1853-1856) began. The main events of the war took place on the Crimean Peninsula, but the success of Russian troops on the Caucasus front became a kind of compensation for the defeat suffered by Russia in Crimea and the Danube theatre. Due to the dominance of the Anglo-French Fleet in the Black Sea, the Russian command could not establish reliable connections with the Eastern Black Sea coast, including Abkhazia. Therefore, in March-April of 1854 the Russian command completely emptied the Black Sea coastal line. The fortresses on the North-Eastern shore of the Black Sea were blown up and their garrisons evacuated (**ACAC, X, 1885: 270, 271, 273-274; Burchuladze, 1960: 268-270**). Russian troops were evacuated from the fortresses of Sokhumi, Bombora, Bichvinta, and Tsebelda under the leadership of the Principal of Abkhazia. The Russian command was grateful to Mikheil Sharvashidze for his actions.

In March of 1855, units of the Ottoman army landed in Sokhumi. Mustafa Pasha, the head of the Turkish administration, was actively trying to recruit the Abkhaz nobility in Sokhumi. The baptism of the Abkhazs by Georgian missionaries, the renovation of churches, as well as the efforts of Mikheil Sharvashidze thwarted the plans of the Turks,

who were unable to recruit Abkhazs *en masse* (**Gamakharia, 2005: 431**). After the withdrawal of Russian troops from Abkhazia, Mikheil Sharvashidze settled in Samegrelo, in the estate of his father-in-law *Giorgi Dadiani* (the village of *Chkaduashi*, Zugdidi Municipality). He hoped to be offered a suitable job as a lieutenant general in the Russian army and as an adjutant general of the Emperor, but his hopes were dashed. He was excluded from the hostilities. Besides, *Ekaterine Dadiani* of Samegrelo categorically demanded from the government the removal of Principal of Abkhazia from Samegrelo. In May Mikheil Sharvashidze returned to Abkhazia and established direct contacts with the Ottoman command. He explained his return to Turkish-occupied Abkhazia by saying that he did not want to be a passive mastermind of the events in the Princedom and to help the Russian command as much as possible. Indeed, he did not cut off secret contacts with the Russian command and provided important information. In June he thwarted the intention of the Western Caucasian highlanders and Abkhazs who gathered in Likhni planning an expedition to seize captives and booty in Samurzakano. At the same time, he tried to find a common language with the Turks (**Takalandze, 1999: 114-115**).

In June of 1855, the Russian troops laid a siege to Kars, threatening key Turkish centres. In early September, in order to save Kars, the Turks landed 45 thousand soldiers under the command of Omer Pasha in Sokhumi (**Burchuladze, 1960: 270**). Omer Pasha decided to help the besieged fortress and reach Kars via Georgia. In October, the Turkish army occupied almost all of Samegrelo, but further progress was hampered. On 16 November 1855, the fortress of Kars surrendered to the Russians. Thus, Omer Pasha's campaign to help Kars lost its meaning. Omer Pasha, driven by the guerrilla war in Samegrelo and harassed by the Russian rescue forces, retreated to the Black Sea coast, and in February of 1856, his already thinned army marched from Sokhumi and Redut-Kale to Batumi and Trebizond. On 10 July, Sokhumi was captured by the Russian troops (**Burchuladze, 1960: 405-421; Essays, I, 1960: 196**). A small part of the population, mainly the nobility, joined Turks and left Abkhazia with them (**Ninua, 1956: 196**).

In March of 1856, a peace treaty was signed in Paris. According to it, Russia retained its Caucasian dominions within its pre-war borders and returned the conquered Kars and Bayazit to Turkey. Russia was forbidden to have a navy on the Black Sea and to fortify the Black Sea ports. Thus, the Treaty of Paris put a limit to Russia's pursuit of dominance in the Middle East.

After the end of the Crimean War, the Russians had to conquer Abkhazia once again. Russian military units were again stationed at the coastline. The liberation movement in Abkhazia started to decline. But the Russian authorities did not feel at ease. That was the reason because of which the Viceroy of the Caucasus N. Muravyov (1854-1856) raised the issue of abolition of the Abkhazian Princedom (June 1856) due to the alleged betrayal of Mikheil Sharvashidze during the Crimean War. He also asked for the deportation of the Principal to some remote Russian province (**ACAC, XI, 1888: 54**), but Emperor

Alexandre II did not accept this proposal. Russian authorities considered Mikheil Sharvashidze as a kind of guarantee of restoring and strengthening Russia's influence in Abkhazia and the Western Caucasus. The hostilities continued in Chechnya and Dagestan, the Western Caucasus had to be conquered, and there was no peace in Abkhazia. Thus, Mikheil Sharvashidze was still needed. The Emperor did not recognize the betrayal of the Principal of Abkhazia and closed the case.

In June of 1856, General *Aleksandr Baryatinsky* (1856-1862) was appointed as a Viceroy of the Caucasus and Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasus Corps. The new Viceroy had a new understanding regarding the political and administrative arrangement of the Eastern Black Sea Coast. During the Crimean War, the hostilities on the territory of Western Georgia led to the unification of the civil and military authorities in Kutaisi Governorate. In August of 1856, with the aim to centralize the government, by merging Kutaisi Governorate and the Black Sea Coastline Division III Kutaisi Governorate-General was established. The position of the head of the troops in Abkhazia was introduced. The Principality of Abkhazia was nominally subject to the governor-general of Kutaisi, but in reality it was subordinated to Viceroy (**Esadze, 1907: 97-99**). At the same time, Tsarism tried to strengthen its position in Georgia and for this purpose introduced Russian rule in the Georgian princedoms, namely in Samegrelo (1857) and in Svaneti (1858).

After the end of the Crimean War, the authorities paid special attention to the final subjugation of the Caucasus. Tsarism was able to gather significant forces in the Caucasus. The Caucasus Corps was transformed into an army. A. Baryatinsky's attention was mainly focused on Chechnya and Dagestan (**Zisserman, 1888: 33-35**). There was a massive attack in this direction. On 25 August 1859, Imam Shamil, the leader of the national liberation struggle in the Caucasus Mountains, surrendered to the Russian command. After the Russian conquest of Chechnya and Dagestan, the highlanders of the Western Caucasus continued their fight against Tsarism. In the struggle for the conquest of the Western Caucasus, great significance was given to Abkhazia, where the Russians controlled only the coastline. In the beginning of 1860, the Russian command focused on the construction of roads connecting Abkhazia with the Northern Caucasus. This was important both from the military and administrative points of view. In August of the same year, Russian troops marched on Pskhu. Three thousand Abkhaz militiamen also took part in the expedition. Despite fierce resistance, the Pskhuans were defeated and forced to obey the Russian command. Despite the success of the expedition, the Russian influence in this mountain region was not strengthened (**ACAC, XII, 1904: 859-860, 861-865; Khorava, 2004: 110-111**). Pskhu still remained one of the important centres of the fight against the Russian occupation.

The Russian government also attached great importance to the role of Mikheil Sharvashidze during the hostilities in the Western Caucasus. The Russian command thought that the Principal of Abkhazia, who enjoyed great respect among the highlanders of the Western Caucasus (Jiks, Ubykhs, Shapsugh, Abadzekhs, etc.), secretly supported

their struggle for independence. The Principal of Abkhazia also knew very well that after the subjugation of the Western Caucasian tribes to Russia his rule would also end. This was the reason why Mikheil Sharvashidze did not rush to build roads to the North Caucasus through the mountain communities of Abkhazia (**Khorava, 2004: 116-117**).

In May 1864, Russian troops occupied the last stronghold of the resistance of the Caucasian highlanders, the Ahchipsou mountain tribe of Jiks in the upper reaches of the River Mzimta. On 21 May, in the centre of Ahchipsou lands, in the aul of Gubaadvi (Kbaade), the Caucasus War was declared over. The Abkhaz host also took part in the last military operation of the Caucasus Army and in the parade dedicated to the end of the war (**Esadze, 1914: 167-174**). The Abkhaz historians always emphasize the participation of the Georgians in the Russo-Caucasian war along with the Russians (**Bgzhba O., Lakoba S., 2015: 244, 271**), but do not mention the contribution of the Abkhazs in this war, especially in the destruction of Jik and Ubikh villages, as well as in subduing the mountain regions of Tsebeli, Dali, Pskhu, and Aibga (**Gamakharia, Akhaladze, Jojua, 2018: 184-186**). In July, Russian troops invaded Pskhu, from the North through the Sancharo Pass, and from Abkhazia through the Dow Pass. The Pskhuans fought fiercely but were defeated. The survivors set fire to their houses and left the gorge after the battle (**Khorava, 2014: 73-74**). Part of the Pskhuans, 105 families (862 people) moved to the Kuma valley in the North Caucasus, while most of them – 3500 went to the Ottoman Empire (**Dzidzaria, 1982: 195; Khorava, 2004a: 256-259**). As a result, the upper reaches of the Bzipi Valley became completely deserted.

After the conquest of the Western Caucasus and the end of the Caucasian War, when part of the Caucasian highlanders was killed in the hostilities and the other part left to Turkey, there was no longer any need to maintain the autonomous principedom of Abkhazia. Thus, the Russian authorities began to take care of the military and administrative arrangement and colonization of the conquered region. Even before the end of the Caucasian War, the fate of Abkhazia had already been decided. The Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasus Army and Viceroy, the Grand Duke *Mikhail Romanov* (1862-1881) raised the issue of abolition of the Principedom in the letter sent to the Minister of War *Dmitry Milyutin* on 27 March 1864. In his view, this measure was necessary in order to carry out a project approved by the Supreme authorities on the arrangement of the Cossack settlements at the Eastern the Black Sea coast, from the mouth of the River Kuban to the River Bzipi (**CHAG: Coll. 5, List 1, Case 7506, p. 41**). He also made practical suggestions in this regard:

1. The consent of the Principal and his heir to renounce the throne;
2. Give a suitable income to the Principal and his heirs;
3. To establish a military district in Abkhazia, which together with Tsebelda will be under the command of a special military person with the right similar to the heads of divisions, who should be subordinate to the Governor-General of Kutaisi;

4. If the amount of the unoccupied lands allows, the Cossack settlements have to be established at the Black Sea coast till the mouth of the River Enguri. Together with the settlements located on the River Bzipi, they will form the Cossack army of Abkhazia under the command of the head of the military district of Abkhazia;
5. To establish the range which closes the narrows of Gagra and currently separates Abkhazia from the land of the Jiks as a border between the troops of Kuban and Abkhazia" (**CHAG**: Coll. 5, List 1, Case 7506, pp. 47-48).

Thus, the Russian administration in the Caucasus developed a special plan for Abkhazia, which included the settlement of Cossacks on the Black Sea coast of Abkhazia. Like in the Terek and Kuban districts, the Cossacks living here had to create the Cossack army of Abkhazia. The existence of the Abkhaz Principal and the feudal landownership was an obstacle in achieving this goal, because in such conditions the plan of colonization of Abkhazia could not be implemented. There was no unoccupied land for the colonization of the region, so it was first necessary to "cleanse" this land from the native population.

In April 1864, Emperor Alexander II approved the proposals submitted by the Viceroy of the Caucasus. On 24 June, Mikheil Romanov officially informed Mikheil Sharvashidze of the Emperor's order on dismissing him from the position of the Principal of Abkhazia and introducing the Russian rule in Abkhazia (**CHAG**: Coll. 416, List 3, Case 177, p. 48; **Dzidzaria, 1982**: 250-252). The Russian authorities wanted to colonize Abkhazia as soon as possible and they were ready to make proposals for the removal of the indigenous population from the Abkhazian principedom after its abolition. On 27 June 1864, *Dmitry Svyatopolk-Mirsky*, Governor-General of Kutaisi wrote to General A. Kartsov, the Chief of the General Staff of the Caucasus Army: *"If some Abkhazs want to emigrate to Turkey after the abolition of the principedom, I think we should not prevent it... If we had acquired the principal's estates, which are very large and important, we could have colonized Abkhazia with the Cossack-Russians immediately"* (**Janashia, 1988**: 7). According to his proposal, the Gagra range should have been established as a border between the Kuban district and Kutaisi Governorate with only one purpose. As D. Svyatopolk-Mirsky wrote in a letter to General A. Kartsov on 6 June 1864, *"If we have empty places on both sides of the Bzipi, we will be able to lay the foundation to the Russian population in Abkhazia"* (**Janashia, 1988**: 7).

On 12 July 1864, the imperial government abolished the Principedom of Abkhazia and introduced direct Russian rule in the region. After the abolition of the principedom, a provisional "military-popular administration" was introduced before the approval of the statute governing Abkhazia. It was headed by Major General Pavel Shatilov, the commander of the troops in Abkhazia (**Dzidzaria, 1988b**: 67; **Khorava, 2014**: 81). Mikheil Sharvashidze, the Principal of Abkhazia, who was ill at the time and asked whether he would be allowed to live in Imereti, particularly, in Kutaisi, was exiled to Voronezh in No-

member of 1864. He died there on 16 April 1866. In July, his remains were brought back and buried in the *Mokvi temple* next to his wife *Alexandra Dadiani* (Khorava, 2011: 283). Their graves are decorated with Georgian Asomtavruli inscriptions, which clearly indicate the belonging of the Principal House of Abkhazia to the Georgian cultural and political world (Papaskiri, 2004: 187). With the abolition of the principedom of Abkhazia and the introduction of Russian rule, a colonial political regime was established in this region (**History of Abkhazia, 1986: 87**).

According to the statistics of 1865, the population of Abkhazia according to the districts was as follows:

- **Sokhumi district** – 2826 households, 16475 souls;
- **Bzipi District** – 3726 households, 20090 souls;
- **Abzhua district** – 5049 households, 32182 souls;
- **Tsebelda district** – 1436 households, 10443 souls.

Total – 13037 households, 79190 souls (**Averkiev, 1866: 298**).

§2. Abkhazia from the Second Half of the 1860s to the Beginning of the 1880s

After the establishment of direct Russian rule in Abkhazia, the Russian administration began to take care of the establishment of “state order,” which, first of all, pursued a consistent colonial policy in this region. In 1865, a commission was sent to Abkhazia, which was tasked with making an inventory of Mikheil Sharvashidze’s estates and figuring out the general economic situation of Abkhazia before carrying out the peasant reform. In 1866, the Russian administration in the Caucasus began preparations for the peasant reform in Abkhazia, and for this purpose a new commission consisting of *Baratov (Sul Khan Baratashvili)*, Captain-Lieutenant *Korghanov*, and Officer *Cherepov* arrived there in early July. The work of the commission, especially Cherepov’s reckless and insolent actions, caused strong dissatisfaction among the peasants of Bzipi district. The peasants were somewhat intimidated by the reform. They were especially worried about the rumours that they would have to buy out the lands they considered to be their property. These rumours, as well as the arbitrariness of the Russian officials, made the peasants extremely upset. Thus, the unrest began.

The head of the Sokhumi military department, Colonel *V. Konyar* accompanied by Mikheil Sharvashidze’s son Giorgi and brother Alexandre, arrived in the village of Likhni to meet with the population. On 26 July, Konyar demanded from the people gathered in Likhni to comply immediately with the government’s demands. This upset Abkhazs and they killed Konyar and other Russian soldiers. Giorgi Sharvashidze tried in vain to stop his compatriots, but people did not obey him. The revolt of the Abkhazs, which was caused by a negative attitude towards the peasant reform, turned into a general popular uprising against the colonial regime of the Russian Empire. The rebels declared Giorgi Sharvashidze

the Principal of Abkhazia and demanded from him to take the lead in their fight against the Russian government. He was forced to follow their wishes. The Abkhaz uprising alarmed the Russian administration in the Caucasus. Authorities took immediate action to quell the uprising, sending additional troops to Sokhumi. These actions turned out to be timely. On 30 July, insurgents attacked Sokhumi. Furious fighting broke out on the outskirts of Sokhumi and in the city streets, but the Russian troops were able to repel the rebels. The uprising was suppressed in August, and its leaders were severely punished. A part of the active participants of the uprising was publicly shot in Sokhumi, many were deported to Siberia and remote provinces of Russia. Giorgi Sharvashidze was sent to Orenburg military district to continue his military service (**Dzidzaria, 1955; Chanturia, 2006: 61-78**).

Thus, the reason for the Abkhaz uprising was the disregard for the peculiarities of the social order of Abkhazia, the rude interference of the bureaucracy in the way of life of the Abkhazs, the economic hardship, the preparation of the ground for the peasant reform, which caused mass dissatisfaction among the Abkhaz population.¹ After the suppression of the uprising, Tsarism began to prepare for the reform of the administrative reform of the region, aimed at strengthening the control there.

On 11 August 1866, the Emperor approved a decree on the management of the Sokhumi military department. According to the statute, the administration of the Commander-in-Chief of the troops in Abkhazia, the Civil Chancellery, the city hall of Sokhumi, the administration of the Commandant of Sokhumi, as well as the Tsebelda and Samurzakano districts were abolished. *“From the lands of Abkhazia, together with Sokhumi, Tsebelda and Samurzakano”*, Sokhumi military department was established. It was divided into Bichvinta, Dranda, Tsebelda, and Okumi superintendencies. Sokhumi was a separate administrative unit. The head of the Sokhumi Military Department was granted the rights of the military governor, although nominally he was subordinate to the Governor-General of Kutaisi. Major-General *P. Shatilov* was appointed as the Head of Sokhumi Military Department (**Khorava, 2014: 82**). Since the Tsarist had a plan of the colonization of the Black Sea coast by Cossack-Russians from the River Bzipi to the River Enguri, Samurzakano (Okumi Okrug) was united with Abkhazia.

After the uprising of 1866, there appeared the first substantiation of the plan for the deportation of the Abkhazs to the Ottoman Empire. It was given by the Governor-General of Kutaisi, D. Svyatopolk-Mirsky in the address of 27 October 1866 to D. Staroselsky, the Head of the Caucasus Highlanders' Administration. It stated: *“There is only one radical way to eliminate any threat from the Sokhumi Department, and that is the relocation of the population of Abkhazia to Turkey”* (**CHAG: Coll. 545, List 1, Case 91, p. 21; Dzidzaria, 1982: 283**). According to D. Svyatopolk-Mirsky, if they had taken this

¹ According to the well-known Abkhazian historian *Stanislav Lakoba*, the Abkhaz uprising was *“clearly anti-colonial, national-liberating in its nature”* (**Lakoba S., 1990: 26**). This viewpoint is also shared by *Zurab Papaskiri* (**Papaskiri, 2004: 192; Papaskiri, 2010: 142**).

step, all the other means would not be needed and the issue would have been resolved once and for all. He also considered this measure as a final step in the system applied against the mountain tribes of the Western Caucasus (**CHAG:** Coll. 545, List 1, Case 91, p. 21). Representatives of the Caucasus administration considered the deportation of Abkhazs to be a very important event, as Abkhazia and Tsebelda played a major role during the Caucasus War due to their geographical location and, in their view, would continue to play a significant role in the possible hostilities in the Caucasus. Reducing the Moslem population of this region by relocating them to the Ottoman Empire would therefore help to ensure political peace and, consequently, strengthen the Emperor's authority in the region. The Viceroy Mikhail Romanov directly stated that "*the main task of the deportation of Abkhazs is to remove the part of the population that is most hostile to the government from the borders of the Russian Empire*" (**Dzidzaria, 1982:** 284).

In November of 1866, Alexandre II agreed to resettle the Moslem population of Abkhazia and Tsebelda to the Ottoman Empire at the earliest opportunity. It should be mentioned that the Moslem Abkhazs, for their part, also insisted on their deportation to the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the Russian authorities instructed *Nikolay Ignatyev (Nikolai Ignatieff)*, their ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, to negotiate with the Porte. Soon, the Russian ambassador agreed with the Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Pasha on the deportation of the Abkhazs. It was also agreed that the Ottoman authorities would not settle the Muhajirs close to the Russian border (**Dzidzaria, 1982:** 284-285). The Caucasus administration considered that the deportation of the Abkhazs was the main issue for the government at that time. At the same time, the government acknowledged that if the entire Moslem population of Abkhazia wished to be deported, it would create some difficulty and inconvenience. Therefore, in their opinion, this process should be regulated. It was also recommended not to allow the deportees to return (**Dzidzaria, 1982:** 285). Russian authorities have predetermined the number of immigrants. The Ottoman Porte was ready to receive 4000 families from Abkhazia (**Dzidzaria, 1982:** 283).

The government decided to evict the Moslem population of Tsebeli-Dali above all because of the strategic importance of this region. It was assumed that the inhabitants of these regions lived in hard-to-reach mountainous areas and had connections with the Karachays and Kabardians through the passes in the Caucasus Mountains. Besides, they were accused of being against the peasant reform. After obtaining consent from the Porte, an organized process of deportation of Abkhazs began in June. However, before that, on 6 April 1867, in the village of Psirtska, the first group of Muhajirs was transported by three ships to Batumi, which was then a part of the Ottoman Empire. These were the Jiks and Pskhuans (49 families, 218 souls) who had settled in the village since 1864 (**Dzidzaria, 1982:** 285-286).

The deportation of Abkhazs was mainly a forced one, which is clear from the documents of that time. On 31 March 1867, the Viceroy wrote to the Emperor that the inhabitants of the Bichvinta district did not want to go to Turkey. The Abkhazs also volun-

tarily converted to Christianity in order to stay (**Dzidzaria, 1982: 288**). The Newspaper “*Droeba*” then reported: “*Abkhazs are very angry ... they are trembling with fear in Samurzakano that they will be also deported... The locals and the Abkhazs have great kinship. Tsebeldians, Dalians, and Gufuians are gone. Many also left the province of the Abzhua. The Chilouians and Jgerdians were sent out from their home. They do not want to leave for any price. Abkhazs greatly praise Dimitri Chavchavadze, the head of Bzuphu Uyezd. He explained to them with paternal care that being under the Russian rule was better than being deported to the Ottoman Empire*” (**Droeba, 1867**).

Resettlement did not affect the people of Samurzakano, which was due to the fact that the local population was mainly Georgian, while the Abkhazs living there were Christians. According to the famous ecclesiastical figure, *Ambrosius Khelaia*, during the Muhajir times a Moslem Abkhaz named Urus with his 12-year-old son came to the Bishop of Abkhazia *Alexandre Okropiridze* (1862-1869), who enjoyed great love and respect in Abkhazia. He explained to the high priest the reason for coming: “*I have come to you, kind shepherd, I am going to the Ottoman Empire, I am leaving my homeland forever and I want to leave my son with you. I have lost my wife and other children before, I do not know what to expect in a foreign country, but I still leave my homeland. I do not want to share my misfortune with my only child and I bring him to you. I know you will provide a Christian upbringing for him and he will be happy.*” The tearful father said goodbye to his son, who was raised by Bishop Alexandre, became a priest, and brought great benefits to Christianity in Abkhazia (**Khorava, 2014: 85-86**).

General A. Kartsov, Chief of General Staff of the Caucasus Army, noted that the circumstances supporting the deportation of the Abkhazs were “*kinship or friendship of the Abkhaz families with the Abkhaz or the Western Caucasus highlanders who went to Turkey*” (**Dzidzaria, 1982: 282**). It should be mentioned that the relocation of the Western Caucasian highlanders had a great impact on the beginning of this movement in Abkhazia. The same A. Kartsov stressed that a significant part of the population of Abkhazia, especially the upper classes of society, have repeatedly expressed a desire to follow the Western Caucasian highlanders, with whom they shared the religion, and, thus, to leave to the Ottoman Empire (**CHAG: Coll. 545, List 1, Case 91, p. 28**). At the same time, it should be noted that the Abkhaz landlords were intimidated by the peasant reform. They saw that after the abolition of the principality of Abkhazia and the uprising of 1866, the attitude of the government towards them changed. The empire no longer needed local nobility’s support, which manifested itself in the fact that they did not recognize their rights to the lands of the peasants. This was aimed at freeing up as much land as possible for further colonization (**Dzidzaria, 1982: 279-280**). Because of this, the Abkhaz nobility decided to take the serfs with them to the Ottoman Empire and build their happiness abroad at the expense of their peasants. On 16 March 1867, General Tolstoy, Head of the Sokhumi Military Department, wrote to the Governor-General of Kutaisi that approximately 40 nobles,

with 2170 peasant families of Tsebelda intended to emigrate to Turkey from 1 May (**Dzidzaria, 1982: 280-281**). The peasants had to obey to their landlords, even if they did not want to. This was due to the traditional relations and the kinship of the peasants with their nobility.

It is noteworthy that among the deportees from Tsebeli-Dali there were active participants of the uprising of 1866: *Kvaj Zurab-ipa Marshan, Tatlastan Tengiz-ipa Marshan, Pskhubei Sastanghaz-ipa Marshan, Kazilbak Marshan, Shirinbey Marshan*, et al. (**Chkhetia, 1954: 118-119**). When the deportation process became more and more extensive, the government tried to limit its achievements. The relocation process was completed in early June of 1867. The Ottoman authorities, according to the agreement, resettled the Muhajirs far beyond the borders of the Russian Empire. Part of them was settled in Anatolia and part in the Balkans, mainly in Bulgaria (**Dzidzaria, 1982: 287-289**).

During the deportation process, lists of Muhajirs were compiled by villages, indicating the number of families, the names of the heads of households, and the number of family members (women, men). According to these lists, the number of Muhajirs from the village of Psirtska was 210 (51 families, in total 210 souls), from Pokveshi – 69 (10 families, among them 9 were the Pachulias and 1 the Jinjias), from Chlou – 539 (125 families), from Atara – 43 (7 families), etc. 226 families (1357 souls) migrated from Bichvinta district, 629 families (3245 souls) from Dranda district, 2503 families (14740 souls) from Tsebelda district. Thus, not 4500, but 3358 families (19,342 persons) were displaced from Abkhazia together with Tsebeli-Dali region (**Khorava, 2014: 89**). According to the document of the Caucasus Highlanders' Administration, the total population remaining in the territory of the Sokhumi military unit (Abkhazia) was equal to 64,933 people by November of 1867 (**Collection, 1869: 39**).

Tsebeli and Dali were almost completely “cleansed,” which was caused by the strategic importance of this side. Nearly 15,000 people from these regions were expelled from their lands and deported abroad. According to 1868 data, there were a total of 13 families living in Tsebeli and none in Dali (**Collection, 1869: 39**). Shortly after the Abkhaz deportation in 1867, the English traveller F. Grove arrived in the Caucasus in 1874. He moved from Karachay to the Kodori Gorge. The English traveller was fascinated by the Kodori Gorge. *“It would be hard to find anything fairer and richer than the meadows and forests by which the Kodor flows,”* Grove wrote with admiration, worrying that *“It was almost appalling to find a land thus teeming with the fruits of the earth altogether deserted by men... Despite its noble and varied beauty there was an unutterable sadness about this valley of the shadow of death”* (**Grove, 1875: 324 -325**).

The necessity of resettling the lands freed due to the Abkhaz migration and further centralization of the administration of the Sokhumi Military Department put the implementation of a new administrative reform on the agenda by 1867. It was done the next year. Administrative-territorial units have been enlarged. Two Okrugs were formed: 1. Bi-

chvinta, which consisted of Gudauta and Gumista districts; and 2. Ochamchire, which consisted of Kodori and Samurzakano districts. In Tsebelda, which was allocated for the colonization, “settlement care” was established (**Esadze, 1907: 279; History of Abkhazia, 1986: 89-90; Khorava, 2014: 90**). Such an administrative division lasted until 1883. North-western border of Sokhumi Military Department (Abkhazia) passed on the River Baghripsta (Kholodnaya Rechka), where it was bordered by the Black Sea Okrug of Kuban Oblast. South-Eastern border was on the River Enguri, while the Northern on the Greater Caucasus Range (**Khorava 2014: 90**).

In the 1860-1870s, the upper classes of the Abkhaz society, which were followed without any objections by a large number of the people, were of Georgian orientation. It is well seen from the report of the deputies of the nobility of Abkhazia and Samurzakano presented to Lieutenant-General D. Svyatopolk-Mirsky on 23 March 1870. It was signed by *Bata Emukhviri, Misoust Marshania, Titu Marghanian, Constantine Inal-ipa*. The compilers of the report, the representatives of the Abkhaz people, considered Abkhazia as an integral part of Georgia. They emphasized the sameness of the life and traditions of the Abkhazs and Georgians, and the unity of their historical destiny (**Menteshashvili, 1998: 28-30; Papaskiri 2010: 139-140; Papaskiri, 2004: 187-189**).

After the abolition of the principality of Abkhazia and the deportation of the Abkhazs in 1867, Tsarism gained vast territory for colonization. The colonization of Abkhazia was in the economic and political interests of the Russian state. Tsarism therefore took care of this task vigorously. But during this period the Russian government thought of colonizing not only Abkhazia, but the entire North-Eastern coast of the Black Sea. For several years after the end of the Caucasian War, this region was completely empty. A. Vereshchagin, the ideologue of the colonization of the Eastern shore of the Black Sea then wrote: “*There has been no sign of life for several years in both the Psou and the Mzimta basins*” (**Vereshchagin, 1874: 66**).

After the deportation of the local population, the Russian authorities were faced with the task of resettling the naturally rich but desolate region. This place should not have become a haven for robbers and smugglers, but its natural wealth – vast forests and fertile lands – should be mastered. The Russian administration wanted to develop wine-making, sericulture, tobacco-growing, gardening, beekeeping, for which there were excellent natural conditions. But the main issue was the resettlement of the region. The government wanted to have politically reliable population on the Black Sea coast (**Vereshchagin, 1878: 7-16**). In order to carry out these tasks, the “*Regulation on the Settlement and Administration of the Black Sea District*” was developed, which was approved by the Emperor on 10 March 1866. In order to implement the measures provided by the statute, a Black Sea Okrug was established, which included the Black Sea coastal area from the River Tuapse to the River Baghripsta (**Vereshchagin, 1878: 7-11; Vereshchagin, 1874: 24**).

According to the decree of 10 March 1866, the Black Sea coast was designated for the creation of the “coastal rural settlements” of the Russian settlers. A number of bene-

fits were defined for the resettlement: plots – 30 dessiatins per family, one-time financial assistance (50 roubles), exemption from taxes for 15 years, exemption from recruitment obligations, etc. However, at first, the number of Russians relocating to the Black Sea Okrug was still small. Residents of Russia's interior provinces found it difficult to get out of their places, fearing the difficulty of relocation and the climate issues. Besides, they were mainly interested in cultivating wheat, while the arable lands in the Black Sea Okrug were small and wheat played a secondary role there. Therefore, the government decided not to oppose migration of the Christians from the Southern Caucasus and Anatolia, also of the Slavs, Moldovans, and so on (**Vereshchagin, 1874: 20; Vereshchagin, 1878: 16-17**).

The colonization of Abkhazia was to be carried out on the same principles as the colonization of the Black Sea Okrug. After the abolition of the principedom of Abkhazia, the Russian authorities confiscated vast lands belonging to the former principal and other members of the principal's house. After the deportation of 1867, a lot of "free lands" appeared in Abkhazia. These lands were included in the State Land Fund, which was managed by the Caucasus Highlanders' Administration (**Dyachkov-Tarasov, 1909-1910: 191; Dzidzaria, 1982: 431**). The State Land Fund also included Tsebelda, which was completely desolated and was also under the authority of the Caucasus Highlanders' Administration. Instead of Tsebelda district, as already mentioned, "care" of Tsebelda settlements was created. The first "caretaker" was a Russian officer named *N. A. Dyatchkov-Tarasov*. His duty was to clear the area of locals hiding in the inaccessible parts of the valley, especially in the River Sakeni valley. He had to choose places to arrange future settlements, provide a detailed description of them, and justify what led to his choice of this place (**Dyachkov-Tarasov 1909-1910: 194**).

The government believed that due to the strategic importance of Tsebelda, this side should have been inhabited by politically trustworthy people. According to A. Dyachkov-Tarasov, the colonization of Tsebelda was necessary for the development of agriculture and industry in this region, which was in pitiful conditions in the hands of the Abkhazs. Taking into account the natural-geographical conditions of the region, horticulture, wine-making, beekeeping, cattle breeding was to be developed here. Since it was not advisable to seed the wheat, corn had to be introduced. For the development of industry there was timber, ores of copper, iron, and lead (**Dyachkov-Tarasov N., 1868**). Tsebelda was free from malaria, which was widespread in the coastal region of Abkhazia. It was distinguished with a healthy and mild climate, fertile soil. Thus, according to the caretaker of Tsebelda settlements, attracting population should not be a problem. Tsebelda could have become a thriving area with excellent vineyards and orchards, mining production, but this required another and the main precondition – roads (**Dyachkov-Tarasov, 1909-1910: 196**).

The authorities wanted to settle the Russians in Tsebelda, but they did not come willingly at first. At the same time, the Georgians, suffering from land scarcity, were moving from other parts of Western Georgia to settle here. This caused concern among the authorities. Under such conditions, the government made its choice on the foreigners,

preferring Anatolian Greeks and Bulgarians. The head of the Sokhumi Military Department, General V. *Heyman* organized the migration of the first Greek colonists from Turkey in 1869. In February-March of 1869, three villages – Alexandrovskoye, Georgievskoye, Olginskoye – were settled. In June of 1869, 62 families of Bulgarians living in the Tiraspol province since the early 1800s, arrived in Sokhumi. They were settled in Anastasievskoye and Nikolaevskoye (**Dyachkov-Tarasov, 1909-1910:** 196-199).

At the same time, the government provided lands to the Russian officials, both military and civilian, but it was impossible for them to run a farm in parallel with their service. They were not able to lease the land because there were no applicants. Because of this, much of the land was unused. Only 8-10% of the colonists had a more or less functioning farm. The settlements of the officials did not develop, the lands were uncultivated (**Olonetsky, 1934:** 78; **Dzidzaria, 1982:** 432).

After the suppression of the Abkhaz uprising of 1866 and the deportation of 1867, the Empire began to pursue peasant reform in Abkhazia more peacefully. On 8 November 1870, Emperor Alexandre II approved a decree on peasant reform in Sokhumi Military Department, which was declared by the government on the tenth anniversary of the abolition of the serfdom in Russia on 19 February 1871. The serfdom was abolished in Abkhazia. The peasantry was freed from the personal dependence of the feudal lords, but received small plots and remained in a temporary dependent relationship.

Since 1872, the so-called “Resort” colonization took place in Abkhazia. Land from one to three dessiatins, the so-called “Sanitary plots” in Sokhumi and its vicinity were given on preferential terms to the Russian officials and officers, but by the 1870s these measures did not lead to great success (**Olonetsky, 1934:** 79). The government also tried to settle Pskhu. For this purpose, the headquarters of the 21st Line Battalion and 200 men were stationed there till 1874. By this time the upper reaches of the River Bzipi became completely deserted. Due to their political insecurity, Abkhazs, like in Tsebelda, were forbidden to settle in Pskhu (**Maevsky, 1896:** 90).

Monastic colonization had also taken place in Abkhazia since the 1870s. In 1872 the Russian monastery of Bichvinta was founded, to which 1049 Dessiatins, a pine forest and Lake Inkiti were given for use. In 1875 a branch of the Russian monastery of St Panteleimon on Mount Athos was established in Psirtska. The monastery was given 327 dessiatins of land and 200 dessiatins of the forest. Later another 1000 dessiatins of land was given to it (**Khorava, 2011a:** 354).

In April 1877, a new Russian-Turkish war broke out, in which the Caucasus was one of the war theatres. As soon as the war started, the situation became difficult in Abkhazia. Dissatisfaction with the Russian colonial regime reached its peak by this time, and the uprising began. In such a difficult and tense situation, on 29 April, Turkish forces, consisting mainly of the Abkhaz Muhajirs, landed near Gudauta. The head of the Sokhumi Military Department, Major General *Pavel Kravchenko*, did not dare to confront a relatively

strong opponent, thus he left Sokhumi and retreated towards the River Kodori. In April-May, the Turks occupied almost all of Abkhazia. Meanwhile, the rebel Abkhazs joined the Turkish landing forces. Uprisings against Russia began in Chechnya and Daghestan. The Sublime Porte was thinking of mobilizing the entire Moslem population of the Caucasus against Russia, but their hopes were dashed by the success of the Russian troops on the Caucasus front, and especially in the Balkans. In July, Russian troops attacked Abkhazia and by August the whole area had been cleared of the Turks (**Megrelidze, 1955: 77-84; Megrelidze, 1974: 74**). While fleeing from Abkhazia, the Turks were followed by some Abkhazs. However, most of them, as well as a small number of Christian Georgians (Megrelians) and Greeks were taken by force (**Dyachkov-Tarasov, 1909-1910: 206-208; Dzidzaria, 1982: 356-369**).

The number of people who left Abkhazia in 1877 can be calculated according to the data of Colonel P. Arakin, the head of the Sokhumi Military Department. In 1878, 24,461 people lived in the Samurzakano district (9 rural communities) of the Ochamchire Okrug of the Sokhumi Military Department. The process of deportation did not happen in Samurzakano this time either. There were 3,935 families (9 rural communities) living in the Kodori part of Ochamchire Okrug. Of these, 1,071 families were displaced. The editorial board of *«Кавказский календарь»* (*Caucasian calendar*) considered it necessary to calculate the population of the Kodori district, for which it took the collective data of the Gumista and Gudauta districts as a starting point. Based on that data, four and a half souls were considered as the average number of members in each household. According to such a calculation, before moving to Turkey, the population of the Kodori district was approximately 17,707 souls. From them around 4,819 souls were exiled to Turkey, while approximately 12,888 remained. All the population was resettled from the Gumista part of Bichvinta district (8 rural communities), where 2,221 families (9,985 people) lived. Out of 5,293 families (23,545 souls in 17 rural communities) in Gudauta district 17,160 residents (3,775 families) were displaced, while 6,385 souls remained on the ground (**CC, 1878: 330-331**). Thus, overall, 31 964 inhabitants left Abkhazia in 1877. While the upper reaches of the Kodori Gorge – Tsebelda and Dali were completely deserted as a result of 1867 deportation, due to the 1877 deportation, the coast of Abkhazia was almost emptied. It is noteworthy that the tireless work of Georgian missionaries, the baptism of thousands of Abkhazs, saved the Abkhaz people from mass deportation and, as a result, protected them from the physical destruction which became the fate of the Ubikhs (**Gamakharia, 2005: 511**).

When the myth of an earthly paradise shattered, the Muhajirs tried to return, but the Russian authorities refused to accept them. According to the agreement between Russia and Turkey, they were not allowed to come back to their homeland, which reduced the flow of people wishing to return, but, nevertheless, the Muhajirs tried their best to return. After the San Stefano Treaty, they first headed to Batumi and from there

tried to return to Abkhazia. Many of them settled in Batumi and its vicinity and their descendants still live there today. On 27 January 1879, the Treaty of Constantinople was signed between Russia and the Ottomans, under which the Russian administration in the Caucasus allowed the partial repatriation of Abkhazs for three years from the date of signing the treaty. By 1881, about 15,000 Muhajirs had returned to Abkhazia (**Dzidzaria, 1982:** 381, 396). But it was not enough. Abkhazia, which was deserted after the deportations, was a depressing sight. As N. Marr noted: *“Even the central ethnographic part of Abkhazia was desolated ... only deserted yards with fruit trees remained, there were no Abkhazs and no Abkhaz words were heard”* (**Marr, 1938:** 177).

The Russian government received vast lands for colonization, this time off the coast of Abkhazia, and it was again faced with the question of who would settle in Abkhazia. On 27 September 1877, “The Tiflis Herald” (*«Тифлисский вестник»*) addressed the issue: *“The present war, along with many other consequences, has resulted in the sudden desolation of the best part of our country, as it has been abandoned by almost of all its inhabitants. We are talking about Abkhazia and its inhabitants who left their homeland and moved to Turkey. There is no doubt that this deportation is not temporary, but permanent: Abkhazia will never be able to see her children again. That fact must be taken into account: Who should settle in this part which has been left forever by its indigenous people.”*

The author of the letter was the famous Georgian public figure *Iakob Gogebashvili* (1840-1912). It was an answer to the article of the Head of Sokhumi district A. Vedensky (published in №207 of the newspaper “*Kavkaz*” /*«Кавказ»* – “*The Caucasus*”/ in the same year). A. Vedensky’s article was directed against the ideas expressed by I. Gogebashvili in the previous issues (№209 and №210) of “The Tiflis Herald,” according to which the Megrelians, Gurians, and Imeretians were the most suitable people for resettling Abkhazia. A. Vedensky sharply criticized this view. However, after I. Gogebashvili studied the issue thoroughly and published the above-mentioned extensive letter in which he substantiated the previously expressed opinion, A. Vedensky agreed with him, visited the newspaper’s editorial office, and said that he had no objections from now on (**Gogebashvili, 1954:** 317).

The Abkhaz historians pay special attention to the settlement of Georgians in Abkhazia in the second half of the 19th century. Meanwhile, they completely avoid the settlement of the Russians, Armenians, Greeks, and others in Abkhazia. They consider I. Gogebashvili as an ideologue of the colonization of Abkhazia (**Bgazhba O., Lakoba S., 2015:** 270-271. For more information, see: **Lakoba S., 1993**). In fact, the settlement of Georgians in Abkhazia was a restoration of historical justice due to the expulsion of their ancestors in the 17th-18th centuries (**Gamakharia, Akhaladze, Jojua, 2018:** 194). As for I. Gogebashvili, he saw well that the Russian government would not allow to leave this region unoccupied, the emigrants from the European part of the empire could not adapt to the natural-climatic conditions of Abkhazia as the mortality rate was high among them, while the Megrelians, Imeretians, and Gurians were best adapted to this region.

In the spring of 1878, the government began to take practical steps for the colonization of Abkhazia. On 1 May 1878, the Bichvinta district administration issued a statement on the lease of vineyards and orchards for a period of one year in the village of Anukhva. In 1879, 137 families of Russian peasants were settled in the Bichvinta district, but by 1881 only 99 of them were left. German colonists could not settle here either. Out of 24 German colonist families, only 3 families remained in Abkhazia by 1883 (**Olonetsky, 1934: 79**).

Thus, the successes of the colonization of Abkhazia in the 1860s-1870s were insignificant. Despite the great efforts of the Russian administration, the colonization of Abkhazia was delayed. The Russians could not get used to the natural conditions of Abkhazia – humid climate, forested, mountainous country, swampy coastline; from the grain crops only corn grew there, which was unusual for the Russians (**Meskhi, 1878**). Along the coast the settlers were suffering from malaria. The mountainous conditions of Tsebelda and Dali were unusual for the peasants migrating from the interior provinces of the Russian Empire. Despite the fact that the lands of Abkhazia were handed over to the Russian officials, the country was still uninhabited and the lands were left unattended. There were only 24 landowners in Tsebelda and 23 landowners in Dali. They were visiting their lands once in every few years. In Dali, where there were about 5 thousand inhabitants before the deportation of 1867, no one lived even by the end of the 19th century. The famous Georgian figure *Pétre Tcharaia* wrote with heartache about the Dali gorge in 1897: *“It has not been long since Dali was crowded with the Abkhazs... The country famous for the bravery of the ancient inhabitants is now deserted so that no one lives there”* (**Tcharaia, 1897: 268**).

After the migration of Abkhazs, when a large part of Abkhazia became deserted, Russians and foreigners did not come here to settle down at all. Against this background, peasants from Imereti and Samegrelo, suffering from the lack of land, moved out from their regions and settled in Abkhazia. They were drying up swamps, pruning shrubs and pursuing farming. The settlement of peasants from Western Georgia and in Abkhazia alarmed the government. The newspaper *“Black Sea Herald”* (*«Черноморский Вестник»*) wrote at that time: *“It is necessary to settle the Russians on the shores of the Black Sea as soon as possible, otherwise the Megrelians will destroy this sacred cause”* (**Tsnobis Purtseli, 1905: №2821**). Tsarist officials believed that for years the government had carried out the colonization of Abkhazia *“without the necessary systematization, because the Russians could not set foot here as they should have”* (**Gershelman, 1908: 21**). On 19 January 1878, A. Vereshchagin, the above-mentioned ideologue of the colonization of the Eastern Black Sea Coast, made a note: *“... On the Caucasian coast of the Black Sea, as in the uttermost part of a state that has cost so much Russian blood and money, the Russian Church, the Russian language, the Russian literacy must dominate. The diversity of the population necessitates the establishment of schools, because only through school can this diverse population become Russian in the future”* (**Vereshchagin, 1878: 22**).

The Imperial policy in Abkhazia was directed against the Abkhazs and Georgians. Due to the anti-Tsarist uprising of 1877, by the Emperor's decree of 31 May 1880, the Abkhaz people of Gudauta, Gumista, and Kodori districts were declared a "guilty population." They were stripped of land ownership and their lands were transferred to the state. Abkhazs were also prohibited to live closer than 20 kilometres from Sokhumi and on the coastal line between the rivers Kodori and Psirtskha (**Lakoba S., 1990: 35**). At that time, the well-known public figure Antimoz Jugheli wrote: *"Now the most important issue in Abkhazia is the settlement of barren places. After the last war (1877-1878 – B.Kh.), the highest decree was that the Abkhazs should not settle on land between the rivers Kodori and Psirtskha. Except for them, everyone was allowed to settle here. Lots of people invaded the country, but no one could adapt to the area except the Imeretians-Megrelians and the Greeks. Currently, there are seven or eight Megrelian and three or four Greek villages around Sokhumi"* (**Gadaghmeli, 1883**).

Later, *Sergei Sharapov*, one of the ideologues of the colonization of the Eastern Black Sea coast, frankly commented on Russia's intentions in Abkhazia: *"Throughout its long historical struggle, while aspiring to the south, to the warm skies and warm seas, the Russian people make sacrifices, and, behold, in the end it has both this sky and this sea. The Russian flag flies here, the Russian eagle flies. But why is it that a Russian man does not feel well here, why is it that he is oppressed here, he is heartbroken? Why is he a stranger on this warm shore, under this bright sun? I think because of Russian generosity here, on this land, which is obtained by Russian blood, all foreigners have been settled in the best places, and not only oppress the Russian people, but also make fun of them. But it will not last long. Our state objectives require this region to become the Russian not only in the name, but in reality; that the Russian man here be supported, strengthened, and trusted. We wish you, gentlemen, that this happens quickly, that in the mighty Russian belly soon all the local and diverse boats will be melted, and that this sky and this sea become truly Russian"* (**Kaukhchishvili S., 1946: 134-135**).

§3. Political Processes in Abkhazia at the End of the 19th Century and the Beginning of the 20th Century

After the end of the war of 1877-1878 and the deportation of Moslem Abkhazians to the Ottoman Empire, the main objective of the Russian Empire became the consolidation of the so-called "Russian civic consciousness." The main condition for the realization of this extremely important state task, as it had been noted by Fyodor Gershelman, Kutaisi Governor-General and one of the inspirers of Russian imperial policy in the Caucasus, was the colonization of Abkhazia by only "Russian population" (**Silagadze, Guruli, 2001: 309; Papaskiri, 2004: 210**). On the way to the Abkhazia's russification, the government was hindered only by the local Georgian population. This was a period when the process of national consolidation of Georgians (including the inhabitants of Abkhazia) entered a

new, crucial phase. The national liberation movement was on the rise in Georgia. Of course, it was contradicting the interests of the Russian Empire. Due to this, the Russian administration of the Caucasus tried its best to promote particularism in Georgian regions and not to allow the formation of a single national body from the separate provinces. That is why Tsarism started to implement the famous imperial formula of “divide et impera” in Georgia.

The Russians did a particularly great “work” to awake the “national” self-awareness among the Megrelians. The Megrelian population was taught that they were not Georgians. Part of this insidious policy was the proclamation that the so-called “Samurzakanoans” were not Georgians and an attempt to register them as the Abkhazs. The official documents of the F. Gershelman’s chancellery are clear evidence of such policy. For example, in his reports of 2 September 1900, General Gershelman, when commenting on the ethnic diversity of the population of Sokhumi Okrug, mentions that from total 96,377 inhabitants of Abkhazia 71% were the Abkhazs. However, then he gives the exact details and it turns out that in reality the Abkhazs were 33,5% of the total population while the Samurzakanoans (who were added to the Abkhazs) were 37.5% of the population (**Silagadze, Guruli, 2001**: 303; **Papaskiri, 2004**: 211).

In another document (on the population of Sokhumi Okrug for January 1900) F. Gershelman gave the following statistics: Total population was 103,262, from whom 36,352 were Samurzakanoans; 32,127 – Abkhazs; 16,195 – Megrelians; 7,812 – Armenian citizens of the Ottoman Porte; 4,486 – Russians; 3,862 – Greeks; 6 – Georgians; 3 – Imeretians; 3 – Gurians; 820 – Germans and Estonians; 934 – Turks, etc. (**Silagadze, Guruli, 2001**: 303; **Papaskiri, 2004**: 212). Thus, with one stroke and without any regrets, the officials of the Russian Empire tried to separate the population of Samurzakano from the rest of Georgia.

Those machinations were not Gershelman’s invention. The Tsarist regime began the speculations regarding the ethnicity of the Samurzakanoans from the first half of the 19th century. At various times Samurzakanoans were regarded as the Abkhazs in the works of Mikhail Seleznyov (**Seleznyov, 1847a**: 135-136), Adolph Bergé (**Berge, 1857**: 6-7), Sergei Dukhovskoi (**Dukhovskoi, 1864**: 44), Grigorij Phillipson (**Phillipson, 1885**: 208), Nikolai Albov (**Albov, 1893**: 306), Ivan Pantyukhov (**Pantyukhov, 1892**), Nikolai Dubrovin (**Dubrovin, 1871**: 2), Constantine Machavariani (**Machavariani, 1913**: 311), and others. Despite the fact that the Samurzakanoans unequivocally considered themselves as Megrelians, the Russian view of the ethnicity of the Samurzakanoans was used in the official documents in Abkhazia in the 1860s (**Esadze, 1907**: 514). In the second half of the 19th century several Georgian scholars, namely *Pétre Tcharaia* (**Tcharaia, 1897**: 218), *Gabriel Kikodze* (**Main Information, 1868**: 2-3), *Tedo Sakhokia* (see in: **Sakhokia, 1985**: 336-339) proved the complete groundlessness of the imperial narrative about the Abkhaz origin of Samurzakanoans (for more details, see: **Kvashilava, 2011**: 325-326; **Kvashilava, 2011a**: 151-157).

The statistical data of the second half of the 19th century show the predominance of Georgians in the ethnic composition of this region (**Totadze, 1995**: 81-85, 89). These facts are also confirmed by ethnographical findings. In particular, out of more than 25,000 surnames known in Georgia, more than 500 are found in Samurzakano. The great majority of them are Georgian, while the number of surnames of Abkhaz origin is relatively small (**Kvashilava I., 2003**: 123).

Of course, we are far from the opinion that Abkhazs did not live in Samurzakano at all in the 19th century. Moreover, the relevant chapter of this work covers the ethno-demographic changes that happened due to the expansion of Jik-Abkhazs in Samurzakano in the 17th-18th centuries. However, there is no doubt that in Samurzakano the number of the ethnical Abkhazs was several times smaller than the number of local Georgian (Megrelian) population in the second half of the 19th century. Moreover, those Abkhazs were Christians and most of them gradually were becoming Georgians (Megrelians). Their original Abkhaz surnames which have the Megrelian suffix “-ia” are the clear evidence of this (*Tarba* became *Tarbaia*, *Butba* – *Butbaia*, *Adzinba* – *Adzinbaia*, *Ketsba* – *Ketsbaia*, and so on).

The fact that Samurzakano was a completely different region from other (“internal”) parts of Abkhazia in terms of ethno-cultural and political mentality, became clear during the permanent anti-Russian protests of the Abkhazs in 1810-1877. The Abkhazs from Samurzakano did not support the rebels and even took an active part in punitive operations organized by the Russian authorities to suppress the unrests. They especially distinguished themselves in this respect during the 1877 uprising. General *Kravchenko*, the Head of the Sokhumi Military Department stressed the courage and loyalty of Samurzakanoans in his telegram of 4 May 1877 (**Materials, 1909**: 160).

The main reason why Samurzakano, both ethno-culturally and politically, was a completely different part from the rest of Abkhazia was that the vast majority of the region (at least 80%) were Georgians (mostly Megrelians). Thus, identifying them as the Abkhazs is completely unjustified. Moreover, this shows that the Georgians were in majority in Abkhazia on the whole. Even if we consider that all the other Megrelians (17,000 according to F. Gershelman’s data) had settled in Abkhazia in the post-Muhajir period (this itself is unbelievable), the Abkhazs at that time would still be outnumbered by the Georgians in Abkhazia.

But the separatist Abkhaz historians do not like this. They are doing their best to convince their compatriots that only the Abkhazs lived on the entire territory of Abkhazia before the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878. They allege that this is confirmed by the numerous eyewitnesses (including Georgians) as well as archival documents and press material (**Lakoba S., 1990a**: 8). However, this conclusion is completely refuted by the documentary materials and observations of eyewitnesses, which show an unmistakable picture of the ethno-demographic situation in Abkhazia before the 1860s. First of all, it is a report signed by Prince Mukhranbatoni, a high-ranking official of the Russian administra-

tion, on the estates of Giorgi Sharvashidze (son of Dimitri Sharvashidze). This report describes the situation of 1866-1870 and says that before the deportation (of 1867) a significant part of the population in the plains of Abkhazia consisted of people of the “half-Megrelian origin” who remembered their Georgian (Megrelian) origins very well (**Documents, 1952:** 527).

Naturally, it can be argued that the author of this report is Georgian and because of this he cannot give an objective picture of the ethno-demographic situation in Abkhazia. But what about the other eyewitnesses who had neither interest nor desire to specifically look for Megrelians-Georgians in Abkhazia. For example, a correspondent of newspaper “*Caucasus*” («*Кавказ*»), covering the ethno-demographic situation of Sokhumi in 1866, wrote that only Russian soldiers and Megrelians lived in the city (**Papaskiri, 2004:** 215-216; **Papaskiri, 2010:** 157-158). Another issue of the same newspaper (06.01.1866) also emphasized that there were no ethnical Abkhazs in Sukhumi at all (“*there are no permanent native residents /«туземцы»/ in Sokhumi*”), and only Russian and Megrelian merchants lived there (**Papaskiri, 2004:** 216-217; **Papaskiri, 2010:** 158).

This is a real fact which was witnessed by a Russian correspondent and published in the official newspaper. The prevalence of Georgian population in Sokhumi before the first deportation of the Abkhazs is also confirmed by the archival data. The official “Description of Sokhumi city in 1864 and State of the city’s Population by Rank and Ethnic Composition” gives the exact demographics of Sokhumi in 1864: “*Local residents: Megrelians – 450, Greeks – 217, Armenians – 78, Russians – 25 (local residents), foreigners – 320, officers – 42, officials – 42, merchants – 5. No Turks and Abkhazs had settled in the city*” (**Lekishvili, 1990:** 14). Thus, the demagogic statements of Abkhaz scholars that only the Abkhazs lived in Abkhazia up to 1866 are completely unfounded.

In order to show the full picture of the ethno-demographic situation in Abkhazia in the last quarter of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, we consider it useful to return to the problem of the ethnic identity of the “Samurzakanoans.” As we have already mentioned, the Abkhaz separatist historiography refers to them only as the Abkhazs. This assertion of Abkhaz scholars is based entirely on some highly questionable statistical material (namely, the 1886 and 1897 censuses in which the Samurzakanoans were arbitrarily identified as ethnic Abkhazs). Georgian scientists (Anzor Totadze, Solomon Lekishvili, etc.) using the same sources (i.e. the materials of 1886 and 1897 censuses), have long ago exposed the fabrications of S. Lakoba and his comrades. They showed how the real number of Abkhazians was changing from census to census. For example, in 1886, the Abkhaz population was 28 323 and the population of Samurzakano was 30 640, but the total number of the Abkhazs was given as 58 963. As we can see, total was obtained by adding Samurzakanoans to the Abkhazs. There exists other statistical data too about which S. Lakoba says nothing. According to the census conducted in 1883, the number of the Abkhazs was 27,526 people, while the number of Samurzakanoans –

25,424. In 1914, the Abkhazs were 42 073. In 1917, this figure was reduced to 38 121, and in 1923 to 36 816 (statistics cited from: **Lekishvili, 1990: 14**).

The decrease in number of the Abkhazs coincides with the increase in number of the Georgians living in Abkhazia. If in 1886 (when the Samurzakanoans were added to the Abkhazs) there were only 25,873 Georgians, in 1923 their number increased to 71,181. However, the most interesting fact happened in 1926 when in just three years the number of the Abkhazs increased from 36,816 to 55,918. However, as S. Lekishvili quite correctly points out, neither in 1897-1923 were particularly unfavourable demographic factors (emigration, repressions, epidemics, etc.) to reduce the population, nor in 1923-1926 were suitable conditions for a demographic boom, which resulted in the increase of the Abkhazs by 20,000 in just 3 years (**Lekishvili, 1990: 9**). The only explanation for this strange confusion in numbers is the manipulation with the ethnical belongingness of the Samurzakanoans. During the census of 1886, 1897, and 1926, they were counted as Abkhazs and in 1914, 1917, and 1923 as Georgians (as they should have been counted in other cases too).

Thus, in view of all the above, we can firmly state that any attempt to declare the indigenous population of Samurzakano as Abkhazs and thus increase the number of the Abkhazs in the 19th century is a gross falsification of historical truth aimed at inciting an anti-Georgian hysteria among the Abkhaz population. At the same time, we cannot deny that from the 1860s-1870s there was indeed a relocation of the Georgian (mostly Megrelian) population to Abkhazia from the neighbouring regions of Western Georgia. Initially, the Imperial authorities were more or less loyal to the settlement of the Megrelians in Abkhazia. However, over time they noticed that the “strong opposition” was coming from “Georgians, mainly Megrelians,” and it threatened the “promotion of Russian civic consciousness ... in Sokhumi Okrug” (**Silagadze, Guruli, 2001: 309**). From that time on the Russian administration in the Caucasus opposed the settlement of peasants from Zugdidi and Senaki districts in the inner parts of Abkhazia (**Lakoba S., 1990: 40**).

Since the 1890s, the Imperial government has openly pursued a policy of discrimination against Georgians. In this regard that an official document on the colonization of Sokhumi Okrug, which was compiled by Colonel Broker, the Head of Sokhumi Okrug in 1895, is especially noteworthy. It openly declared the cessation of the settlement of the “foreign elements,” “especially the Megrelians,” in Sokhumi Okrug, **“in order to preserve as much free land as possible for the settlement of exclusively Russian population”** (**Lakoba S., 1990: 40**. Emphasis added – Z.P., K.K.).

At the same time, the colonial government made every effort to bring the residents of Abkhazia and Samurzakano closer to the Russians and “plant within them the Russian civic consciousness” (**Silagadze, Guruli, 2001: 309**). F. Gershelman especially noted in his report that “the Russian colonization of the region is of great political importance from a political point of view.” It is noteworthy that he considered the Abkhazs “an extremely

low cultured, underdeveloped people, both mentally and morally”, with *“unstable religious beliefs,”* who repeatedly showed the political unreliability. In such a situation, the military Governor of Kutaisi pointed out that the matter could be corrected by establishing the Russian civic consciousness in the region. In his opinion, the best way to achieve this, was to use the Russian population for the colonization.

The government with great diligence pursued a policy of colonizing Abkhazia exclusively with the Russians. The Russians were given large plots of land, according to S. Lakoba’s, from 5 to 30 dessiatins per household. They also received financial assistance and many other benefits (**Lakoba S., 1990: 41**). The Russian nobility had even more support. Large estates were allocated to individual representatives of the Russian aristocratic elite (**Essays I, 1960: 220; Lakoba S., 1990: 40**).

The Russian government did not limit itself to pursuing an imperial colonial policy. The same priority was given to measures aimed at the complete assimilation of the Abkhazs with the Russians (**Silagadze, Guruli, 2001: 335**), which simply meant their russification. For this, it was necessary to cut the Abkhazs off the all-Georgian historical and cultural universe. This was needed because Abkhazia, despite some distancing from the rest of Georgia due to the new wave of expansion of Jik-Abkhazs, still remained in the area of Georgian culture and literacy. The Church was also Georgian. All this prevented the government from carrying out its imperial plans. That is why the decision was made to create an Abkhazian alphabet based on the Cyrillic script. Its main purpose, according to the initiators of this “cultural initiative” (Evgenii Weidenbaum), was not to raise the intellectual level of the Abkhaz people, but to separate them from the Georgian educational space and to replace the Georgian language with the state (Russian) language (**Inal-ipa, 1965: 163-164; Anchabadze Z., 1976: 119-120**).

The imperial policy towards church had the same goals. The authorities were well aware that the Georgian clergy, who still had *“such powerful means as church and school,”* was the main obstacle on the way of russification of this region. This circumstance was regarded by the Russian officials as *“an evil that should be uprooted once and for all”* (**Silagadze, Guruli, 2001: 312**).

As a result of the colonial policy pursued by the Russian authorities at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, an extremely dangerous situation arose not only in Sokhumi and other parts of Abkhazia, but even in Samurzakano. This caused alarm among the Georgian intelligentsia. They have raised their voices against the persecution of the Georgian church and schools in Abkhazia. In this regard, we should especially mention Tedo Sakhokia’s letter, which was published in the newspaper “St. Petersburg’s Vedomosti” (*«Санкт-Петербургские Ведомости»*, №177, 1 (13) July 1900). T. Sakhokia exposed the policy of russification conducted by the Georgian exarchate and the leadership of Sokhumi Eparchy. It should be noted that T. Sakhokia was the leader of the so-called “Georgian Party.” According to the Governor-General of Kutaisi F. Gershel-

man, the main goal of the “Georgian Party” was to disrupt the “governmental measures to bring the indigenous population of Abkhazia and Samurzakano closer to the Russians and to incept in them the principles of the Russian civic consciousness” (**Silagadze, Guruli, 2001: 300**).

Active members of the “Georgian Party” were the public figures who were famous not only in Abkhazia, but throughout the whole of Georgia: *Antimoz Jugheli, Ivané Gegia, Grigol Kandelaki, Ivané Burchuladze, Parna Davitaia, Davit Machavariani, Ioane Chkhenkeli, Besarion Khelaia (Ambrosius, future Catholicos of Georgia), Spiridon Norakidze, priest Kereselidze*, and others.

Despite the attempts of the ruling circles of the Russian Empire to eradicate the Georgian Church and Georgian literature in Abkhazia and thereby destroying the Georgian-Abkhaz historical and cultural unity, there were still many people in Abkhazia, especially among the Abkhaz nobility, who did not follow the propaganda of the Russian government. They remained faithful to the Georgian-Abkhaz historical unity to the end. A vivid confirmation of this is the arrival of the “Abkhaz deputation” in Tbilisi and their meeting with the Viceroy, Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich on 26 April (9 May) 1916. The representatives¹ of the Abkhaz nobility and people were well aware of their responsibility to history. They categorically demanded from the government not to allow Abkhazia to be cut off from the rest of Georgia ecclesiastically² (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997: 385-386**).

While talking about the Georgian-Abkhaz historical and cultural unity, one cannot help mentioning the activities of Giorgi Sharvashidze, publicist and public figure, an outstanding representative of the Georgian literature of the 19th-20th centuries, the son and heir of Mikheil Sharvashidze, the last Principal of Abkhazia.

There is no doubt that Giorgi Sharvashidze is a tragic person. Still being young he became a leader of a strong anti-Russian rebellion (the Abkhaz uprising of 1866) because of which he suffered persecution by the Russian regime during his whole life. Being brought up according to the best traditions of the Georgian feudal aristocracy, Giorgi Sharvashidze felt love and devotion both for his native Abkhazia and his big motherland – Georgia which he used to call *Iveria* since childhood. It is not questionable that he, first of all, regarded as his native land not just Abkhazia but the whole of Georgia. However, this does not give us a reason to question his, and the Sharvashidze family in general, belongingness to the Abkhaz ethnic world in the 17th-19th centuries. Giorgi Sharvashidze who was definitely Georgian historically and culturally, was well aware about of his own Abkhazness. The vivid illustration of this is his poetic masterpiece *Varada* (an Abkhazian re-

¹ The delegation was headed by Prince Alexandre Sharvashidze and it included the representatives both of the nobility (*Dimitri Marshania, Astamur Inal-ipa, Giorgi Sharvashidze, Pétré Anchabadze*) and peasants (*Anton Chukbar and Ezukhbaia*).

² At that time the Holy Synod planned to separate the Sukhumi Eparchy from the jurisdiction of the Georgian Exarchate (for details, see: **Gamakharia, 2005: 739-748**).

frain) in which he emotionally expresses his wish not to be cut from his Abkhaz roots: *"Oh, my God! / Help me not to degrade / And sometimes to hum / My ancestors' Varada"* (Sharvashidze, 2006: 97).

As Simon Janashia justly puts it, *"Only on the ground of deep feeling and understanding of the uniqueness of the native environment could have grown such a masterpiece as it is Abkhazian song "Varada" coming from the depths of the soul, poetic embodiment of lyrical emotion"* (Janashia, 1988: 22). And this Abkhaz, who whole-heartedly loved his native Abkhazia and was a brilliant expert of his own land and the Abkhazian language (Janashia, 1988: 21), at the same time was a true son and patriot of Georgia, his big motherland, and never missed an opportunity to stand steadily on Georgia's guard, protect its national and cultural values, and give an adequate response to those who expressed hostility to his big motherland.

A good example of this is Giorgi Sharvashidze's letter to the editor of the German newspaper *"Berliner Tageblatt"* as a response to the article published by its correspondent Lorenz. In his article the journalist recollected his trip to Gagra where he was invited by Prince Oldenburg. According to the journalist, during the party *"the representatives of the local elite who served the table"* stole *"the coat of one of the guests."* Lorenz also wrote about Tbilisi with a kind of scorn noting that *"there people and animals are in the same position."* Giorgi Sharvashidze responded to this libel in the following way: ***"the people he (Lorenz – Z.P.) referred to so scornfully have wonderful historical past... Georgians were the knights taking part in crusading wars as the first advocates of Christianity, stood at the gates of the Caucasus not for the purpose of breaking into foreign lands and plunder other people's good, but to defend the fatherland; to protect Christian culture and civil life... Georgians have the richest old epic literature which can be compared with the best works in the world ... In the hierarchy of Georgian kings and people the names of outstanding heroes and people of wisdom can be found"***.¹

It is clearly seen from this letter that for Giorgi Sharvashidze, the Abkhazs and Abkhazia are an integral part of Georgia. It is a single cultural, political, and state system. He is proud of this motherland common for the Abkhazs and the Georgians. That is why in 1917 when the contours of the revival of Georgian state appeared, Giorgi Sharvashidze whole-heartedly welcomed the beginning of a new epoch. In connection with this, of special interest is his letter published in the newspaper *"Sakartvelo" / "Georgia"*: ***"Although our homeland Iveria has had all kinds of big cultural challenges but our past froze in such a time that we have lost the path of national evolution. Yes, we can speak boldly that if not the bad fortune, today we would have been ahead of Europe... Today, at the time when the conscious part of the cut up Iver people stood with their arms folded at the***

¹ See: *The letter of His Serene Highness G. M. Sharvashidze sent by him to the Editorial board of the newspaper Berliner Tageblatt.* – Newspaper *"Transcaucasian speech"* («Закавказская речь»), №146, 1911 (Lekishvili, 1975: 85-86. Emphasis added – Z.P.).

graves of their former greatness, suddenly the voice of justice and freedom was heard! Georgia raises the alarm, cries hurray, hurray!"

Against the background of such national awakening Giorgi Sharvashidze's heart is broken because the other slogans are also heard: "We do not want freedom, we do not look for the autonomy, all peoples in the world are united and we only want to provide benefits to the working people. To do this, take away the estates of the landlords and give it to peasants, down with titles and private ownership on land ... **and thus the bright sun of national liberation and revival set down to earthly calculations**" (Sharvashidze, 2006: 306-307). Really, one cannot but admire Giorgi Sharvashidze's inspiration in the spirit of Ilia Chavchavadze.

Giorgi Sharvashidze's national pain as of a fervent patriot of Georgia, loving his native land, always concerning about his country's fate, is remarkably rendered in his poem *Response to V.O.*, which was written in Batumi as a response to Vakhtang Orbeliani's verse *Amer-Imers*. Because of the censorship, *Response to V.O* was not published in the newspaper "Droeba." Giorgi Sharvashidze shared the patriotic pathos of his friend poet and with a heavy heart recalled the past when Georgia was powerful and united.¹

Giorgi Sharvashidze was very upset that the feeling of unity had been lost among the Georgians and the whole country was consumed with envy and strife from within: "Some small groups, diversity of ideas, / Oh! where is the glorious Georgian of old times!" (Lekishvili, 1975: 256-257).

Here for known reasons we will refrain from the detailed analysis of this remarkable poem written by Giorgi Sharvashidze. It is to be evaluated by experts. We only state that this poem can be put in rank with the most outstanding samples of Georgian patriotic lyrics (Papaskiri, 2007a: 238).

Giorgi Sharvashidze's image as of Georgian public man, the man concerning about native Georgian literature, Georgian language is remarkably manifested in one more publication: *On the Georgian Language* (Janashia, 1988: 20). In this article he appears as an active defender of Georgian literary traditions. He strongly disapproves "of bad translation from foreign languages." In Giorgi Sharvashidze's opinion, this expresses a tendency to the "degeneration of the native language" (Janashia, 1988: 20). He is also greatly concerned about an increased haphazard usage of foreign words in the Georgian language. In the author's view, "one should borrow foreign words and terms only in extreme case when there is no equivalent in Georgian... it is necessary to try to enrich **our language** and not make it extinct" (Janashia, 1988: 20-21. Emphasis added – Z.P., K.K.). As is seen, Giorgi Sharvashidze's attitude to his native written language is very much like Ilia Chavchavadze's (Papaskiri, 2007a: 239).

In conclusion, while speaking about Giorgi Sharvashidze's national-state and cultural-political image one cannot help mentioning his speech at the so-called "gathering of

¹ This verse has been found and published by S. Lekishvili (Lekishvili, 1975: 256-257).

the Abkhazs” on 8 November 1917. This meeting organized by the Abkhazian nationalistic leaders with anti-Georgian attitude trampled down the centuries-old Georgian-Abkhaz historical unity and linked the future of the Abkhaz people to the so-called “Union of the Caucasian Highlanders.” The well-pronounced anti-Georgian zeal of the “gathering” and orientation caused a protest on the part of Georgian statesmen. As is mentioned by Mikheil Tarnava, known for his separatist attitudes, the meeting was attended by Akaki Chkhenkeli, member of the Russian State Duma (IV), a representative of the “Ozakom” (*“Special Transcaucasian Committee”* – a supreme body of Russian Provisional Government in Transcaucasia) and other celebrated figures among which was Giorgi Sharvashidze.

Giorgi Sharvashidze addressed the participants of the “meeting” in the Abkhazian language, explained the essence of the recent developments in Russia, congratulated with the proximity of the freedom, and called to the friendship and collaboration with Georgian people: *“You better follow your elder brothers, take joint actions, and fight for gaining freedom and self-preservation. I know some of you may not like such a view of mine as you are looking in the direction of Moscow and I am looking at Tbilisi. There is no other choice and has never been for Abkhazia but the close connection with Georgia and sharing her sorrows and joy.”* After this speech, being disappointed with anti-Georgian demarche of his brethren, Giorgi Sharvashidze left the hall never to return (Chitaia D., 2006: 125-126). Three months later, on 19 February 1918 entire Georgia was shocked by the news that came from Sokhumi regarding the death of a great patriot.

The unexpected death of Giorgi Sharvashidze, a true pillar of Georgian-Abkhazian historical fraternity and unity, at the beginning of 1918 when newly appeared Abkhazian leaders tried hard to detach his native area from the rest of Georgia, was somehow a symbolic event. An ardent patriot of Georgia, his great motherland, more than once provoked rage from the Russian authorities because of his uncompromising position. His heart could not bear the disloyalty of his compatriots. It was evident that the new Abkhaz leaders had totally different ideals. They could not and did not wish to follow Giorgi Sharvashidze’s path. It was not for this purpose that “mother Russia” nurtured them up.¹

¹ This fact did not go unnoticed for the eminent representatives of the Georgian society of that time. This is what was said in Giorgi Sharvashidze’s funeral speech by known Georgian public figure Niko Tavdgiridze: *“Those Abkhazs who were respected by foreigners because of you, for the freedom of whom you sacrificed all your glorious career, all your belongings, wealth, did not even notice your arrival here... They did not benefit from your being here... To ignore you was a crime... What injustice, what an irony of fate: you have sacrificed all your energy... for the freedom of your small country Abkhazia, the only treasure that had value to you. And you welcomed it gathering your last strength as Biblical Simon but your beloved people – the Abkhaz did not respond to you, failed to appreciate you, and followed the leaders brought up with Russian mentality against whom you were fighting and sacrificed all your happiness”* (Sharvashidze, 2006a: 39-40. Emphasis added – Z.P.).

And finally, the most important argument that the representatives of the Princely family of Abkhazia identified themselves as an integral part of the Georgian Orthodox Christian world is that the last leader of Abkhazia Mikheil Sharvashidze and his son Giorgi Sharvashidze were buried in the Mokvi Temple and the epitaph on their grave is carved in old Georgian script Asomtavruli. It should be also mentioned that even after the abolishment of the Principedom of Abkhazia (1864) by the Russian Empire, the representatives of the Sharvashidze family always emphasized that they were Georgian noblemen.¹

The second great ethnically Abkhaz public figure, who also actively guarded the Georgian-Abkhaz historical unity during this period was David Chkotua. Being a close friend of Giorgi Sharvashidze and a representative of the liberal wing of the Georgian feudal intelligentsia, he was brought up on the old Georgian literary and cultural traditions (**Janashia, 1988a**: 79-80). This was the reason why David Chkotua chose Shota Rustaveli's immortal poem "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" as his field of creative work and left a very solid scholarly legacy in this field (for details, see: **Jaiani, 2018**).

Despite the great efforts of the Russian authorities, not only for Giorgi Sharvashidze and Davit Chkotua, but also for the vast majority of the representatives of the Abkhaz nobility, the Georgian cultural and historical world still remained native. But the anti-Georgian propaganda carried out by the government (since the beginning of the 20th century) found favourable ground in the so-called the Abkhaz "popular" intelligentsia. Most of them were "the public figures" from the lower social strata who had received formal Russian education. The representatives of this "new intelligentsia," to whom the ideologues of Great Russian chauvinism instilled the idea that Abkhazia was not Georgia, conducted their cultural and educational activities in entirely anti-Georgian spirit.

From the beginning of the 20th century, the imperial government tried in every way to cut Abkhazia administratively off the rest of Georgia. According to the draft, submitted to the State Council in the spring of 1900, the Sokhumi Okrug would join the Black Sea Governorate and Samurzakano would be transferred to Zugdidi Uyezd (**Gelenava, 2014**: 16). It seems that the Empire was somehow determined to "gratify" the Georgians if they accepted Samurzakano and renounced the rest of Abkhazia. Like the church reform, the project was not implemented at that time.

On 13 (26) January 1902, 14,000 dessiatins of the best land was cut off from Sokhumi Okrug and given to the Gagra climatical station (**Essays, I, 1960**: 237). In 1904, at the request of Prince Alexander Oldenburg, the government decided to incorporate Gagra and its vicinity into the Black Sea Governorate. In 1914, before the outbreak of World War I, the Viceroy of the Caucasus raised the issue of transforming the Sokhumi Okrug into an independent governorate. During this period, the process of seizing the lands of local Abkhazs by Russian colonists intensified. In addition, the newcomers also had larger homesteads (**Gelenava, 2014**: 111-112).

¹ From this viewpoint Alexandre Sharvashidze's known remark is of particular importance: "*I am not an Abkhaz but Georgian nobleman*" (**Berdzenishvili, 1990**: 611. Emphasis added – Z.P.).

It is not difficult to understand that with these measures the imperial government was trying to separate Abkhazia from the rest of Georgia and complete the process of turning the region into a typical Russian province. The permanent anti-Georgian political-ideological campaign of the Russian imperial machine, disguised by the hypocritical care for raising the national and cultural self-awareness of the “Tuzemtsy” (in this case Abkhazs), had already yielded results during the years of the first Russian revolution. Ironically, Abkhazia, which was severely punished by the authorities for its participation in the “Holy War” against Russia and declared a “guilty population,” at this time appeared most loyal to the Russian autocratic regime among the peoples of the Caucasus.

It is well known that the revolution of 1905-1907 was a popular democratic revolution that shook the entire empire. The democratic movement also covered the outskirts of the empire. Moreover, in these regions it was transformed into the national-liberation struggle. We can say without any exaggeration that Georgia was at the forefront of this great national struggle (despite the excessive emphasis on social and class motives by Social Democratic Party, especially of its Bolshevik wing). Revolutionary speeches spread in all the regions of Georgia, including Abkhazia. However, the main driving force of the revolution in this part of Georgia was not the Abkhazs, who showed astonishing passivity and, in fact, seemed to be the defenders of the feudal-dictatorial imperial regime, but the Georgians.

The Georgians of Abkhazia immediately embraced the progressive democratic ideas of the Russian revolution and did not hesitate to join the revolutionary rallies in the rest of Georgia. One of the reasons for such a passivity of the Abkhazs was the absence of the class differences between them. This point of view is developed by the modern Abkhaz scholar Stanislav Lakoba, who emphasizes the viability of the patriarchal system in Abkhazia and the fact that Abkhazs, with rare exceptions, did not live in the city of Sokhumi, as well as in Gudauta and Ochamchire. According to the Abkhaz historian, capitalist relations were alien to the Abkhazs (**Lakoba S., 1990: 55**): Abkhazia was not involved in revolutionary processes due to its social and cultural backwardness. By the way, the Russian authorities could not hide their satisfaction with the unacceptance of the revolutionary processes in Abkhazia. It is no coincidence that one of the official newspapers wrote with enthusiasm in 1906 that the Abkhazs did not understand socialism and therefore it was possible to live with them (**Lakoba S., 1990: 55**).

Discussing the reasons for the Abkhazs’ abstaining from the revolutionary events of 1905-1907, we can agree with S. Lakoba that the Abkhaz peasants perceived the revolutionary changes in Abkhazia as a Georgian revolution (**Lakoba S., 1990: 55**), but he forgets one very important circumstance: such “distrust” of Abkhazs towards Georgians was the result of the “agitation” of the Russian Empire, which instilled hatred for “Georgian invaders” in the “oppressed” Abkhazs during the previous two decades.

Tensions escalated in late April of 1905 and continued almost till the end of 1906 (**Gamakharia, 2006b: 36-37**). In December of 1905, an armed demonstration was planned

in Gudauta under the leadership of Sergo Ordzhonikidze. Weapons were imported from abroad for this purpose (**Fadeev, 1933:** 26). A local “Republic” was also established in Samurzakano (existed from 15 (28) December 1905 to 9 (22) January 1906) led by the local Bolshevik Platon Emkhvari (**Lakoba S., 1984:** 40-63). Therefore, a regime of “enhanced security” was established in Abkhazia and on 28 February (13 March) 1906 martial law was introduced throughout the whole region (**Lakoba S., 1990:** 47).

Georgian society was concerned about the situation in Abkhazia in 1905. This is clearly shown by the materials published in the Georgian democratic press of that time. They exposed the “dark forces” that were spreading a thousand dirty rumours in Abkhazia, alleging that the Georgians were going to kill the Abkhazs and seize their lands (**Gelenava, 2014:** 113).

In April-May of 1906 the elections of the First State Duma were held in Georgia as defined by the Manifesto of 17 (30) October 1905, and from the Sokhumi, Batumi, and Kars electoral districts General Prokopi Sharvashidze was elected. Constantine Kandelaki was represented in the Second State Duma (February-June of 1907) from the same constituencies. In the third Duma (September-October of 1907 – June of 1912) – again Prokopi Sharvashidze was elected. Akaki Chkhenkeli who was Samurzakanoan by the origin, became a member of the 4th State Duma /September-October of 1912 – February of 1917/ (**Gelenava, 2011:** 376).

Despite great efforts, the tsarist government still failed to use obedient Abkhazs against the rebellious Georgians. But the loyalty of the Abkhazs was still appreciated by the autocratic regime of the Russian Empire. In May of 1906, given that the Abkhazs, who were a “guilty population” back in 1880, “had distinguished themselves by its loyalty to the government in the recent months,” the Viceroy of the Caucasus raised the issue of their rehabilitation. In December of 1906 Pyotr Stolypin agreed to this initiative of the Russian administration in the Caucasus and the Emperor’s “Grace” was published on 27 April (10 May) 1907, according to which the Abkhazs were officially pardoned. This was a reward for the outstanding loyalty to “the Homeland and the Tsar.” “The Abkhazs have withstood the test with dignity,” said the Viceroy of the Caucasus and expressed his deep conviction that from this time on “the Abkhazs will never be guilty before their sovereign Emperor” (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997:** 385-386).

It can be categorically asserted that the Abkhazs (at least most of them) really justified these hopes and since then have firmly stood in the service of the imperial policy of old or new Russia. For the first time this was clearly manifested during the events that took place after the February Revolution of 1917.

CHAPTER VIII. RELIGION AND CULTURE OF PRESENT-DAY ABKHAZIA IN 1810-1917

§1. The Religious Situation in Abkhazia in 1810-1917

In the early 1800s, when the issue of Abkhazia's unification with Russia was put on the agenda, the Samegrelo Principedom intensified the issue of restoring the Christian faith. This was mentioned in the 8 June 1808 letter of *Nino Dadiani*, the interim ruler of Samegrelo, addressed to *Ivan Gudovich*, the Governor-General of Georgia (1806-1809). She was informing him about the secret baptism of Giorgi Sharvashidze, the heir of *Kelesh-Bey Sharvashidze* and the son-in-law of Grigol Dadiani (**ACAC, III, 1869: 202**). There is also information about the baptism of Kelesh-Bey himself (**Gamba, 1987: 85; Gamakharria, 2005: 346, 367-368**).

The Georgian clergy, who had not yet seen the real goals of the Russian Empire, supported her in the struggle for Abkhazia. It is noteworthy the merits of the deeds of *Besarion (Dadiani)*, the Metropolitan of Chqondidi, *Grigol (Chikovani)*, the Metropolitan of Tsaishi, *Ioané (Ioseliani)*, the archpriest of the Principal court of Samegrelo, *Giorgi (Kukhalashvili)*, the archimandrite and later bishop, in bringing Abkhazia's some regions (Samurzakano, Tsebeli) under the Russian "protection" (**ACAC, II, 1868: 209; ACAC, III, 1869: 527; ACAC, V, 1873: 507-508**). Meanwhile, the Georgian clergy, with the Russian help, sought to restore Christianity in Abkhazia (**ACAC, IV, 1870: 415-416**). Archpriest Ioané (Ioseliani) asked *Alexander Tormasov*, the Governor-General of Georgia, to assist in the restoration of the temples of Bichvinta, Likhni, Dranda, Mokvi, Bedia on 23 December 1809. He again addressed A. Tormasov for help on 2 January 1810, but received none. After that, archpriest Ioané Ioseliani rebuilt the temple in Likhni at his own expense and sent priests *Ioané Kavtaradze* and *Simon Zhordania* there (**Gamakharria, 2005: 368**).

It should be noted that the Russian authorities were aware of the importance of spreading the Christianity among the highlanders, including the Abkhazs, and the importance of the Georgian clergy's involvement in this matter. On 28 December 1818, the Most Holy Governing Synod of Russia made a decision mandating the Georgian eparchies to perform a missionary function among the unbelievers living near them. This decision also applied to Abkhazia, but the Georgian Exarchate was unable to send missionaries there due to the anti-Russian armed revolts. Some clergymen still managed to conduct their missionary activities in Abkhazia. The archpriest *Ioané (Ioseliani)*, the priest *Simon Zhordania* (spiritual father of Mikheil Sharvashidze), who served in Likhni, as well as *Solomon Nadirov*, *Ioané Kavtaradze*, were especially prominent among them in the early 1820s. On 15 August 1821, the latter was ordained as "Archimandrite of the Church of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the whole region of Abkhazia" by the order of the Emperor and the decision of the Holy Synod. In October of the same year, *Ioané Kavtaradze* returned to Abkhazia together with *Dimitri Sharvashidze*, the newly appointed Prin-

cipal. In December he already was performing his functions in Likhni “for pious service to the conversion of the Abkhaz people to the Christian faith” (**CHAG:** Collection 488, List 1, Case 963, p. 3). Under the leadership of *Ioané Kavtaradze*, Georgian clergy baptized hundreds of the Abkhazs (**CHAG:** Collection 488, List 1, Case 963, pp. 1-2, 9, 14, 15, 17-20, 22).

The process of extending the jurisdiction of the Exarchate of Georgia to the churches of Samegrelo was completed on 26 March 1825. From that day on, at the request of the Exarch and *Levan V Dadiani*, one of the main responsibilities of the Chqondidi Eparchy became to send missionaries to Abkhazia. The first mission was sent to Samurzakano under the guidance of archpriest Iese Mikaberidze in the early 1830s. The mission achieved a great success in a short time (**State of Christianity in Abkhazia, 1903:** 60-61).

In order to speed up the restoration of Christianity in Abkhazia, Mikheil Sharvashidze put forward before the Russian administration in Georgia the issue of creating a separate eparchy of Abkhazia in 1831. The Georgian-Imeretian Synodal Office studied the situation in Abkhazia, where only the Likhni Church was functioning (hegumen was Svimon Zhordania), did not comply with Mikheil Sharvashidze’s request, and decided to send a religious mission to Abkhazia from the Samegrelo Eparchy. This decision was also supported by the Most Holy Governing Synod. After taking some organizational measures (in early March of 1834) the mission headed by archimandrite *Anton Dadiani* arrived in Abkhazia. The head of the mission stayed at the Principal’s house and started to fulfil his duties. This was the first spiritual mission to Abkhazia after the 17th century.

Since the 1830s, the missionaries in Abkhazia were *Svimon Zhordania*, *David Akhvlediani*, *Teophané Gabunia*, *Andria Gelovani*, *Ioseb* and *Markoz Tatarashvili*, *Athanasé Chkadua*, *Roman Mertchvile*, *Vasil Nemsadze*, *Giorgi Kavtaradze*, and others. The Exarchate of Georgia praised the successful work of Anton Dadiani’s mission (**ACAC, VIII, 1881:** 252). There were about 2,000 Abkhazs baptized and three churches built in 1834-1836 (**Gamakharia, 2005:** 374-379). The missionaries achieved great success in Bzipi area and Abzhua. *Tamar Dadiani*, Principal’s mother and the daughter of *Katsia Dadiani*, greatly contributed to the mission’s success in Bzipi area, while in Abzhua the same applied to *Kesaria Dadiani*, daughter of *Niko Dadiani* and wife of *Alexandre (Ali Bey) Sharvashidze*, owner of this region (**CHAG:** Collection 488, List 1, Case 3741, pp. 65, 66).

The Abkhazs realized that Russia was trying to convert them to Christianity in order to achieve her political goals, so their resistance intensified. On 31 March 1836, Levan V Dadiani addressed a letter to Georg Rosen, the Governor-General of Georgia, and described the situation in Abkhazia (**CHAG:** Collection 489, List 1, Case 5095, pp. 1-3). The views of Levan V Dadiani had some influence on government’s religious policy towards the highlanders. Yevgeny Golovin, the Governor-General of Georgia (1837-1842), renounced the illusion of strengthening Russia’s position in Abkhazia through the spread of Christianity, chose the military path, and fortified the Black Sea coastline. For the same reasons, he rejected a proposal to restore the Bichvinta temple, which was put forward

by Anton Dadiani in July 1835. Nicholas I agreed to Yevgeny Golovin's position in December of 1838 and the restoration of the Bichvinta temple was postponed indefinitely (**Murzakevich, 1877: 22-24; Gamakharia, 2005: 372-373, 396-398**).

The militant governmental policies changed the attitude towards Georgian missionaries too. General *Paul von Kotzebue*, Chief of Staff of the Caucasus Corps, proposed the designation of the Russian clergymen for spreading Christianity "among the semi-wild highlanders" in Abkhazia in his letters to the Exarch of Georgia of 10 and 20 March 1840. According to his proposal, the church in Abkhazia should be subordinated to the Black Sea Coastline Church Department. P. von Kotzebue's proposal was supported by Yevgeny Golovin. The final word belonged to Mikheil Sharvashidze, the Principal of Abkhazia. The decision was hastened by the appointment of Anton Dadiani as Bishop of Samegrelo (1842) and the absence of the head of mission in Abkhazia (**Rogava, 2002: 93-94**). The Principal of Abkhazia stated: "*after Anton's departure, I want to see hegumen (Superior Father) Theophané in his place, who ... knows the Abkhazs well, and with his kindness and wise approach had deserved their respect ... I want the church of my domain to be directly subordinated to Bishop Anton of Samegrelo.*"

By the will of Mikheil Sharvashidze, Georgian missionaries continued their work under the leadership of Bishop *Anton* and hegumen *Theophané Gabunia*. In two years they baptized about five hundred Abkhazs (**CHAG: Collection 48, List 1, Case 9600**). At the end of 1845, the Georgian spiritual mission in Abkhazia was headed by hegumen Germané Gogelashvili, confessor of Mikheil Sharvashidze. Through his efforts, up to a thousand Abkhazs were baptized in just half a year.

In the beginning of 1846, the Most Holy Governing Synod decided to establish a Russian spiritual mission in Abkhazia. The head of the mission at the same time would be the head of the Black Sea Coastline clergy and would report directly to the Holy Synod. *Mikhail Vorontsov*, the Viceroy of the Caucasus, did not agree with this decision. He assured the secular and ecclesiastical authorities that, taking into account Abkhazia's Principal's wish to leave the clerical mission under the Exarch of Georgia, it was necessary to use Georgian clergymen for missionary purposes in Abkhazia (**ACAC, X, 1885: 225-227**). The Holy Synod mostly agreed with Vorontsov. In 1847, by the decision of the Holy Synod, *Germané Gogelashvili* was appointed as Archimandrite of Abkhazia and was ordained by Bishop Anton Dadiani (**Rogava, 2002: 95**).

By the end of the 1840s the issue of establishing the separate eparchy in Abkhazia became more acceptable to the Russian authorities. Thus, when on 14 March 1849 Mikheil Sharvashidze put forward this initiative before Isidor, the Exarch of Georgia, it was shared both by Exarch and Viceroy. The latter once again asked for the dispatch of the Georgian clergymen to Abkhazia and the appointment of *Germané Gogelashvili* as Bishop of Abkhazia (**ACAC, X, 1885: 230-232**). Following Emperor Nicholas I's decree (15 April 1851) and the decision of the Holy Synod (30 April 1851), the Abkhazian Eparchy was

founded. By the same decrees, the theological school was also founded in the Eparchy. *Germané Gogelashvili*, confessor of *Mikhail Sharvashidze*, became the first Bishop of Abkhazia (30 May 1851).

The Crimean War and the Ottoman occupation hampered the missionary activities, with many Abkhazs turning to the Ottomans and rejecting the Christian faith. Both the eparchy and the theological school, together with the Principal of Abkhazia, were forced to leave Abkhazia. To support the Christians, Simon Eshba, the Eparchy interpreter, and Ioané Gegia, the newly ordained first Abkhaz priest, were sent by Bishop Germané to Abkhazia in 1854 and May 1855 respectively. They encouraged Christians and converted hundreds of people to Christianity. Bishop *Germané* especially emphasized the great contribution of Ioané Gegia, for which he was ordained as the hegumen of Athara church in July 1855 (**CHAG**: Collection 488, List 1, Case 5095, pp. 1-5). The return of Mikheil Sharvashidze to Abkhazia (May 1855) and the restoration of worship at the Likhni Church also contributed to the strengthening of the Christians. In the first half of 1855, the theological school renewed its functioning, although it happened not in Abkhazia, but in the village of *Chkaduashi*, near Zugdidi. Later, the school, which Alexandre Okropiridze kept with his own funds, was moved to Elizbar Dadiani's house in the village of Kvashkhori (Senaki district). There were six Abkhaz children attending it and Giorgi Sharvashidze, son of Mikheil Sharvashidze, was among them (**Gamakharia, 2016a**: 74-75).

Alexandre Okropiridze, who was promoted to the rank of Archimandrite (26 February 1856) made a great contribution to the restoration of Christianity in Abkhazia after the end of the Crimean War. Through his activities, Archimandrite Alexandre earned the high trust of *Mikheil Sharvashidze* and the love of the Abkhaz people. On 17 August 1857 *Geronti (Papitashvili)* was appointed as a Bishop of Abkhazia. On 16 November 1859 he simultaneously became the Bishop of Samegrelo and moved to Martvili. The actual management of the eparchy was again assigned to Alexandre Okropiridze, who submitted three analytical reports with relevant recommendations and proposals to the clerical and military authorities in 1860 (**Gamakharia, 2006c**: 83-96). *Alexandre Okropiridze* officially raised the issue of creating the Abkhazian script and literature for the first time in those reports and argued that without them the final victory of Christianity would be impossible in Abkhazia.

On 21 November 1861 *Alexandre Okropiridze* was appointed as a Bishop of Abkhazia. His concern was the opening of new churches, the increasing of the number of clergymen, the establishment of worship in Georgian and Abkhazian languages, the education of the Abkhazs. He did not spare his own funds for it. Around twenty new churches were opened in Abkhazia-Samurzakano (including the old church in the Sokhumi cemetery which he restored with his own funds) in those times (**Gamakharia, 2005**: 427-435, 938-948). It should be stressed that the 1867 Muhajirun hit hardest those regions of Abkhazia where there were no Georgian missionaries, churches, and schools. Such was the

Tsebelda district, which had been completely emptied of its population. Partially affected were the regions (Bichvinta and Dranda districts) where the missionaries had some success. The Muhajirun did not touch the Okumi district at all, where the entire population was predominantly Christian.

Gabriel Kikodze was appointed the head of the Abkhazian Eparchy by the decree of Emperor Alexander II of 30 May 1869 and the decision of the Holy Synod of 6 June 1869 (**Gamakharia, 2007**: 212-220, 226-229, 247-253, 256-258). The missionary work of Bishop Gabriel in Abkhazia represents an entire epoch in the ecclesiastical history of the region. The missionary trips to Abkhazia, village-to-village walks, meetings with the population, sermons and conversations, love and paternal care for the Abkhaz people have yielded extremely positive results (**Gamakharia, 2007**: 354-534). The significant contribution to the success achieved in spreading the Christianity in Abkhazia was made by *David Machavariani, Athanasé Zhordania, Anton Dgebuadze, Besarion Mikaberidze, Giorgi Akhvlediani, Ioané Kereselidze, Ioseb Berdzenishvili, Timothé Sakhokia, Zosime Khelaia*, and other Georgian clergymen (**Gamakharia, 2005**: 843-865; **Gamakharia, 2007**: 661-668). Ethnically Abkhaz priest Ioane Gegia, the hegumen of the Likhni Church, was actively involved in the missionary and pedagogical activities.

The Russian military administration of the Sokhumi branch was opposing in every way the activities of the Georgian missionaries, which, in their opinion, was hindering the “Russian development” of the region (**Gamakharia, 2005**: 988). The successful work of Georgian missionaries in Abkhazia was hampered by another anti-Russian uprising in 1877. On 5 August 1877, the Abkhaz Moslems killed Ioané. Abkhazs once again faced a national tragedy – another mass emigration. As in 1867, this time the worst affected was the region where Georgian missionaries were not allowed to work; where churches and schools were not sufficient; where the Moslem influence was the strongest. In 1877 it was the Gumista district that had been completely emptied of its population. Meanwhile, with the great contribution from Bishop Gabriel and other Georgian missionaries 19,000 Christian Abkhazs escaped deportation (**CHAG**: Collection 489, List 1, Case 40793, p. 38).

Bishop Gabriel and the Georgian clergy of Abkhazia assisted the return of the Abkhaz Muhajiri to their homeland in every possible way. For example, Stephané Sakhokia, the priest of Achandari Easter Church, brought 160 Abkhaz Muhajiri from Batumi to Abkhazia at his own expense (**CHAG**: Collection 489, List 1, Case 40793, p. 38). In 1879-1886 through the efforts of Bishop Gabriel and other Georgian clergymen, it was possible to restore the Christian spiritual life, build or renovate about twenty churches, including the Sokhumi Cathedral in 1884 (**Gamakharia, 2005**: 509, 516, 519).

The state policy of Russification of the population also dictated the establishment of Russian monasteries in Abkhazia. Decisions on this issue were made at the highest political level. The Establishment of monasteries continued from the 1870s to the beginning of the 20th century. Russian monasteries were purposefully opened in the historically Ge-

orgian temples. Monasteries were opened in Bichvinta (1872), Anakopia (New Athos – 1875), Dranda (1881), Kaman (1901), Mokvi (1902). These significant centres of Georgian civilization had to become the centres of denationalization of Georgians and Abkhazs.

Among the monasteries based in Abkhazia, the Simon the Canaanite Monastery in Akhali Atoni (New Athos) deserves the special attention. It was founded as a branch of the St. Panteleimon Russian Monastery (“Russica”) functioning on Mount Athos since the 11th century. The monastery of New Athos was declared the property of only ethnic Russians (**Abkhazia and New Athos, 1898**: 216-219). On 24 September 1888, the monastery of New Athos was visited by Emperor *Alexander III*, Empress *Maria*, Prince *Nicholas*, Palace Minister *Illarion Vorontsov-Dashkov*, Governor of the Caucasus *Alexandre Dondoukov-Korsakov* and their entourage. The guard of honour was staffed only by Samurzakanoans (the Abkhazs were declared a “guilty nation,” and were not trusted). Princess *Sharvashidze* greeted the guests on behalf of the local population («*түземцы*») in Georgian (**Potto, 1889**: 93; **Platonov, 1910**: 124; **Abkhazia and New Athos, 1898**: 187). The New Athos Monastery, which had included Bichvinta since 1885, soon became a citadel of the governmental and ecclesiastical policy of the Russification of region.

Within the framework of this policy, the Eparchy of Abkhazia was reorganized. By Emperor’s decree of 12 June 1885, the Eparchy of Abkhazia became the Eparchy of Sokhumi, which included the Sokhumi District and the Black Sea District from Adler to Anapa (**CHAG**: Collection 489, List 1, Case 40323, p. 1-2, 6). This marked the beginning of the era of Russian bishops’ assimilationist policy of in the Sokhumi Eparchy (**Report, 1888**: 27-28, 71). In order to separate the different parts of Georgia from each other, the Russian government began to introduce worship and education in the Megrelian language in Samurzakano and Samegrelo (**Report, 1888**: 27-28, 71). The persecution of the Georgian language and everything Georgian continued in Abkhazia.

According to the Russian administration in the Caucasus, the implementation of the imperial plan of the russification of the Abkhazs was hindered by the Georgian clergymen and teachers. The Georgian society of Abkhazia opposed the plan of russification, to which the interests of Orthodoxy were sacrificed. The letter of *Tedo Sakhokia* from “Sokhumi,” which was published in the newspaper “*St. Petersburg’s Vedomosti*” on 1 (13) July 1900, got great resonance (**Silagadze, Guruli, 1999**: 137-156). Kutaisi Governor-General *Fyodor Gershelman* denied *Tedo Sakhokia*’s allegations, accused him of creating the “Georgian party” and attempting to Georgianize Abkhazia using the church and school. Authorities expelled the leaders of the Georgian Party from Sokhumi district on the charges that they opposed the “governmental measures for the russification of district’s population” (**Silagadze, Guruli, 1999**: 130-131).

In order to speed up the russification of Abkhazia, Bishop *Arsen* filed a motion before the Holy Synod to separate the Sokhumi Eparchy from the Georgian Exarchate on 20 October 1901. The proposal was approved by the Governor-General *Grigory Golitsyn* and

Exarch *Alexei* (**CHAG**: Collection 488, List 1, Case 24544, pp. 2, 5, 8, 9, 13; **CHAG**: Collection 489, List 1, Case 47709, p. 2; **Gamakharia, 2005**: 615-616,759). Later, against the background of the revolution, the Russian Bishop of Sokhumi allowed the Georgian liturgy in the Sokhumi Cathedral on 5 June 1905 (**CHAG**: Collection 1458, List. 1, Case 180, p. 15). Moreover, the government decided to appoint a Georgian priest as the Bishop of Sokhumi. On 3 February 1906 *Kyrion (Sadzaglishvili)* became the Bishop of Sokhumi.

Bishop Kyrion left a profound impact on the ecclesiastical life of Abkhazia. He stopped forced conversion to the Christianity of the Abkhazs, which was practised by the Russian priests, and the compilation of the false lists of the “baptized.” The Bishop was focusing on the meetings with parishioners, the sermons, the opening of new parishes, and the restoration of churches). With the blessing of Kyrion, a meeting of the clergy of the Sokhumi Eparchy was convened. On 12 January the congregation decided to support the restoration of the autocephaly of the Georgian Church (**Georgia, 1917**). Kyrion also quickly put an end to the discrimination of the parishes on national grounds. Georgians, Abkhazs, Russians, Greeks were allowed to worship in their native language. Abkhaz or Abkhazian-speaking priests were appointed to the Abkhaz parishes. The Abkhazian language became the subject of Kyrion’s care. At the beginning of November of 1906, by the decree of Bishop Kyrion, the Abkhazian language was included in the curriculum of Gudauta two-grade school headed by Ioané Kavtaradze, the archpriest of Gudauta district, for the first time in history. As *Iakob Gogebashvili* wrote, Bishop Kyrion, who was deeply sympathetic to the creation of Abkhazian script and literature, asked him to take part in compiling a textbook on the Abkhazian language. Iakob Gogebashvili recommended that “*Georgians from Sokhumi should act in this direction and help Abkhazians in this cultural endeavour*” (**Gogebashvili, 1955**: 201). Bishop Kyrion's work in the Sukhumi Eparchy was becoming increasingly unacceptable to the Russian authorities. At the end of November of 1906, the Holy Synod summoned Bishop Kyrion to St. Petersburg and appointed him as a Bishop of *Kovno* (Kaunas) and Vicar of the Lithuanian Eparchy.

In 1911 *Andrew (Ukhtomsky)* was appointed as a bishop to the Sokhumi Eparchy. At first, Bishop Andrew tried to take into account the interests of parishioners of all nationalities. On 14 January 1912 (the day of Commemoration of St. Nino) he allowed liturgy in Georgian in the Sokhumi Cathedral. With the support of Bishop Andrew, in 1913 the translation of church books into Abkhazian language (the work started by Bishop Kyrion) was completed. On 27 October 1913, a liturgy was held in Abkhazian in Likhni. In a short time, Bishop Andrew earned the respect of the clergy and the parishioners. However, at the same time, he started to implement the Russian “cultural goals.” In November of 1912 Bishop Andrew agreed to the conversion of Ilori Church into the Russian nunnery. This caused opposition from the Georgian clergymen. In April and December of 1913, *Ambrosi Khelaia (St. Ambrosius)*, who was in exile at that time, published several letters against such conversion (**Gamakharia, 2006a**: 492-547). *Constantine Majganadze* and

Porphyry Khelaia, the priests of the Ilori Church were also actively opposing this measure. The struggle on this issue continued till 1916, when, with the help of Akaki Chkhenkeli, the member of the 4th State Duma, the Russian plan failed (**Gamakharia, 2012: 84-86**).

At the beginning of the 1910s the problem of declining Christianity and spreading of Islam in Abkhazia became apparent. As Bishop Andrew put it, Gudauta district was “completely imbued with Islam.” The prominent Abkhaz public figures – writer *Dimitri Gulia*, priests *Nikoloz Pateipa* and *Dimitri Marghania*, etc. – openly wrote that the Abkhazs had never been true Christians, that they had always been and still remained pagans, that mosques were being built, and so on (**Sotrudnik, 1912, №10: 152, №11: 173, 176, №13: 204-207**). In this situation Bishop Andrew abolished the mobile church and established an anti-Moslem mission of the Abkhaz priests (**CHAG: Collection 493, List 1, Case 1439, pp. 1-9**). *Nikoloz Ladaria*, Priest of Durifshi Church, superintendent of church-parish schools in Gudauta and Gumista districts had been appointed as a mission leader in the same districts. In 1912-1914 he also was the head of the anti-Moslem mission of Sokhumi district on the whole. *Nikoloz Pateipa* has been appointed as a missionary of Kodori and Samurzakano districts (**CHAG: Collection 489, List 1, Case 55664, p. 1; Collection 493, List 1, Case 1439, pp. 12-18**). On 17 October 1913 the Holy Synod founded the Bedia Blachernae Monastery. The Schemamonk *Joseph (Iessé Shelia)* was appointed as its hegumen.

In 1916, the issue of reorganization of the Georgian Exarchate and separation of Sokhumi Eparchy became actual once again (**Gamakharia, 2016: 263-265**). It was planned to separate the Sokhumi Eparchy without Samurzakano. The separation of Sokhumi Eparchy from the Georgian Exarchate was categorically unacceptable for the Georgian society (**Church Bulletin, 1907: 299-301**). Moreover, the Abkhaz delegation, headed by *Alexandre Sharvashidze*, arrived in Tbilisi, and played a significant role in disrupting the plans of the Holy Synod. This threat was finally averted thanks to the 1917 February Revolution and subsequent events.

§2. The Cultural Life in Abkhazia in 1810-1917

From the end of the 17th century, when the local Christian cultural and educational centres were dismantled in Abkhazia and the area was emptied of clergymen, there was virtually no cultural and educational activity here. From that time on, only the ecclesiastical centres of Samegrelo (Odishi) Principedom were maintaining the cultural life in Abkhazia. They were teaching the residents from Abkhazia (Abkhazs and Georgians) literacy, scripture, geography, astronomy, arithmetic, hagiography, hymnography, etc. It was based on centuries-old traditions of Georgian-Abkhaz historical coexistence, which, despite the pressure from the highlanders and the strengthening of Ottoman influence, was not completely eradicated. This determined the fact that Abkhazia had remained a part of the all-Georgian cultural and historical universe. This is evidenced by the written sources left by the Principals of Abkhazia, Abkhaz and Georgian nobility, and the representatives

of the lower social circles: The official documents, letters, donations, complaints and rulings, tombstone epitaphs, etc. All of them are written in Georgian. There were also some family schools and also an ecclesiastical school near the Ilori Church, where Georgian literacy and other fields of literature were taught.

Throughout the 19th century, the house of Abkhazia's principals was the centre of the cultural life in Abkhazia. Even after the abolition of the Abkhazian Principedom (1864), the representatives of the former ruling house and persons closely related to them were determining the main aspects of social and cultural life. The activities of *Giorgi (Safar-Bey) Sharvashidze*, *Mikheil Sharvashidze*, *Konstantine Sharvashidze*, *Giorgi Sharvashidze*, *Solomon Zvamba*, *Dimitri Machavariani*, and clergymen such as *Ioané Ioseliani*, *Alexandre Okropiridze*, *Gabriel Kikodze*, *Ambrosi Khelaia*, *Kyrion Sadzaglishvili*, *Ivané Gegia*, and others should be especially mentioned. In 1810, with the support of the Abkhaz prince *Giorgi (Safar-bey) Sharvashidze*, *Ioané Ioseliani*, the Archpriest of the Zugdidi Temple and the court priest of the Abkhazian Principal, officially tried to open an ecclesiastical school in the village Likhni, the centre of the Abkhazian Principedom (**AKAK, VI, 1875: 850-851**). This was the first attempt to establish an ecclesiastical school in Abkhazia.

The transformation of Sokhumi into the cultural and educational centre of Abkhazia began in the mid-19th century, after the foundation of the first ecclesiastical and secular schools. *Giorgi (Safar-bey) Sharvashidze's* children, *Mikheil*, *Konstantine* and *Alexandre*, had a good Georgian education which was ensured by their mother *Tamar Dadiani* (sister *Grigol Dadiani*, the Samegrelo Principal). This tradition was continued in the family of *Mikheil*, whose spouse was *Alexandra (Tsutsa) Dadiani*, a representative of the side branch of the Samegrelo Princely House and the granddaughter of *Niko Dadiani*, who was known as the *Great Niko*.

Georgian was the main language of culture and education in 19th century Abkhazia. This is confirmed by the Russian scholars and travellers of the first half of the 19th century (**Seleznyov, 1847b: 206**). Their works contain a lot of information about artefacts decorated with Georgian Asomtavruli inscriptions in the 19th century Abkhazia. For example, Georgian inscriptions are on the icons commissioned by *Mikheil Sharvashidze* in 1829 and 1848, which he donated to the Likhuni (Likhni) Temple. The correspondence of *Mikheil Sharvashidze* with the Russian authorities and family members was conducted in Georgian. Letters of the Principal's family members were also written in perfect Georgian. *Simon Janashia*, observing the form and style of *Mikheil Sharvashidze's* correspondence, concludes that "such function of the Georgian language was the result of the centuries-old cultural and historical development of the country of Abkhazia" (**Janashia, 1988: 35**). Besides the official documents and epistolary legacy of *Giorgi (Safar-Bey) Sharvashidze* and *Mikheil Sharvashidze*, the Russian General *Kotzebue* confirms the widespread use of the Georgian language at *Mikheil Sharvashidze's* court: "Georgian was the written language used by the family of the Princes *Sharvashidze*" (**Papaskiri, 2010a; Papaskiri, 2016: 412**. See relevant literature there). It should be also mentioned that the tombstone epi-

taphs of the last prince of Abkhazia Mikheil Sharvashidze and his wife Alexandra Dadiani in the Mokvi Cathedral are also made in Georgian Asomtavruli script (**Bgaghba Kh., 1967:** 32-33; **Silogava, 2004:** 298-301). Also in Georgian are the tombstone epitaph of nobleman *Mikheil Marshania* in the same temple (**Bgaghba Kh., 1967:** 31; **Silogava, 2004:** 302-303) and numerous tombstone epitaphs found in Gali Municipality. Among the latter, special attention is to be paid to the tombstone epitaphs of noblewoman *Salome Anchabadze* and her husband *Kiazo Emkhvari* (**Akhaladze, 2006:** 208-208, 212).

Constantine Sharvashidze, the younger brother of Mikheil Sharvashidze, also draws attention. Although he was educated at the Pages' Corps in St. Petersburg, Constantine Sharvashidze was close to the Georgian aristocratic circles and shared their ideas. It is evidenced by his participation in the 1832 conspiracy to restore the state independence of Georgia (**Potto, 1994:** 25-26). As it is seen from the testimony of one of the conspirators, Constantine Sharvashidze enjoyed great authority among them. He was talking ecstatically about freedom and claimed that he "could mount an uprising in Abkhazia, and clear Abkhazia from the Russians with two thousand Abkhazs." He also "*intended to send 300 armed Abkhazs (According to the other source, 500 Abkhazs) to Tbilisi in the first days of the revolt*" (**Gozalishvili, 1970:** 363-364). Because of his participation in the 1832 conspiracy, Constantine Sharvashidze was banished from Georgia (**ACAC, VI, 1875:** 410) and was allowed to return only from 1858 (he lived mainly in Kutaisi and Tbilisi). This period is associated with his active involvement in the process of creating the first Abkhazian alphabet.

It is known that Abkhazian was a spoken language. The Russian government decided to create an Abkhazian script in the 1860s. The creation of the Abkhazian script is connected with the name of General Peter von Uslar, who composed the Abkhazian alphabet on the basis of Cyrillic script in 1862 (**Gvantseladze, 2012:** 11). The same year, the Society for the Restoration of Orthodox Christianity in the Caucasus set up in Tbilisi a special commission headed by General Ivan Bartolomei to compile the first textbook of the Abkhazian alphabet for Abkhazian parish schools. The members of the commission were the well-known Georgian historian *Dimitri Purtseladze*, who at that time was in charge of the affairs of the Society for the Restoration of Orthodox Christianity, and *Vladimir Trirogov*, the Special Representative of the Caucasus Viceroy, graduate of the Faculty of Oriental Studies at St. Petersburg University and an expert in Oriental languages. The residents of Abkhazia – Priest *Ioané Gegia*, Officer *Giorgi Kurtsikidze*, and *Simeon Eshba* – also took an active part in creating the alphabet. In addition, the Abkhazian text was reviewed and corrected twice: by *Constantine Sharvashidze* in 1863 and by *Grigol Sharvashidze* in 1864. According to their suggestion, the Bzipi pronunciation of the Abkhazian language, which was used in the book at first, was changed to the common Abkhazian pronunciation (**Gvantseladze, 2012**).

The creation of the Cyrillic-based Abkhazian alphabet by P. von Uslar was highly criticized. It was believed that Georgian graphics better reflected the phonemes of Abkhazian sounds (**Tcharaia, 1907**). This fact was acknowledged by Peter von Uslar himself

when he wrote: *“The Georgian alphabet system can be taken as the basis of a common alphabet for all Caucasian languages that are not written languages yet; But if we borrow from Georgians not only the alphabet system, but also the outline of the letters, we will unintentionally create difficulties, which will be even more noticeable as the Russian literacy spreads more in the Caucasus”*¹ (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997:** 353; Compare: **Gvantseladze, 2009:** 210). Even the Abkhaz nationalists believed that the Russian Empire was trying to separate the Abkhazs from the kindred peoples (**Ashkhatsava, 1925:** 37-38). The Abkhazian script was created solely for political reasons and aimed both the isolation of the Abkhazs from the Georgian cultural universe and the preparation of their Russification through the use of Russian graphics and the Russian language (**Gvantseladze, 2009:** 212). Although at that time this alphabet could not be used properly, and neither the Abkhazian primary school nor the Abkhazian literature could be established on its basis, this fact gave hope to the Abkhaz society that they would have their own script and new fields of culture.

Georgian missionaries of the Georgian Exarchate played a special role in the cultural life of Abkhazia and in the survival of the Abkhaz ethnos in general. Their activities contributed to the institutional development of education and culture in Abkhazia. The establishment of the first educational and cultural institutions is connected with their names. The first was the Okumi Parish School, which was opened for the children of nobles by *David Machavariani*, a graduate of the Tbilisi Theological Seminary, in 1851. Soon the gifted children of peasants also were able to join the school. There was a library near Okumi school, which was opened by Ivané Gegia with his own funds (**Sakhokia, 1985:** 333-335).

It is believed that the Okumi school for a long time was the only one among the schools and parish schools of the Orthodox Christian Restoration Society in the Caucasus (**Dudko, 1956:** 3). However, there are reports that other (non-official) schools had already functioned in Abkhazia (namely, in Likhni and Ilori) before 1851-1852 (**Gamakharia, 2006c:** 67; **Dudko, 1956:** 20). According to the archival sources, the Georgian Exarch rewarded Bishop *Alexandre Okropiridze* (8 May 1852) for establishing a school for the children in Ilori. The documents show that the pupils were ready to enter the 2nd grade in 1852 and their achievements had been already substantial. Based on the documents, we can presume that the Ilori school started its functioning no earlier than 1850 and no later than May 1851 (**CHAG, Collection 493, Case 96, p. 18**). As for the Likhni ecclesiastical school, it

¹ *«Грузинский алфавит... едва ли это ни есть совершеннейший из всех существующих алфавитов... Система грузинской азбуки может быть принята за основание для общей азбуки всех кавказских народов, чуждых до сих пор грамотности. Но если мы позаимствуем у грузин не только систему азбуки, но и начертание букв, то совершенно произвольно создадим затруднения, которые тем будут ощутительнее, чем более грамотность распространится по Кавказу»* (**Uslar, 1887:** 48-49).

was officially established on 25 September 1852 and was subordinated to Alexandre Okropiridze, the supervisor of the Abkhazian Theological School. The Russian scholar *A. Dudko* also mentions the establishment of schools at churches and monasteries in Abkhazia, namely in Bedia, Saberio, Dikhazurga, and Gudava (**Dudko, 1956: 20**).

Soon new schools were opened in Samurzakano and Abkhazia. For example, there were 11 schools in Samurzakano (Okumi, Dikhazurga, Bedia, Gudava, Tagiloni, I and II Saberio, Barghebi, Nabakevi, Chuburkhindji, Pakhulani) by 1868. The Ilori school also continued its functioning and Bishop Alexandre Okropiridze donated 200 rubles from his own salary to this school (**Gamakharia, 2005: 457**).

In 1863, a school for the highlanders was opened in Sokhumi. The Sokhumi school was designed for 20 boys, including 15 places for the children of Abkhaz nobles and 5 places for the children of Russian officials. The education would last four years (**Gulia D., 1962: 140**). For years, the school superintendent was *Constantine Machavariani* (son of *David Machavariani*, the founder of the Okumi School). The Sokhumi Highlanders' School was the largest educational institution in Abkhazia (**Tarba, 1964: 10**).

According to the material published in the newspaper "*Kavkaz*" on 1 June 1866, the local Russian administration established the women's school in Sokhumi on 3 March 1866. There, among others, were enrolled five Abkhazs (**Papaskiri, 2004: 216-217**). In 1870, the second women's school for the Abkhaz girls – a Progymnasium – had been opened in Sokhumi (**Dudko, 1956: 40**). The establishment of the Highlanders' School and the women's Progymnasium only for the children of the Abkhaz and Russian civil servants, unequivocally indicates the imperial goal to divide the local community and gradually establish its own foothold for the full domination in the region.

To 1917, about 79 schools with 3407 pupils were functioning in Abkhazia (**Dudko, 1956: 309-328**). The establishment of the Sokhumi branch of the Society for the Spreading of Literacy among Georgians greatly contributed to the institutional development of education in Abkhazia. The idea of establishing a Sukhumi branch was born during *Ilia Chavchavadze's* stay in Abkhazia. *Ilia Chavchavadze* was invited to Gagra by Duke *Alexander von Oldenburg* and he arrived there in May of 1903. From there *Ilia Chavchavadze* went to Sokhumi. On 24 May he was warmly welcomed by the Georgian society of Sokhumi (by the initiative of *Tedo Sakhokia*) in Alexandre Sharvashidze's house (**Gelenava, 2011: 370**). It was at the official dinner, after the toast made by *Ilia Chavchavadze*, that one of the young attendees asked him, as the Chairman of the Society for the Spreading of Literacy among Georgians, to request the establishment of the branch of this society in Sokhumi. However, the establishment of the Branch and opening the school took several years. This idea was revived in 1909 when *Niko Tavdgiridze*, the known public figure, wrote the petition on behalf of the Georgians of Sokhumi. Finally, the Sokhumi Branch of the Society for the Spreading of Literacy among Georgians had been established in 1910. Its active members were *Antimoz Jugheli*, *Mariam Dadiani-Anchabadze* (Chairman of the Board), *Niko Tavdgiridze*, *Sachino Ioseliani*, *Niko Janashia*, and others (**Kvaratskhelia,**

2009: 41). The number of members grew to 355 in 1913. Soon the branch had its own schools in Sokhumi, Gudauta, and Gali. There were also small schools in the villages. In 1911, at the initiative of the Sokhumi residents, the People's University was founded. Initially, the number of students was around 40. The classes lasted for 5 days a week and the Georgian literacy was also taught there (**Sakhalkho Gazeti**, 1911, №440).

One of the prominent figures in the cultural and educational life of Abkhazia at the turn of the 20th century was *Niko Janashia*. As soon as the Sokhumi branch of the society was established, at the request of the board, Niko Janashia was invited as a teacher of the Georgian school. He started working in 1910 and worked there until his death. Along with other public figures (*Antimoz Jugheli, Alexandre Sharvashidze, Andria Chochua*), he made a great contribution to the establishment of a seminary in Abkhazia. The four-year seminary was open on 1 July 1915 and from 1917 it was supervised by *Alexandre Giorgobiani*, a graduate of Moscow University (**Gelenava, 2000**: 38-40).

It is impossible to omit the prominent Georgian and Abkhaz public figures when studying the history of culture of Abkhazia in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Among them who greatly influenced the cultural life of the region we should single out *Giorgi Sharvashidze*, the son of the last Principal of Abkhazia *Mikhail Sharvashidze* and the heir to the throne. Giorgi Sharvashidze, with his works and activities as a poet, playwright, novelist, essayist, and theatre critic, was an integral part of the all-Georgian culture. He referred to Georgia as "our homeland Iveria" and considered Abkhazia as an organic part of this Iveria (Georgia). Shalva Inal-ipa, the well-known Abkhaz scholar, correctly stated that he "was striving to restore the historical unity of two kindred peoples – Georgians and Abkhazs" (**Inal-ipa, 1973**: 8).¹

Giorgi Sharvashidze had a special relationship with the newly formed community of theatre-lovers in Abkhazia, which later became the basis for the establishment of a drama theatre. Theatrical performances began in Sokhumi in the 1880s. The first performances were organized by Sokhumi theatrical circle. Thus, Sokhumi drew attention of not only the Abkhaz, but also of the Georgian theatrical community in general. Soon the drama group was formed in Sokhumi. Its inspirers were ladies from the Sharvashidze and the Anchabadze families: *Mariam, Aghati, and Terezia Sharvashidze, and Mariam (Masho) Dadiani-Anchabadze*. At first, the income from the theatrical performances was used for charity. The money was spent on schools and hospitals, or given to the poor and students. In 1885, the Sokhumi theatre-lovers society performed the first play in Georgian before the audience. From 1886, *Lado Meskhishvili* began his collaboration with the Sokhumi theatre-lovers society. He had special relations with the Sokhumi Theatre (**Paghava, 1941**: №5).

In 1894, "*The Georgian Koro*" ("*The Georgian Choir*"), the first professional ensemble of the Georgian song (founded on 15 November 1886), successfully conducted its performances in Sokhumi. It was led by Czech singer *Ioseb Ratil (Navratil)*, the lead singer of

¹ For the detailed account of Giorgi Sharvashidze's activities, see Chapter VII, pp. 188-192.

Tbilisi Opera and Ballet Theatre, who was immensely in love with Georgian folk song. In 1897, *Alexandre Kavsadze*, the famous choirmaster, visited Sokhumi and performed with great success on the stage of the Sokhumi Theatre (**Iveria, 1897: №122**).

Sokhumi and Sokhumi Drama Theatre are closely connected with the name of *Shalva Dadiani*, the famous Georgian writer, playwright, and a theatrical figure. His active theatrical activities and acting career began in Sokhumi. From 1912 Shalva Dadiani was able to establish a semi-professional theatre in Sokhumi. There were several professional actors including *Elo Andronikashvili*, *Vaso Agulishvili*, later *Evelina Tsutsunava* and *David Kobakhidze* in the Georgian troupe. The troupe actively collaborated with *Dzuku Lolua's* choir (see in detail: **Kajaia, 2006**).

Along with the Georgian, the Abkhazian theatre was also founded in the 1910s. Following the initiative of Dimitri Gulia, an Abkhazian literary-dramatic circle headed by Anton Shakaia was formed in Sokhumi in 1918. The first Abkhazian-language performance under the direction of local theatre-lover Platon Shakril was held in Ochamchire in 1918 (**Georgian Soviet, 1985: 503**). When talking about the formation and development of theatrical art in Abkhazia, it is impossible not to recall the first Abkhazian professional artist *Alexandre Sharvashidze*. He was educated at the Moscow Higher School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. He was a graphic artist, painter, scenographer, and art critic and theorist. He worked in St. Petersburg and Paris Theatres. In 1918 he returned to Sokhumi and as a theatre artist he also contributed to the development of theatrical art in Abkhazia. In 1918, at the initiative of A. Sharvashidze, a children's art studio was opened in the building of the Sokhumi Women's Gymnasium, where he gave drawing lessons (**Shervashidze, 1961**). He was invited to Europe in 1920 and has lived in Europe since 1921, but he donated about 500 works to the museums of Tbilisi and Sokhumi in 1958 (**Shervashidze-Chachba, 2011**).

The formation and development of modern Abkhaz culture was greatly influenced by *Solomon Zvanba*, the Abkhaz military officer, scholar, and ethnographer. He was educated in St. Petersburg and served in the Honourable Regiment. He spent seven years in Russia and then enlisted in the Black Sea Coast Guard Battalion. Solomon Zvanba knew well the life and traditions of the Abkhazs. It is confirmed by his ethnographic works (**Zvanba, 1982; Dzidzaria, 1979: 45-47**). It should be also noted that Solomon Zvanba was the first scholar who considered the Abkhazs to be culturally and historically separate from the rest of Georgia. He was the first Abkhaz scholar whose scientific work and cultural identity were entirely associated with the Russian cultural universe.

Dimitri Gulia, who started his public activities at the end of the 19th century, has a special contribution to the formation of Abkhaz culture and Abkhaz national values. He was educated at the Highlanders' school in Sukhumi and the Teaching Seminary in Gori. Dimitri Gulia as a scholar, poet, writer, and public figure was greatly influenced by Georgian public opinion. He collaborated with Tbilisi State University, where he was invited to

teach Abkhazian language. In 1892, Dimitri Gulia, together with Constantine Machavariani, adapted the alphabet created by P. von Uslar to match the sounds of the Abkhazian language and published the new Cyrillic-based Abkhazian alphabet. The textbook based on the revised Abkhazian alphabet was published by Andria Chochua in Tbilisi in 1909. In 1912, two important collections of Dimitri Gulia's poems, based on the Abkhaz folklore, were published in this script in Tbilisi. In 1913, his ballad "The Love Letter" was published also in Tbilisi. Thus, the foundation of the Abkhaz culture, literature, and poetry was gradually laid, and it was closely connected with the Georgian literature and culture.

Dimitri Gulia is also associated with "Apsni," the first newspaper in Abkhazian language, which was published on 27 February 1919. With the support of Georgian friends, the Abkhazian type was mould in Tbilisi and brought to Sokhumi by *Andria Chochua*. The newspaper's editorial office was in the building of the Sokhumi Teaching Seminary. A total of 35 issues were published before 12 February 1921 when the publication of "Apsni" was stopped. As Dimitri Gulia wrote, the newspaper was closed temporarily (**Gulia D., 1925: 22**), although, in fact, this was the first repressive step of the Soviet government against the Abkhaz national culture.

At the turn of the 20th century, musical institutions were also established in Abkhazia. In 1904, following the initiative of *Mariam Dadiani-Anchabadze* and the board of the Sokhumi branch of the Society for the Spreading of Literacy among Georgians, Georgian musician, singer, and choirmaster *Dzuku Lolua* moved to Sokhumi. After his arrival he immediately created a reading room "Dioskuria," gathered up to eighty singers and formed a choir. In the choir's repertoire special attention was paid to the Abkhazian songs (along with the Georgian ones), which were collected during Dz. Lolua's village-by-village walks. He recorded them on a phonograph, performed on the stage and saved for the eternity. In fact, he is the first collector and recorder of Abkhazian folk songs (**Lolua, 2015**).

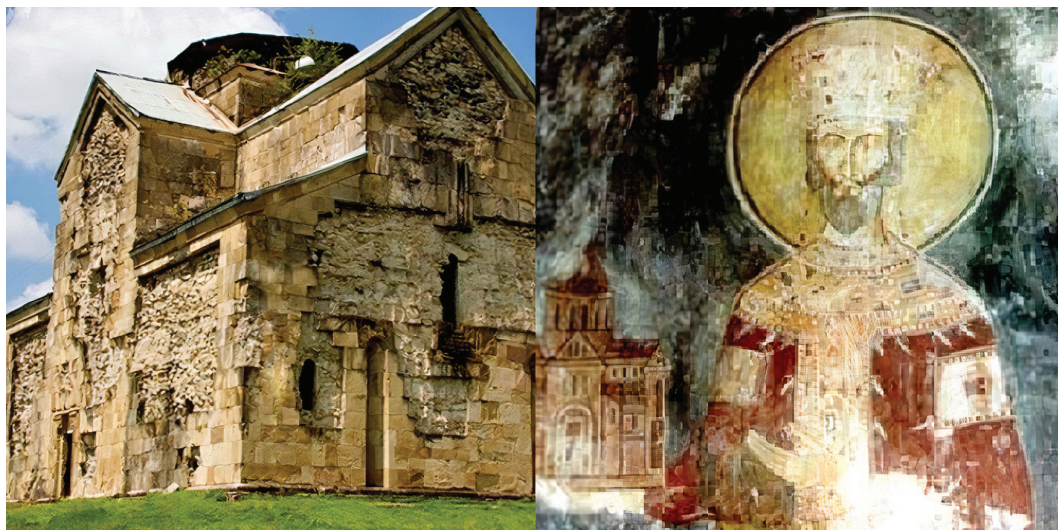
A new phase in the development of musical art in Abkhazia began in the era of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. On 23 April 1919, *Zakaria Chkhikvadze*, the famous Georgian choirmaster and teacher, with the instructions of the Georgian Music Society established a branch of the Music Society in Sokhumi. It was called the Abkhazo-Georgian Music Society of Sokhumi. In fact, it was the first philharmonic society in Sokhumi whose chairman became *Astamur Inalipa*.

David Chkotua, a representative of aristocratic circles, is another prominent Abkhaz whose work developed in the natural cultural and historical way of the Abkhaz people. He was a member of the younger generation of Georgian 1860s movement and a participant of the Georgian National Liberation movement. David Chkotua was also a columnist, talented journalist, tireless propagandist of education, and great scholar. His scientific and publicistic letters address various topical issues of Georgian linguistics, literature, education, ethnography, and geology. He was one of the first to begin the discussion regarding the national and universal significance of Rustaveli's immortal poem (**Jaiani, 2005: 148-**

149). Despite the tragic and unjust fate, David Chkotua with his journalist and scholarly activities had a profound impact on Rustvelology and on the history of Georgian national culture in general.

The history of the cultural life of Abkhazia of the 19th and early 20th centuries knows many prominent people, whose works and public activities deserve special research. There are people whose contributions to various spheres of public life are invaluable. *Mikheil Sharvashidze, Constantine Sharvashidze, Giorgi Sharvashidze, Ioané Ioseliani, Anton Dadiani, Alexandre Okropiridze, Gabriel Kikodze, Kyrion Sadzaglishvili, David Machavariani, Ivané Gegia, Mariam Sharvashidze, Aghati Sharvashidze, Tereza Sharvashidze, Solomon Zvanba, David Chkotua, Dimitri Gulia, Tedo Sakhokia, Petré Tcharaia, Mariam (Masho) Dadiani-Anchabadze, Niko Janashia, Luarsab Botsvadze, Taras Anchabadze, Niko Tavdgridze, Constantine Machavariani, Shalva Dadiani*, and many others were the people who created the cultural image of Abkhazia of that period.

ABKHAZIA – AN ORGANIC PART OF THE ALL-GEORGIAN CULTURAL WORLD



Bedia Cathedral – a monument of Medieval Georgian Christian architecture (Bedia village, Oчамchire Municipality, Abkhazia), built by **Bagrat III Bagrationi**, the first King of the unified Georgia (978-1014), with the image on the fresco of the king Bagrat



The Bedia Chalice – Unique monument of Georgian goldsmithing of 10th-11th centuries, donation to the Bedia Temple from its builder – first King of the unified Georgia Bagrat III Bagrationi (978-1014) and his mother Queen **Gurandukht**, with inscription in old Georgian script *Asomtavruli*: *ჲთჳნდოღო ნთჳთღუნთჳყვლინო ბაროჲ იყთჳნ ჲნტყრ ბუნსო ყრანსო ყტღჳთჲ ტფჲტბნტ ბარფანსო დო ბარდოსსო ბოტანსო ჲღჳთნდოჲჲ ბარდოჲტნსო ტბანს ყტთბინთნსო ყრბარჳთჳნტნტნო ტბინ* / **“Holy Mother of God, intercede before your son for Bagrat, king of the Abkhazs, and his mother, the queen Gurandukht, the commissioners of this vessel, the decorators of this altar, and the builders of this holy church. Amen.”** / (English translation by Cowe, 1997: 341)



Anakopia Fortress (Anakopia – Contemporary New Athos – Abkhazia) – *“the principal fortress of Abkhazia”* (**Matiane Kartlisa, 2014: 163**), Residence of the Eristavis of Abkhazeti. An ancient military citadel in Anakopia is located at the top of the *“Iverian Mountain”*



The Bagrat's Castle – ruined Medieval fortress, *“Mount of Bagrat”* (Sokhumi, Abkhazia). Its renovation is associated either with **Bagrat III Bagrationi**, the first King of the unified Georgia (978-1014), or Bagrat IV (1027-1072). According to researchers (**Voronov, 1980: 104-105**) residence of the Eristavis of Tskhumi



The Church of Dormition of Lykhny – a monument of medieval Georgian Christian architecture (Likhni village, Gudauta Municipality, Abkhazia), built in the 10th century



Old Georgian inscription in the Lykhny Temple with mentioning of Bagrat IV (1027-1072, the 3rd King of the Unified Georgia) about the appearance

of [Halley’s] Comet in 1066) (Photo by **K. A. Mikhailov** – 1885)

... ოს ოქტომბრის... ღმერთისაგანს სწავს (1066) ღმერთისაგანს ყველაზე უნდა იქნას
ბრწყინებულად, უსაძინებლად დღისაგანს ღმერთისაგანს უნდა იქნას, ღმერთის
წინაშე უნდა იქნას ოს წინაშე ბრწყინებულად უნდა იქნას ყველაზე უნდა იქნას
ღმერთისაგანს ოს ოქტომბრისაგანს ოს ოქტომბრისაგანს

*“...In the Chronicon SVP, in the reign of **Bagrat, son of Giorgi** ... in April, a star appeared
... enflamed from the nether and in front of it like a great nimbus. It occurred from Palm
Sunday to the Easter”*



Bichvinta Cathedral (10th-11th centuries) – a monument of Georgian Christian architecture, the residence of the Catholicoses of “Abkhazia” (Western Georgia) until the middle of the 16th century, when the Catholicos of “Abkhazia” **Evdemon I** (Chkhetidze) moved the Catholicos’ throne to Gelati



Luke the Evangelist, a miniature from the Bichvinta Four Gospels (12th century).

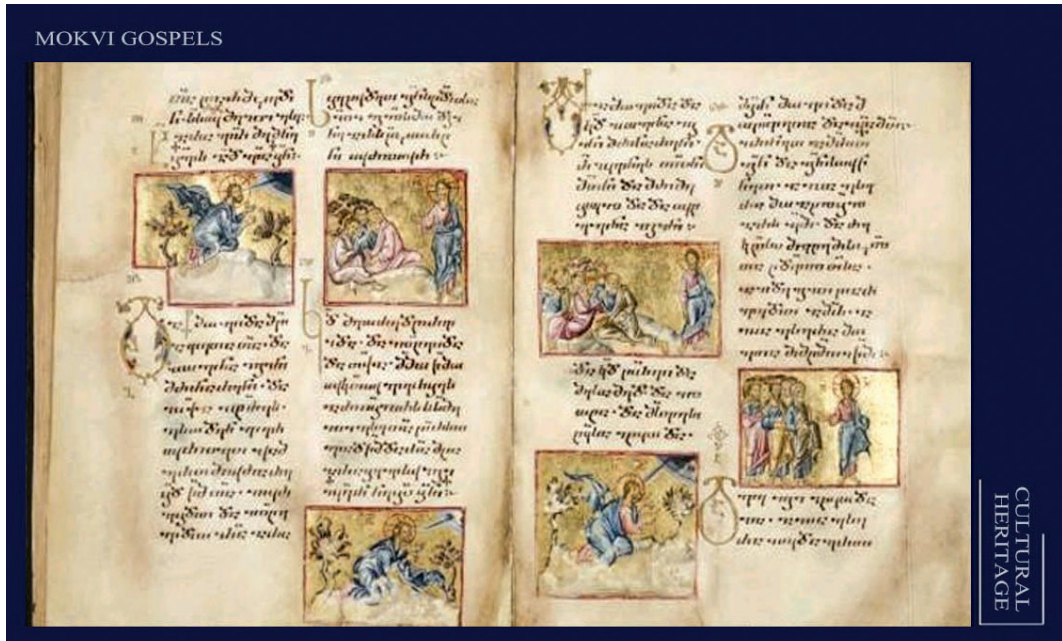
The text is in old Georgian script *Nuskhuri*.

The manuscript is placed in a silver cover, which was commissioned (not earlier than the 1658) by Principal Solomon Sharvashidze and his son Arzaqan. This is documented by an accompanying inscription: *“The Great Mother of God of Bichvinta, with Your prayer... this Gospel was embossed by us, Sharvashidze Solomon and our son Azraqan”*

(**Description of Manuscripts, 1949: 74**).



Mokvi Cathedral – a monument of medieval Georgian Christian architecture (Mokvi village, Oчамchire Municipality, Abkhazia).
 Built by **Leon III** (957-967) the King of “Abkhazs” (Western Georgia)



Mokvi Gospel – Manuscript of the *Four Gospels*, a unique monument of Georgian written culture and spirituality, copied in 1300 in the Mokvi Cathedral. Mokvi Gospel is famous for its luxurious traditional Georgian ornaments and miniatures. The text is in old Georgian script *Nuskhuri*.



The Queen Tamar's Bridge (also known as **The Besleti Bridge**) – Medieval arched stone bridge in Sokhumi (Abkhazia). This single-arch bridge is one of the most illustrative examples of the medieval bridge design popular in Georgia during the reign of **Tamar** (1184-1213). The following inscription in the old Georgian script *Asomtavruli* was engraved on it: “*Christ the Lord, glorify in both lives the invincible King of Kings Bagrat.*” According to the researchers (*Zurab Anchabadze*), this inscription (by its palaeographic marks) belongs to the 11th-12th centuries (**Essays, I, 1960: 85**).



The Coat of arms of the Principedom of Abkhazia – From the geographic atlas by the Georgian scholar, royal prince **Vakhushti Bagrationi** (1696-1757)



The Tsebelda iconostasis – a limestone fragment of an altar screen – an Early Medieval monument of Christian art from Tsebelda (village in the Gulripshi municipality, Abkhazia), dated the 7th or 8th century. The mode and technique of execution is analogous to the similar items found in other parts of Georgia



Excerpt from 1554 map by the famous Italian cartographer Battista Agnese (1500-1564) depicting an impressive picture of the “*Rex Georgianus*” (“Georgian King”) in the area covering the Eastern Black Sea coast, including the territory of present-day Abkhazia (**Battista Agnese, 1554**). The Russian scholar Igor Fomenko, who studied those maps, paid special attention to the specifications of this picture and made a commentary that the Georgian king was the only significant figure in the region (**Fomenko, 2011: 182-183**).

**GLORIOUS SONS OF THE ABKHAZ PEOPLE FIGHTING
FOR THE UNITY OF GEORGIA**



Giorgi Sharvashidze (1846-1918) – the son and heir of **Mikheil Sharvashidze**, the last ruler of Abkhazia, an outstanding representative of the Georgian literature, publicist and public figure; true pillar of Georgian-Abkhazian historical fraternity and unity



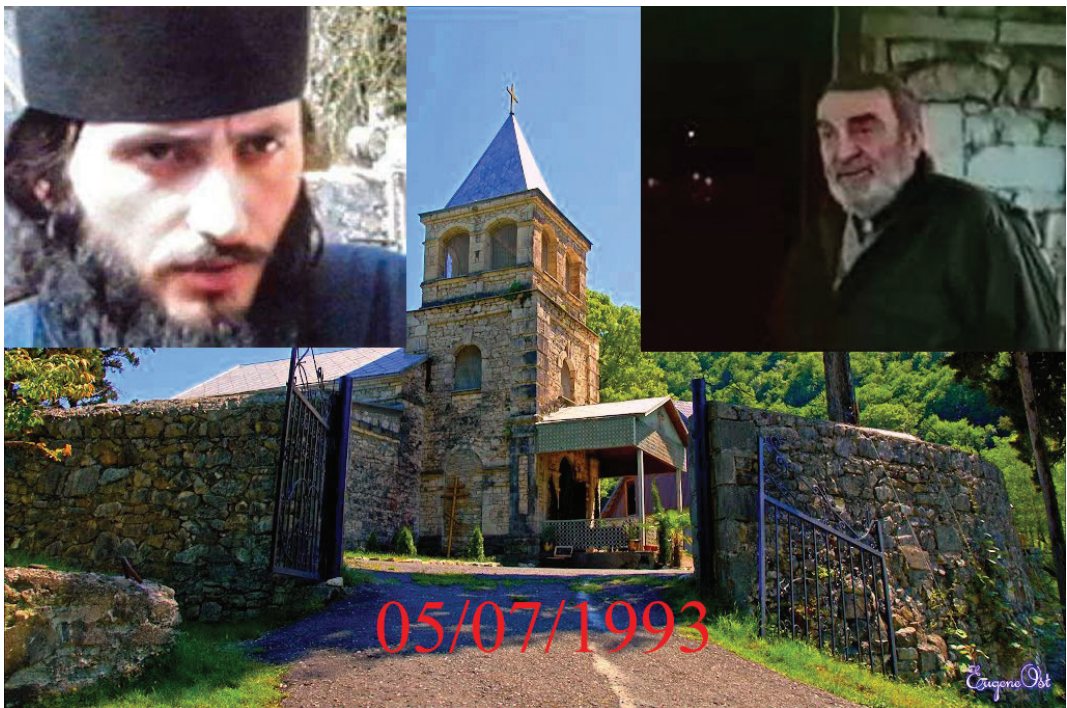
Alexandre Sharvashidze (1867-1968) – the grandson of the Abkhazian ruler **Giorgi Sharvashidze** (1810-1821) and son of **Constantine Sharvashidze** (participant of the 1832 conspiracy of Georgian nobility against the Russian rule), the first professional artist among Abkhazs: graphic artist, painter, set designer, art critic



Arzakan (Dimitri) Emukhvari (1880-1939) – Prominent Abkhazian statesman and politician, first chairman of the government of autonomous Abkhazia and member of the Constituent Assembly of Georgia, is buried in the Leville Georgian Cemetery in France, next to Noe Zhordania and other leaders of the Georgian Democratic Republic



Vasil Gurjua (1885-1924) – Prominent Abkhazian statesman and political figure, a member of the Transcaucasian Seym, the People’s Council of Abkhazia, the Constituent Assembly of Georgia. He was sentenced to death by Bolshevik regime’s special tribunal, the so-called “*Troika*” (chairman Nestor Lakoba) for his participation in the 1924 anti-Soviet uprising



The **Kamani Monastery** (village Kamani, Sokhumi Municipality, Abkhazia). In July of 1993, during the war in Abkhazia, the monastery was stormed by the Abkhaz separatist forces. Reconstructor of Kamani Monastery – Abkhaz **Yuri Anua** and the Georgian priest **Andria Kurashvili** were brutally killed

CHAPTER IX. ABKHAZIA – AN AUTONOMOUS UNIT OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA

§1. The Issue of Abkhazia during the Struggle for the State Independence of Georgia (February 1917 – May 1918)

After the 1917 February Revolution the situation had changed radically everywhere throughout the whole empire, Caucasus and Abkhazia included. The Provisional Government was formed. In the Caucasus the *Special Transcaucasian Committee (Ozakom)* became the local governmental body of the Provisional Government. Its chairman was *Vasily Kharlamov* from the Constitutional Democratic Party. The other members were *Kita Abashidze* (later replaced by *Akaki Chkhenkeli*), *Mammad-Yusif Jafarov*, and *Mikhail Papadjanov (Michael Papadjanian)*. In Abkhazia (officially Sukhumi Okrug) the local governmental body – The Committee of Public Safety – was formed on 10 March 1917. Its chairman was *Alexandre Sharvashidze*, who later was replaced by *Dmitry Zakharov*. *Tatash Marshania* was appointed as the head of local militia, while *Beniamin (Beniá) Tchkhikvichvili* became the Mayor of Sokhumi.

The elections in the Sokhumi Okrug Duma were held on July 2 1917. It was won by the Social-Democratic Party. On 12 October 1917, *Varlam Sharvashidze* became the head of the executive authority of the Okrug (**Chitaia D., 2006: 106-108**). In the wake of the democratic transformations that began in Russia as a result of the overthrow of the monarchy, the issue of self-determination of the nations living in the empire became topical. This situation was especially tense on both sides of the Greater Caucasus. On 3 August 1917, the Georgian political parties formed the Inter-Party Council and began joint preparations for the first national congress to discuss the issues of Georgia's self-determination. The process of self-determination was also going on in the North Caucasus. Some Abkhaz political leaders also supported the unification movement of Caucasian highlanders. On May 1-7, 1917, the First Congress of the Union of Mountainous Peoples was held in Vladikavkaz, which adopted the "*Constitution of the Union of the Mountainous Peoples of the North Caucasus and Dagestan*", and the "*Political Platform and Program*" of the Union.

According to these documents, the goal of the Union of Mountainous Peoples was to protect the common political, social, cultural, and national interests of the highlanders and to transform Russia into a democratic federal republic consisting of self-governing autonomous regions. The Abkhaz representatives attended the 2nd congress of United Mountainous Peoples of the North Caucasus and Dagestan, which was held in Vladikavkaz on 20-30 September 1917. At this congress, from the "Abkhaz People" *Simon Basaria* was elected as a member of the executive body of the organization, the Central Committee. *Semyon Ashkhatsava* was elected as a candidate and was also considered a member of the Government (**Alliance of the United, 2013: 41, 46-51, 84**).

The unifying movement that began in the North Caucasus was gradually expanding. On 20 October (2 November) 1917, the *“The South-Eastern Union of Cossack Hosts, highlanders of the Caucasus, and Free Peoples of the Steppe”* was formed. It included *“The highlanders of the Sukhumi Okrug (Abkhazs)”*. On 25 October (7 November) 1917, as a result of the Bolshevik coup, Russia became engulfed in civil war and chaos. This severed the ties between the centre and the regions. This led to the recognition of the Congress of Delegates of the Caucasus Highlanders and the Central Committee from 6 (19) November 1917 (**Alliance of the United, 2013**: 51-52). This was the period when *Aslanbek Sheripov*, sent by the above-mentioned committee to Abkhazia, tried to involve Abkhazs in the political union of the mountainous peoples (**Eshba, 1990**: 158, 161). The Congress of the Abkhaz People on 7-8 (19-20) November 1917, did not take into account the position of the Samurzakano delegates and also of the residents of Abkhazia who arrived from Tbilisi (Akaki Chkhenkeli, Valiko Jugheli, etc.). Thus, the Congress decided to join the Union of Mountainous Peoples, approved the declaration of the Abkhaz People’s Council and the Constitution, and elected the People’s Council (Chairman *Simon Basaria*). People’s Council was a national-political body of the Abkhaz people and did not claim the role of a regional governmental body. It recognized the “authority and jurisdiction of the Sokhumi Okrug Committee, the Transcaucasian Special Committee, all social-political, administrative institutions and executives of Transcaucasia” (**Alliance of the United, 2013**: 52-54). Thus, the recognition of the Congress of the Mountainous Peoples and the Central Committee elected by it did not mean the extension of its jurisdiction over Abkhazia. Abkhazia remained under the authority of the Transcaucasian Special Committee.

The coup of 25 October (7 November) 1917 and the formation of an illegitimate Russian government headed by *Vladimir Lenin* also led to a reorganization of the Transcaucasian government. On 11 (24) November 1917, the Provisional Government – Commissariat (Chairman *Evgeni Gegechkori*) was formed, replacing the Transcaucasian Special Committee. Its jurisdiction also extended to Abkhazia. Moreover, first a Special Committee and then a Commissariat took care of the return of Gagra to Sokhumi Okrug, which had been cut from it in 1904. The preliminary resolution on this issue was adopted on 30 October (12 November) 1917, at the initiative of *Akaki Chkhenkeli* by the Transcaucasian Special Committee. The Transcaucasian Commissariat finally decided on 7 (20) December 1917 *“To abolish the statute of 25 December 1904 (7 January 1905 – J.G.) ... to restore the old historical borders of the Sukhumi district by including Gagra and Bzipi districts”* (**Status, 2004**: 213-214, 218). This fact also indicates that Abkhazia remained part of the Transcaucasia. Nor did the interim government of the Union of Mountainous Peoples make a clear claim on the territory of Abkhazia. The Central Committee of the Union of Mountainous Peoples, by decree of 3 (16) December 1917, determined the territories under its full jurisdiction. Based on the above-mentioned decree, on the next day, 4 (17) December, Decree №1 of the Provisional Government of the Union of Mountainous Peoples was issued:

1. *“The state power of the Provisional Government of the Mountainous Peoples is fully extended throughout the Dagestan region, in the Khasav-Yurt, Grozny, Vedeno, Nazran, Vladikavkaz, and Nalchik districts, in the Kara-Nogai district of the Terek region, as well as in the Nogai and Turkmen territories of Stavropol Governorate.*
2. *The Provisional Government of the Mountainous Peoples shall have authority the Zakatal and Sokhumi Okrugs regarding the national and political issues, as for the immediate full extent of the State’s Governmental authority, the People’s Councils of the Zakatala and Sokhumi Okrugs shall be entrusted with making such decision” (Alliance of the United, 2013: 59-60; Gamakharria, 1997: 397-398).*

The Abkhaz People’s Council never made a decision to fort the state union with the North Caucasus. Nevertheless, the separatist forces did not stop trying to join Abkhazia first to the Union of the Mountainous Peoples and then to the Mountainous Republic.

The Bolshevik coup in Russia accelerated the convening of the First National Congress of Georgia (19-24 November /2-7 December/ 1917). The issue of Abkhazia was not on the agenda of the congress, but *Akaki Chkhenkeli* and *Ivané Gegia*, a representative of Samurzakano, spoke about it (**Ertoba, 1917: 23.10**). In his speech, Ivané Gegia brought historical facts confirming Abkhazia’s belonging to Georgia, stressed the conciliatory role of Samurzakano between Georgians and Abkhazs, and noted that Samurzakano did not join the Abkhazs on the issue of ties with the highlanders. I. Gegia concluded his speech by saying: *“We want Abkhazia to join Georgia... We want Abkhazia-Samurzakano, Sokhumi district to remain unchanged and national-cultural autonomy to be granted within its borders” (Gamakharria, 2011c: 388).*

The implementation of the decisions of the Georgian National Assembly was connected with the establishment of a democratic system in Russia, But the Constituent Assembly, which opened on 5 (18) January 1918, and which did not recognize the Soviet government, was disbanded by the Lenin government the very next day. After that Transcaucasia took the path to independence. On 10 (23) February 1918, members of the Russian Constituent Assembly from Transcaucasia formed the Transcaucasian Seim (Parliament). It was also filled with new members elected by political parties. *Nikoloz (Carlo) Chkheidze* was elected as a chairman of the Seim. From Abkhazia its members were *Akaki Chkhenkeli, Vasil Gurjua, Valiko Jugheli. Vladimir Emukhvari* became a candidate for membership (**Ertoba, 1918: 07.02**). *Evgeni Gegechkori* remained the Chairman of the Commissariat (government).

The declaration of independence of Transcaucasia was accelerated by the Foreign political situation. According to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed between Russia and Germany on 3 March 1918, Turkey demanded Batumi, Kars, Artaani districts and other regions. Transcaucasia did not recognize the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and sought to resolve relations with Turkey through diplomatic means. The peace conference

in Trabzon, which took place in March-April of 1918, ended without results. Turkey started hostilities and occupied Adjara, as well as South-Western Georgia. On 9 (22) April 1918, the Seim reviewed the situation and decided to declare the independence of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic. It also approved the government with Akaki Chkhenkeli as its Chairman.

All this time Abkhazia remained a part of Transcaucasia. In order to clarify the relations with Abkhazia, the National Council of Georgia held a meeting with the representatives of the People's Council of Abkhazia and Samurzakano in Tbilisi on 9 (22) February 1918. The participants were: *A. Chkhenkeli, C. Meskhi, G. Gvazava, P. Sakvarelidze, N. Kartsvadze* from the Georgian side and *A. Sharvashidze, M. Emukhvari, N. Marghania, R. Chkotua, M. Tsaguria* from the Abkhaz side. Parties accepted A. Chkhenkeli's proposal for Abkhazia to become a part of Georgia with the status of autonomy and agreed *"to restore a united, indivisible Abkhazia within the borders from the River Enguri to the River Mzimta, which will include Abkhazia and Samurzakano"* (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997: 402, 744-745**).

Settling the situation in Abkhazia was not in the plans of the Russian Bolsheviks. They twice tried to conquer Abkhazia. In both cases, they managed to capture Sokhumi and establish a bloody dictatorship of the so-called Revolutionary Committee (Chairman – *Efrem Eshba*). The first time this happened was on 16-21 February (1-6 March) 1918, the second time – from 8 (21) April to 17 May¹ of the same year. A great part of Abkhazia became an arena for the Bolshevik terror and looting. The Bolsheviks dismissed the Abkhaz People's Council and arrested its chairman S. Basaria and several other members (**Ertoba, 1918: 17.04.**). By the decision of the Transcaucasian Seim and the government, the Georgian People's Guard under the command of *Valiko Jugheli* liberated first Sokhumi on 17 May 1918 and then the whole of Abkhazia from the Bolsheviks (**Jugheli, 1920: 17-18**).

After the expulsion of the Bolsheviks from Abkhazia, a session of the Abkhaz People's Council was held on 20 May 1918. Its composition had changed to a certain degree, due to which it is also called the second edition of the Abkhaz People's Council. The session confirmed the decisions regarding uniting with the peoples of Transcaucasia made by the 2nd Congress of Peasants of the Sokhumi Okrug held on 4-9 (17-22) March 1918 (**Ertoba, 1918: 22.03, 24.03, 24.05**). The 20 May decision of the People's Council, as requested by Akaki Chkhenkeli, was to be delivered by the delegation to the Batumi Peace Conference, on the decisions of which the future of Abkhazia also depended. There already were present the members of the Mountain Republic Government,² as well as *Alexandre Shar-*

¹ Editor's note: The transition to the Gregorian Calendar in the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic happened on 1 May (O.S. 18 April) 1918.

² On 11 May 1918, the Union of the Mountains Peoples of North Caucasus and Dagestan proclaimed the Independence of the Mountainous Republic of the Northern Caucasus (Mountain Republic). From that time, the delegation of the highlanders officially participated in the work of the Batumi conference (**Trebizond Conference, 2018: 207, 208**). It is noteworthy that the

vashidze and *Tatash Marshania*, influential people from Abkhazia, in Batumi. *Varlam Sharvashidze, Andrey Chochua, Simon Basaria, Haki Avidzba, Khujin Gitsba, Grigol Zulkhbaia, Kiagva Kiut, Anton Chukbar*, and others arrived in Batumi (**Chochua, 1987: 69-70; Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997: 764**). Thus, the claim that the statehood of Abkhazia was restored on 11 May 1918, the day of the declaration of independence of the Mountain Republic (**Bgazhba O., Lakoba S., 2015: 310-311**), is completely groundless.

The Batumi Conference failed to solve the problems facing Transcaucasia. Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan could not agree on foreign political orientation. Georgia was pro-German, Armenia was pro-British, and Azerbaijan was pro-Turkish. This disagreement and the aggressive action of Turkey in May of 1918 led to the disintegration of the Transcaucasian state. On 26 May 1918, the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic ceased to exist and on the same day the National Council adopted the Act of Independence of Georgian Democratic Republic. The government was approved under the chairmanship of *Noe Ramishvili*, who was replaced by *Noe Zhordania* on 24 July 1918. Based on the recommendation of *Akaki Chkhenkeli*, the borders of Georgia were not indicated in the 26 May Act. On 28 May, the Sokhumi Okrug Court considered the issue of Georgia's independence and further Georgian-Abkhazian relations. The court concluded that Abkhazia, which was still a part of Kutaisi Governorate, now became part of Georgia (**Chitaia D., 2006: 169**). On the same day, the Georgian government received a secret letter from Otto von Lossow, a representative of Germany, the main guarantor of the country's independence. Its author noted that Sokhumi district, including Gagra, was a part of Georgia (**Menteshashvili, 1998: 16**).

§2. Abkhazian Autonomy in the Democratic Republic of Georgia

After the declaration of Georgia's independence, the situation in Abkhazia also changed. On 2 June 1918, the session of the Abkhaz People's Council noted that the Transcaucasian Guard (now the Georgian military unit), which was stationed in Abkhazia and which held the real power there, after 26 May found itself outside its own country. Because of this, the Council made a request to the Georgian National Council to assist in

second paragraph of the 11 May Declaration defined the borders of the Mountain Republic: From the West – the Black Sea; from the East – the Caspian Sea; to the South – the border, which will be determined in detail in agreement with the Transcaucasian government" (**Alliance of the United, 2013: 76**). Thus, despite the claims of the modern Abkhazian historians (**Bgazhba O., Lakoba S., 2015: 310**), this document proves that Abkhazia was not a part of the Mountain Republic. Also completely groundless is the claim that the statehood of Abkhazia was restored on 11 May 1918, the day of the declaration of independence of the Mountain Republic (**Bgazhba O., Lakoba S., 2015: 310-311**). Abkhazia (still Sokhumi Okrug officially) could not restore its statehood under the conditions of the Bolshevik occupation, the dismissal of the People's Council, and the arrest of its members.

organizing the Abkhazian government, to leave the units in Abkhazia, and to subordinate them to the Abkhaz People's Council (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997: 413**). At the same time, a decision was made to send a delegation of the People's Council consisting of *Razhden Kakuba, Vasil Gurjua, Giorgi Ajamov, and Giorgi Tumanov* to Tbilisi. On 6 June the Abkhaz deputation met with members of the Georgian government led by Defence Minister *Grigol Giorgadze*. On 10 June 1918, the Abkhaz delegation signed an agreement with the Georgian government. The document stated the following:

1. *Upon the recommendation of the People's Council, the Minister for Abkhazia would be appointed in the Government of Georgia;*¹
2. *The internal affairs of Abkhazia were under the People's Council jurisdiction;*
3. *Money and loans to Abkhazia were allocated from Georgian funds;*
4. *To establish the order in Abkhazia, the Government of Georgia was sending a guard under the subordination of the People's Council;*
5. *The government assisted Abkhazia with finances and equipment in the formation of an international detachment;*
6. *Social reforms in Abkhazia would be carried out based on common laws;*
7. *In the near future, a representative body convened on a democratic basis would decide the issues regarding the state structure of Abkhazia;*
8. *The National Assembly of Abkhazia could revise the agreement (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997: 414, 749**).*

The Treaty of 11 June 1918 was the continuation and development of the agreement of 9 February 1918 and the legal basis for the unification of Abkhazia with Georgia. Abkhazia had in fact become an autonomous unit of Georgia. It is noteworthy that even S. Danilov, who was hostile towards Georgia and a direct witness of the events of that time, wrote: "Georgia was declared an independent state (26 May), Abkhazia gained autonomy after negotiations with the representatives of the Abkhaz people" (**Danilov, 1990: 9**). *Raphiel Chkotua*, who was appointed as a Minister for Abkhazia), wrote to *Varlam Sharvashidze*, the chairman of the Abkhaz People's Council, on 20 September 1918: "*If the Abkhaz people have linked their destiny to the Georgian people on an autonomous basis, then clear and unambiguous conditions must be worked out for the relations with the Georgian government.*" The Russian National Council formed in Sukhumi on 25 August 1918, also considered Abkhazia as autonomy of Georgia (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997: 753**).

The Georgian government sought to protect the interests of all nationalities living in Abkhazia, including Greeks and Armenians. People living and working in Abkhazia before the First World War became full citizens of the country. They were allowed to own land and have both active and passive voting rights (**Democratic Republic of Georgia,**

¹ Minister for Abkhazia was the representative of Abkhazia at the Georgian government, not the Minister of government – Editor's note.

1990: 46-47, 179-197, 222-223, 270-273). The policy of equality of nations and equal political and economic rights was welcomed by the representatives of other nations living in Abkhazia. Because of this, they supported the Georgian government. It caused dissatisfaction among the separatists. For example, S. Basaria rebuked the Greeks for their support of the government of Georgian Democratic Republic (**Basaria, 1923: 95**). There were also cases of attacks on the Greeks, which forced many families to leave Abkhazia (**Ioanidi, 2006: 10**). The Hellenic Society of Abkhazia and its leader *Ivan Pashalidi*, the famous doctor and political figure, always actively supported the Democratic Republic of Georgia (**Ioanidi, 2006: 26-27; Khvadagiani, 2017**). A similar position was held by the Armenian National Council headed by *Kh. Avdالبekian*, well-known Armenian public figure (**Gamakharia, 2011c: 402**).

In mid-June of 1918, the Russian Bolsheviks launched another attack from Sochi, defeated a Georgian military unit stationed in Gudauta under the subordination of the People's Council, and fortified positions near Akhali Atoni (New Athos). At the request of the members of the Abkhaz People's Council, the Georgian government sent additional troops to Abkhazia under the command of General *Giorgi Mazniashvili*. The Georgian unit, reinforced by a 300-strong squadron of Abkhazs, as well as well-armed ships, launched a swift attack on 27 June, and liberated the occupied regions of Abkhazia on 28 June. According to the resolution of the Abkhaz People's Council of 24 June 1918 (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997: 415**), the attack continued, and Georgian units occupied Adler on 29 June, Sochi on 6 July, and Tuapse on 26 July. Under pressure from the White Army, which fought against the Bolshevik Red Army in the Russian Civil War, Georgian troops retreated to Sochi in August 1918 (**Gamakharia, 2011c: 393-394**).

The deployment of Georgian troops in Abkhazia was called the occupation of Abkhazia by the defeated Bolsheviks and Abkhaz separatists. This statement is still repeated by Abkhazian historians (**Bgazhba O., Lakoba S., 2015: 320-321**).

Separatist historiography and the Russian occupiers¹ still purposefully repeat the thesis of Georgian "occupation" in an attempt to prove the "illegality" of Abkhazia's presence in Georgia in 1918-1921. The topic of "occupation" has been repeatedly raised at the sessions of the People's Council. On 17 July 1918, it discussed the issue of confidence in Giorgi Mazniashvili's staff and stated to "*Reaffirm a lot of decisions and the necessity of the presence of the Georgian units*" (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997: 418**). On 18-19 July 1918, the members of the People's Council did not support the proposal of Isidoré Ramishvili, the representative of the Georgian government, to withdraw Georgian troops from Abkhazia (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997: 418-421**). These facts refute the myth about the Geor-

¹ As it was already mentioned, the Russian President *Vladimir Putin* himself has recently become actively involved in the propaganda of this false narrative of Abkhaz historians. On 9 July 2019, he stated that "*Georgia occupied Abkhazia in 1918 with the help of German troops*" (**Putin, 2019**).

gian “occupation” of Abkhazia in 1918-1921 (**Chervonnaya, 1993**: 39-42). Georgian troops were present in Abkhazia, i.e. in their own country, according to the 11 June 1918 agreement, at the request of the Abkhaz People’s Council.

The Abkhaz separatists used the invasion of Bolshevik troops from Russia for their own purposes. On the same day as the Georgian military launched an operation against the Bolsheviks (27 June 1918), *Alexandre Sharvashidze* and *Tatash Marshania* arrived in the Kodori district to start a landing of Turkish troops descended from the Abkhaz Muhajirs. Such an operation was a violation of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, but the Turkish government justified itself by claiming that the landing party was not Turkish but an Abkhaz one, a private expedition of highlanders, and so on (See details: **Andersen, 2014**: 36-39). Modern separatist historiography repeats exactly the same (**Bgazhba O., Lakoba S., 2015**: 325-326) despite the fact that later, the separatist leaders – *Ivané Marghania*, *Dimitri Alania*, *Mikheil Tarnava*, and *Mikheil Tsaguria* – acknowledged the reality and in a report submitted to the Georgian government (29 November 1919) referred to those units as a “Turkish landing troops” (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997**: 82).

Special mention should also be made of about the participation of the German military in the neutralization of the Turkish landing troops. Based on the agreement between Georgia and Germany signed in Poti on 28 May 1918, the German government sent to Tbilisi the Caucasus military-diplomatic mission headed by General *Friedrich Kress von Kressenstein*. German garrisons were deployed throughout Georgia, including Ochamchire, Sokhumi, and Sochi (**Kressenstein, 2002**: 30, 31, 36, 60, 76). The Germans did not take part in combat operations in Abkhazia, although their presence there was containing the Russians, both the Bolsheviks and the White Army. According to von Kressenstein, the Germans in Abkhazia influenced the Turkish landing troops more by persuasion than by using arms (**Kressenstein, 2002**: 87-89; **Andersen, 2014**: 57-58). Thus, President V. Putin’s statements and the separatists’ assertions about Georgia’s occupation of Abkhazia with the help of German troops are baseless.

There can be no denying that the military operation was accompanied by repressive measures against the civilian population. The robbery and burning of houses of the Abkhaz families “suspected” in support of the Turkish landing troops were quite common, especially by the Russian Cossacks. It was stated in the report prepared on behalf of 14 opposition (separatist) deputies of the People’s Council of Abkhazia to the Government of Georgia on 29 September 1919 that the Cossacks “rushed to peaceful Abkhazian villages, took everything that was at least slightly valuable, and abused women” (**Khodzhaa, 1999**: 21). The responsibility for all of this was still on Georgian command. Metropolitan *Ambrosi (Khelaia)*, who arrived in Abkhazia in early September of 1918, at the request of Varlam and Joto Sharvashidzes, appealed to the Georgian military to prevent the raiding of peaceful villages, burning houses and looting; Metropolitan Ambrosi took steps to free the detained Abkhazs and to withdraw the soldiers from the villages where their presence was not necessary (**Gamakharia, 2006a**: 223).

On 3 September 1918, the Government of Georgia created the special commission from the representatives of the Defence, Justice, and Internal Affairs Ministries. The commission was instructed to “Investigate, together with three members of the Abkhaz People’s Council, all the circumstances, mentioned in the complaint of the Abkhaz People’s Council on the actions of our units, in particular, regarding the arrests of Abkhazs, as well as to determine the extent of damage to the local population” (**CHAG**: Collection 1861, list 2, Case 37, p. 12). The special commission (headed by General *Dimitri Topuria*) immediately left for Abkhazia and started its mission. The materials of the investigation, by the resolution of the Government of Georgia, were handed over for the further reaction to *Shalva Aleksii-Meskhishvili*, the Minister of Justice, on 17 December 1918 (**Gamakharia, 1991**: 73).

In July-August of 1918, the People’s Council was reorganized. In all the regions of Abkhazia (except Samurzakano, where the Bolshevik gangs roamed), rallies and assemblies were held at which the deputies People’s Council was elected. On 31 July the council recognized the credentials of 35 elected deputies. Among them one could not find Alexandre Sharvashidze, Tatash Marshania, and others, against whom a criminal case was initiated for assisting the Turkish landing troops (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997**: 762-766). The council included the heads of the national councils of Georgians (I. Gogelashvili), Greeks (I. Pashalidi), Armenians (Kh. Avdalbekian), and Estonians (I. Michelson) living in Abkhazia. The reorganization was mostly completed by 15 August 1918. The majority of the deputies were the old members re-elected to the council (**Chitaia D., 2006**: 226-227). A. Sharvashidze, who took refuge first with the Turks and then with the White Army, referred to the reorganization of the People’s Council as its dissolution by the Georgian government (**Andersen, 2014**: 47). This myth is still repeated by Abkhazian historiography (**Lakoba S., 1990**: 68; **Bgazhba O., Lakoba S., 2015**: 327).

The People’s Council has started preparations for the elections. For this purpose, it set up a commission consisting of V. Gurjua, R. Kakuba, N. Khasaia, and A. Inalipa. The situation was normalizing, which did not suit the separatists. After the defeat of the Turkish and Bolshevik raids, they found a new ally in the form of an anti-Bolshevik force, namely the “Volunteer Army” led by General *Mikhail Alekseev*. On 15 September 1918, E. Gegechkori, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, reported to N. Zhordania from Sochi about the meeting of the Abkhazs with M. Alekseev. They asked him for “protection” from the Georgians. According to E. Gegechkori’s information, local socialist parties wanted to unite the Sochi region with Georgia and advised the government to use this trump card and “declare the annexation of Sochi District” (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997**: 84). Indeed, on 18 September 1918, the United Council of the Socialist parties of Sochi adopted a resolution on uniting the District of Sochi with Georgia. On 20 September, the same decision was made by the General Assembly of the Sochi population (**Menteshashvili, 1998**: 25-26).

The Georgian government was in no hurry to annex Sochi. This issue became the main topic of discussion at the meeting of the Georgian delegation (E. Gegechkori, G. Mazniashvili) with the representatives of the Volunteer Army Command and the Kuban gov-

ernment (M. Alekseev, A. Denikin, I. Romanovsky, A. Dragomirov, A. Lukomsky, V. Shulgin, V. Stepanov, L. Beach, N. Vorobyov). The meeting took place in Ekaterinodar (present-day Krasnodar) on 25-26 September 1918 (**Denikin, 2002:** 398-399). As it turned out at the Ekaterinodar meeting, the “volunteers,” like the Bolsheviks, were going to use the Abkhaz separatists against Georgia. On 9 October 1918, with the help of “volunteers,” the separatists tried to stage a coup in Sokhumi, and dismiss the presidium and chairman of the People’s Council. The aim of the coup was to separate the Sokhumi District from Georgia (**Andersen, 2014:** 65-66). According to M. Tarnava, *Varlam Sharvashidze* was not confused, he did not obey the insurgents, and called for government troops, after which the order was soon restored (**Literary, 1991:** 202-203).

The Government of Georgia agreed to the proposal of V. Sharvashidze, D. Emukhvari, I. Gogelashvili, I. Pashalidi, P. Gelovani, and declared dissolution of the Abkhaz People’s Council by the decree of 10 October 1918. New elections based on universal suffrage should be held under the supervision of the Central Election Commission, which consisted of V. Sharvashidze, I. Ramishvili, V. Gurjua, I. Pashalidi, and G. Shanshiev. Before the elections of the People’s Council of Abkhazia, Benia Chkhikvishvili was appointed as a Commissioner of Sokhumi District. The mandate of R. Chkotua as a Minister for Abkhazia, was declared exhausted, and his functions were temporarily assigned to the Minister of Internal Affairs (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997:** 424-425). The Central Election Commission of Abkhazia (Chairman V. Sharvashidze) worked out the draft of the election regulations, which was approved by the Georgian Parliament on 27 December 1918 (**Gamakharia, 1991:** 73).

Elections of the Abkhaz People’s Council were scheduled for 13 February 1919. According to the separatists, Tbilisi set the date of the “undemocratic” elections in a hurry because it feared that the British and Denikin would achieve Abkhazia’s neutrality (**Bga-zhba O., Lakoba S., 2015:** 339-340, 343). This is a complete lie. The decision to hold elections in Abkhazia was made long before Denikin appeared on the political field and before the British entered the region. At the end of January of 1919, Denikin’s troops occupied first Sochi, then Gagra, and finally fortified their positions on the River Bzipi (**Denikin, 2002a:** 283).

On 13 February, three days after Gagra’s occupation, the elections of the People’s Council were held in Abkhazia. These were the first democratic elections in the history of the region. Even those, who staged the 9 October 1918 coup, participated in the elections. The Abkhazian organization of the Georgian Social-Democratic Party won the elections. Almost simultaneously, on 14-16 February 1919, there were held the elections of the Constituent Assembly of Georgia. *Dimitri Emukhvari, Varlam Sharvashidze, Vasil Gurjua, Ivane Pashalidi, and Dimitri Zakharov* (all of them already were the members of the People’s Council of Abkhazia) became its members from Abkhazia (**Gamakharia, 2011c:** 403). On 12 March 1919, at the first session of the Constituent Assembly of Georgia, the delegates from Abkhazia signed the Act of State Independence of Georgia adopted by the

Georgian National Council on 26 May 1918. This historical document was also signed by other members of the Constituent Assembly, who were from Abkhazia, but were holding the official positions in the Georgian government: *Akaki Chkhenkeli* from Samurzakano, the first Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, and *Valiko Jugheli* from Sokhumi, the Commander of the Georgian National Guard.

The Abkhaz People's Council, which was chosen via proportional representation, consisted of 40 deputies. Among the deputies there were 27 Social Democrats, 4 Independent Socialists, 3 Socialist-Revolutionaries, 3 Right, 1 Socialist-Federalist, 1 National-Democrat and 1 Colonist. The composition of the deputies based on ethnicity was the following: 20 Abkhazs, 9-10 Georgians, 9-10 representatives of other nationalities (Russian, Greek, Armenian, Estonian) (**Papaskiri, 2007:** 33-34; **Andersen, 2014:** 152-153). The first session was held on 18 March 1919. It elected *Dimitri (Arzaqan) Emukhviri* as the chairman of the People's Council. Deputy Chairman became *Mikheil Berulava*, Secretary – *V. Korolev*. On 20 March 1919, the Council adopted a resolution consisting of the following three points:

1. *About the Autonomy;*
2. *Adopting the Social-Democratic platform as the basis for autonomy;*
3. *Working out the Constitution of Abkhazia by the Commission consisting of the equal number of members from Georgian Constituent Assembly and People's Council of Abkhazia.*

The session approved the Act on the Autonomy of Abkhazia, which stated: "*Abkhazia is a part of the Democratic Republic of Georgia as its autonomous unit*" (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997:** 429-435, 772-774).

The People's Council fully covered the political spectrum in Abkhazia. The ruling Social Democratic Party had a strong but externally controlled opposition. The most radical among them was the faction of "Independent Socialists" (*Dimitri Alania, Mikheil Tsaguria, Samson Chanba, Ivané Marghania, Razhden Kakuba, Alexandre Demyanov, Raphiel Chkotua*). One part of them collaborated with the Bolsheviks, the other with the White Army. The common "platform" for this faction was the destabilization of the situation in Abkhazia and discrediting the Democratic Republic of Georgia. In November of 1919, the faction of "Internationalists" (K. Bartsits, D. Dzkuia, M. Tarnava) separated from the Social Democrats. They also took part in all anti-Georgian rallies.

On 13 May 1919, an executive body (Commissariat) was established. The Commissariat was headed by *Dimitri (Arzaqan) Emukhviri* and it consisted of three members – the Commissar for Internal Affairs, the Commissar for Justice, Education and Health, and the Commissar for National Economy. On the same day, the Abkhaz People's Council was renamed to the People's Council of Abkhazia (ASS). Sokhumi District (Okrug) also was renamed to Abkhazia. On 20 May the People's Council elected *Varlam Sharvashidze* as the chairman instead of *Dimitri Emukhviri*. *Mikheil Berulava* became the Deputy Chairman. In

February of 1920, he was replaced by *Taras Kvaratskhelia*, future prominent scientist, founding member of the Georgian Academy of Sciences. *N. Akirtava* became the Secretary of the Council.

Despite the democratic transformations, the struggle around autonomous Abkhazia was becoming more and more intense. A. Denikin was especially active. He had close contacts with the Abkhaz separatist groups. A. Denikin sent a memorandum (1 February 1919) to George Milne and *George Forestier-Walker*, the commanders of British troops in the Middle East and the South Caucasus respectively. In this memorandum, Denikin made the following proposals in order to “calm Abkhazia and remove the pretext of a clash with Georgia”: 1. Declare the Sokhumi region neutral; 2. Georgian troops and administration had to leave the Sokhumi region immediately; 3. The maintenance of order shall be entrusted to the freely elected Abkhaz government and the people’s militia consisting of Abkhazs” (**Denikin, 2002b**: 284). According to Denikin’s plan, Georgian troops should retreat to the River Enguri.

The People’s Council heard I. Ramishvili’s report on the memorandum and adopted a stern statement on 15 April 1919. It stated that the People’s Council was the only authorized and plenipotentiary representative of Abkhazia. Through it Abkhazia established close ties with Georgia, became its autonomous part and defined common borders precisely. The “representatives of the Abkhaz people” mentioned in the memorandum were declared by the council as enemies of democracy and traitors to their own people. The Council asked the Government of Georgia to present the adopted resolution Allied States) (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997**: 435-437). All factions of the People’s Council, including separatist groups, condemned A. Denikin’s Memorandum. It soon became clear that Alexandre Sharvashidze and Alexi Khasaia were behind this reckless scheme (**Gamakharia, 2011c**: 406).

The Georgian government, as well as the British, categorically refuted the plan set out in A. Denikin’s Memorandum on Abkhazia (See details: **Andersen, 2014**: 84-85). In February of 1919, the British troops were stationed between the opposing sides on the River Bzipi. Nevertheless, the Georgian side began preparations for Gagra’s liberation. The People’s Council held a solemn meeting with General *Ioseb Gedevanishvili*, the Commander of the Georgian Army. The newspaper “*Nashe Slovo*” (21 March 1919) gave an account of how *Varlam Sharvashidze* greeted General Gedevanishvili: “‘*The People’s Council of Abkhazia welcomes you, General, and in your person, the famous Army and the People’s Guard of the Republic of Georgia, who have repeatedly come to our aid in difficult times. And now that you are back on our land to protect it from the invasion of the Tsarist generals, are not afraid of any sacrifice! I, on behalf of the Council, wish you and your distinguished troops success in your hard but honourable cause.*’ Everyone stands up and applauds, greets the army in the form of People’s General Gedevanov. A group of independents is sitting. “Denikinians!” Sounds are heard. The group reluctantly stands up

and they also applaud” (Chachkhiani, 2014: 295-296). The Georgian army was applauded by extreme separatists, who not a long time ago referred to the same army as “occupiers.”

The Georgian Armed Forces, led by the People’s Guard under the command of *Valiko Jugheli* launched an operation to liberate Gagra (16 April 1919), which ended in victory on the next day. On 18 April the Guard crossed the River Mekhadir, continued to advance, and reached the River Mzimta in a few days. V. Jugheli soon retreated slightly and fortified his positions on the River Mekhadir (Denikin, 2002b: 288-293; Chachkhiani, 2014: 308-313). The further attack of the Georgian troops was stopped at the categorical request of the British.

The liberation of Gagra and its return to Georgia was the truly historic accomplishment of the Georgian Armed Forces, first of all, of the People’s Guard and its commander *Valiko Jugheli*. Thanks to the brilliant military operation carried out on 16-20 April 1919, the Russian-Georgian state border was established not on the River Bzipi, but on the River Psou. The separatists note with satisfaction how A. Denikin ousted Georgian troops from Gagra (Bgazhba O., Lakoba S., 2015: 340), but they say nothing about the heroism of the same troops when they took back Gagra against the will of the British commanders.

Even after the loss of Gagra, General A. Denikin’s actions against Georgia have not stopped. One part of the Abkhaz separatists continued to work closely with the volunteer army, while the other part pledged allegiance to the Mountain Republic fighting against them. The government of the Mountain Republic played a double game against Georgia. On the one hand, the Mountain Republic had not declared Abkhazia as its integral part of in any of official documents. Moreover, in the statement of its special delegation to General Denikin (10 February 1919), not only Abkhazia, but also the Black Sea Governorate was not mentioned within the borders of the Mountain Republic (Alliance of the United, 2013: 133). On the other hand, although no Abkhazian authority has ever adopted the decision to unite with the Mountainous Republic, based on the statements of the private individuals from Abkhazia, the highlanders were constantly making claims on Abkhazia. On 21 January 1919, *Giorgi Tumanov*, the “representative of Abkhazia,” made anti-Georgian statements at the session of the Union Council of the Mountainous Republic (Provisional Parliament of the republic). Meanwhile, according to the statute of the Mountain Parliament, he neither could be nor was the authorized representative of Abkhazia (Alliance of the United, 2013: 115-116, 119-121). Moreover, G. Tumanov was a person who, along with other separatists, was supporting the volunteer army, the direct enemy of the Mountain Republic.

The Highlanders had not fully defined their relations with the Bolsheviks either (Alliance of the United, 2013: 114). Nevertheless, Georgia supported the idea of the Mountain Republic within its natural borders. When Denikin launched an attack against the Highlanders (in March of 1919), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia and the Government made statements of full support for the Mountain Republic (Alliance of the Uni-

ted, 2013: 155-158). The situation of the highlanders was somewhat alleviated by the expulsion of volunteers by Georgian military units from Gagra, and later by the support of the Democratic Forces of the Black Sea Governorate and its active actions against Denikin (**Chachkhiani, 2014: 323-332**).

In May of 1919, Denikin ended the occupation of the North Caucasus, after which (23 May) the Parliament of the Mountain Republic ceased to exist. The government continued to function in Tbilisi. At the next session of the Caucasian Conference (9 June 1919), E. Gegechkori expressed his full solidarity with the highlanders and expressed hope that with joint efforts the rights of the Mountainous Republic would be restored (**Alliance of the United, 2013: 209**).

The separatists, who declared Abkhazia part of the Mountain Republic, said nothing about Denikin's crushing of the republic. Their goal was (and is for their descendants) to deceive the North Caucasians in order to gain their support. Modern separatist historiography also ignores this topic and is engaged only in slander against Georgia. However, Georgia was the country that, together with Azerbaijan, supported the highlanders in every possible way, supplied them with weapons, and helped them with manpower. The friendly attitude of Georgia towards the highlanders is indicated by the appointment of General Leo Kereselidze to the position of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Mountain Republic (August of 1919). The Georgian general was in Chechnya and led the war against Denikin. Because of this, A. Denikin declared an economic blockade of Georgia (**Denikin, 2002b: 266-271**). Abkhaz separatists did not even think about participating in the defence of the highlanders.

In March of 1920, A. Denikin was defeated in a battle with the Bolsheviks. The Soviet rule was established in the North Caucasus and the Black Sea Governorate. At the end of April of 1920, the 34th Division of the Red Army entered Sochi and its vanguard marched to the River Psou, where they were met by Georgian military units. On 7 May 1920, Soviet Russia signed the treaty with the Georgian Democratic Republic, recognized its independence and borders. (As it turned out later, it was a tactical decision of the Russian government, which needed time before the attack on Georgia.) Abkhazia, including Gagra, was recognized as an undisputed territory of Georgia, and the interstate border was fixed on the River Psou (**Occupation, 1990: 75-76**). The separatist historians claim that the 7 May 1920 Treaty did not apply to Abkhazia because it was allegedly occupied by Georgia (**Bgazhba O., Lakoba S., 2015: 351**). Their statement is devoid of any legal or political basis. D. Emukhvari's Information on the Russian-Georgian Treaty was gladly received by the People's Council (18 May 1920) and it adopted a resolution of support, which was sent both to the Government of Georgia and the Constituent Assembly (**Gamakharia, 1991: 80**).

The plans of the Russian chauvinists and the Abkhaz separatists supporting them regarding the borders failed. At the same time, it should be noted that Georgia was not content with the border on the River Psou. At the Paris Peace Conference, the Georgian

delegation (March and July of 1919) presented its territorial demands. The historical substantiation (compiled by *Ivane Javakhishvili*) showed that the ethnic and state border of Georgia spread to the River Kuban from the Ancient times and to the River Makopse after the 15th century. Georgia wanted to draw the line on the River Makopse, although, in case if the highlander refugees would return from Turkey and the North Caucasian state would be established, the Georgian government was ready to revise the border and establish a new line between the rivers Mzimta and Makopse (**Occupation, 1990: 64-68; Toidze, 1991: 211-215**). This fact is concealed by separatist historiography, which talks about Georgia's "imperialist aspirations" (**Bgazhba O., Lakoba S., 2015: 330-335**). At the same time, the separatist historians do not "notice" the concern for the restoration of the historical borders of Georgia, i.e. Abkhazia.

Separatist historiography also ignores the Georgian government's policy on the return of Abkhazian Muhajirs. As early as 15 May 1918, during the Batumi International Conference, Akaki Chkhenkeli, the Chairman of the Government of the Transcaucasian Republic, wrote to Noe Zhordania, the Chairman of the Georgian National Council, that he intended to include a separate article in the Transcaucasian-Turkish Treaty. According to this article, the Abkhaz Muhajirs would be able to return freely (**Chumburidze, 2018: 136**). The problem of the return of Muhajirs had always worried the Abkhaz population, the intelligentsia, which adopted a special resolution on this issue at its congress (February of 1920) and sent it to the Government of Georgia (**Gamakharia, 1991: 81**). It happened so (not quite incidentally) that Abkhaz Muhajirs appealed to the head of the Georgian mission in Turkey, *Giorgi Rtskhiladze*, with a request to return to their homeland on 1 February 1920. G. Rtskhiladze informed N. Chkheidze, the head of the Georgian delegation at the Paris international conference about the desire of the Muhajirs. N. Chkheidze raised the issue before the Supreme Council of the Allied Powers (7 April 1920) with a request to include a special article in the forthcoming agreement with Turkey on the free return of Georgian and Abkhaz Muhajirs to their homeland (**Menteshashvili, 1998: 47-49**). The Soviet occupation of Georgia (February-March of 1921) prevented the implementation of this gesture of good will from the Georgian side.

The Georgian government was attentive to any request from Abkhazia, especially when it was tied with the interests of the Abkhaz people. For example, on 1 November 1919, Noe Ramishvili reported to the government about the petition D. Emukhvari, the chairman of the Abkhazian Commissariat, to release all Abkhazians from military service regardless of religion. (Previously only Christian Abkhazs were enlisted in the army). The same was demanded by the meeting of the representatives of the communities of Gudauta district held in Likhni on 13 May 1920 (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997: 453-454, 781**). The Government of Georgia granted this request.

Separatist historiography accuses Georgia of chauvinism, the Georgianization of Abkhazia, and the introduction of the Georgian language in institutions and schools (**Bgazhba O., Lakoba S., 2015: 350**). However, the government pursued a cautious policy on

the issue of transitioning the legal paperwork into Georgian. For example, the provision on the transitioning the Post and Telegraph into Georgian, which was approved by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia on 20 July 1918 was not obligatory in Abkhazia (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997: 420, 761-762**). As for the teaching of Georgian language in the schools since 1919, this issue was discussed by the People's Council on 18 November 1919. In this regard, the ethnical Abkhaz *Vianor Anchabadze* correctly stated that ***“learning the state language, if not the education in the state language is the ABC of the state law”*** (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997: 454-456**. Emphasis added – J.G.).

The Georgian government was not speeding up the transition to the Georgian language in the state institutions or schools in Abkhazia. Because of this, it was strongly criticized by the political opposition in the Constituent Assembly. The difficult political situation in general became a subject of heated debate following the query from the National Democratic Party at the session of the Constituent Assembly on 2 August 1919. Especially interesting was the speech of *Vasil Gurjua*. Ethnically Abkhaz member of the Constituent Assembly and at the same time, of the People's Council of Abkhazia, clearly expressed his vision regarding the relations between centre and autonomy, including the issue of power-sharing. He said: *“We understand that the interests of Abkhazia are closely connected with the Republic of Georgia. And we in this republic consider ourselves equal citizens. We will not deviate from the right path which is one democratic republic and one state law for each part of Georgia (Applause). Abkhazia, as an autonomous entity, but part of Georgia, will be independent only in its own internal affairs. Thus, long live Georgia and its Democratic Republic, long live Democratic Autonomous Abkhazia, an integral part of this Republic of Georgia”* (**Stenographic reports, 1919, Session 45: 16-17**).

The members of the Constituent Assembly of Georgia, as well as the members of the People's Council of Abkhazia, were most interested in drafting and adopting the Constitution of Abkhazia. The Constitutional Commission of the People's Council during its first session (30 March 1919) unanimously adopted Article 1 of the future Constitution, which was the same as the first paragraph of “the Abkhaz Autonomy Act”: *“Abkhazia is part of the Democratic Republic of Georgia as its autonomous unit”* (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997: 97**). There were heated discussions regarding other articles in the commission. Two different projects were prepared. The third reconciliation project was drawn up by the Abkhazian Commissariat (**Menteshashvili, 1998: 80-94**). None of them received the required number of votes of the members of the People's Council, but the project of the Commissariat still got more votes, namely, 20. The People's Council elected a delegation (*Dimitri Emukhvari, Giorgi Korolev, Mikheil Ubiria, Vasil Gurjua, Mikheil Tsaava, Mikheil Grigolia*) to discuss the constitutional issues with the Government of Georgia (21 July 1919). In September-October of 1919 members of the delegation visited Tbilisi. The report addressed to the government (4 October) touched upon the power-sharing between the centre and autonomy, the speeding up of the adoption of the constitution, the agriculture reform, and about the social and economic problems. At the request of the Peo-

ple's Council, the Presidium of the Constituent Assembly appointed a five-member commission (*Pavle Sakvarelidze, Samson Dadiani, Giorgi Gvazava, Giorgi Naneishvili, Mukhran-lona Khocholava*) to work on the constitutional issues of Abkhazia. The joint work of the delegation of the People's Council and the commission of the Constituent Assembly proved to be quite fruitful. A draft agreement on the basic provisions of the Abkhazian government has been drafted. The document reflected the de facto relations between the centre and autonomy (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997**: 99-100; 451-453).

Following the invitation from the Government of Georgia another delegation from Abkhazia (*Ivané Marghania, Dimitri Alania, Mikheil Tsaguria, Mikheil Tarnava*) was sent to Tbilisi at the end of September of 1919. It expressed the position of 14 separatist members of the People's Council. It seems that the government has taken the path of negotiation and agreement with all factions. A special session was dedicated to the meeting with the separatists, at which the delegation made a report. At the request of Noe Zhordania, this report was written and submitted to the Government (29 September 1919). It covered the situation in Abkhazia with a bias traditional to the separatists. The members of the delegation saw the solution in the adoption of their draft of Constitution (**Mentshshvili, 1998**: 89-94). The real aim of the separatist participation in the negotiations with the Government of Georgia on the issues of autonomy and Constitution, was disclosed by M. Tarnava. As he said, while trying to disrupt the agreement and criticize the government, the separatists "*were looking for the opportunity to interact with the RSFSR and join it*" (**Toidze, 1996**: 6). Such "patriots" were the separatists represented in the People's Council of Abkhazia.

On 22-23 February 1920, a Congress of the Abkhaz intelligentsia was held in Sokhumi. It was chaired by Grigol Zukhbaia, Vianor Anchabadze, and Dimitri Gulia. There was a confrontation between Georgian-oriented people and separatist Abkhazs at the congress (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997**: 102-105). The Congress of Abkhaz Intelligence confirmed the need for urgent drafting and approval of the constitution. The People's Council continued to work in this direction. The People's Council elected (21 May 1920) a delegation (V. Sharvashidze, D. Emukhvari, D. Zakharov, G. Zukhbaia, M. Tarnava, V. Anchabadze), which soon visited Tbilisi. The delegation presented a report to the Presidium of the Constituent Assembly on 1 July 1920). The delegation wanted the recognition of Abkhazia as an autonomous entity of Georgia and the discussion of issues regarding the power-sharing between the central and local governments. After returning to Sokhumi the members of the delegation reported to the People's Council regarding the work carried out in Tbilisi and the elaboration of two versions of the Constitution of Abkhazia (10 September 1920). Based on them, the Constitutional Commission (G. Zukhbaia, D. Zakharov, M. Tsulukidze, G. Korolev, M. Tarnava) compiled one draft. After several detailed article-by-article discussions on different sessions, the People's Council approved its own version of the draft Constitution of Abkhazia on 16 October 1920.

According to the first article of the draft constitution, Abkhazia was a part of the Democratic Republic of Georgia as an autonomous unit from the River Enguri to the Greater Caucasus adjacent to the Kuban and Terek regions. Thus, the People's Council, in the draft Constitution of Abkhazia, designated the North-Western borders presented by Georgia at the Paris International Conference.

On 4 November 1920, the delegation of the People's Council (V. Sharvashidze, D. Zakharov, V. Gurjua, M. Ubiria, I. Pashalidi, M. Tsaguria, D. Alania, M. Tarnava, M. Berulava) arrived in Tbilisi. On 16 November, the members of the delegation met with N. Zhordania. The Chairman of the Government confirmed that the issue of Abkhazia's autonomy was beyond doubt. The prerogative of drafting the Constitution belonged only to the Constituent Assembly. N. Zhordania stated that Abkhazia should be given autonomy after the adoption of the common constitution; if the approval of the Basic Law is delayed, then a provisional law will be issued, which will later become a separate chapter of the country's constitution. Such a position of N. Zhordania was acceptable to the delegation of the People's Council.

A hindering factor was the fact that the Constituent Assembly did not agree to the establishment of a constitutional commission on an equal basis, as it was provided in the People's Council Act of 20 March 1919 and as it was determined by the mandate of the delegation. On 5 December the members of the delegation were summoned to Sokhumi for a report. On 6 December, the Presidium of the Constituent Assembly discussed the statements of M. Tsaguria, D. Alania, and M. Tarnava regarding their refusal to participate in the discussion of the Constitution of Abkhazia according to the presented order. The fruitless visit to Tbilisi caused a crisis in the People's Council. V. Sharvashidze even put the issue of his and the presidium's other members' resignation to a vote on 24 December, but no decision was made. The People's Council approved the work done by the delegation in Tbilisi on 4 January 1921.

The crisis in the People's Council was exploited well by Soviet Russia and its local Bolshevik agents. After a military-political defeat in the spring and summer of 1918, the Bolshevik movement suffered a complete collapse in Abkhazia. The revival of the Bolshevik movement was facilitated by the Treaty between Georgia and Russia (7 May 1920), which included provisions for the legalization of the Communist Party in Georgia. In October of 1920, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia suppressed the armed uprising of the Bolsheviks in Abkhazia (S. Kukhaleishvili, N. Svanidze, and others were arrested). The leaders of the planned uprising had close ties with Soviet Russian troops stationed at the Gagra front, from which came armaments and huge financial aid of 20 million rubles (**Chachkhiani, 2014: 326**). *“Preparations for the armed uprising were accompanied by ideological work with the population, spreading rumours about the withdrawal of Abkhazia from Georgia, and advising Abkhazs to join Russia”* (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997: 456, 785-786**).

In the fall of 1920, the state took measures to strengthen the Georgian garrison in the Gagra-Bichvinta zone. General Davit Artmeladze was appointed as a Commander of the Black Sea Troops (**Chachkhiani, 2014: 365-366**). By the end of 1920, the subversive activities of the Bolsheviks in Georgia had been stopped, but in January of 1921 Bolshevik organizations began to revive again. During this period, the Bolsheviks became more active in Abkhazia as well (**Struggle for October, 1967: 172-173**).

In February of 1921, Soviet Russia grossly violated the 7 May 1920 Treaty, and invaded Georgian territory. The Georgian Armed Forces, despite the heroic resistance, could not withstand the onslaught of the enemy who had a great superiority in numbers. In this situation, the Constituent Assembly of Georgia (21 February 1921) managed to adopt the Basic Law of the Republic – the Constitution. According to Article 107 of the Constitution, *“Integral parts of the Republic of Georgia – Abkhazia (Sukhumi District), Muslim Georgia (Batumi Region) and Zakatala (Zakatala District)”* – received *“Autonomous Self-Government in Local Affairs”* (**Democratic Republic of Georgia, 1990: 476**). Pursuant to Article 108 of the same Constitution the Constituent Assembly also approved the Law on the Statute of the Government of Autonomous Abkhazia on 21 February (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997: 108-110, 466-469, 787**). It was based on the draft constitution adopted by the People’s Council of Abkhazia on 16 October 1920. According to the law, autonomous Abkhazia was granted broad rights in the management of internal affairs. But all this turned out to be in vain. Soviet Russian occupation forces were attacking Georgia from different directions. This attack ended (March 1921) with the complete occupation and annexation of Georgia.

Thus, 1917-1920 is one of the most important stages in the history of Abkhazia. Abkhazia, which had been a Russian administrative unit since 1864 (the Sokhumi Military Department in 1864-1883 and the Sukhumi Okrug in 1883-1917) was transformed into an autonomous Abkhazia as part of Georgia. The status of autonomy was put in the Constitution of Georgia. Instead of the Russian officers of the Sokhumi district, autonomous Abkhazia was now governed by a democratically elected People’s Council and government, which was approved by the People’s Council and which was led by ethnic Abkhazs. With the annexation of Gagra, the territory of Abkhazia expanded to the River Psou. The confrontation between different ethnic groups, which was deliberately inspired by the Russian imperial and Bolshevik regimes, was eliminated, and all conditions were created for the free national and cultural development of Abkhazia.

§3. Church Life in 1917-1921

The Georgian clergy took advantage of the favourable conditions created by the February Revolution and restored the autocephaly of their own church on 25 (O.S. 12) March 1917 (**Georgian Orthodox Church, 2016**). The Provisional Government of Russia recognized the national autocephaly of the Georgian Orthodox Church (27 March 1917).

On 11 July 1917, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church approved “the provisional rules for the organization of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Caucasus.” The Exarchate of Georgia was transformed into the Exarchate of the Caucasus, headed by the Exarch of the Caucasus and the Metropolitan of Tbilisi (**CHAG**: Collection 489, List 1, Case 60353, pp. 2, 7-9; **Kalistrate Tsintsadze, 2010**: 426-427).

The newly formed Russian Exarchate of the Caucasus and the Bishop of Sokhumi, *Sergei (Petrov)*, made every effort to maintain the Sokhumi Eparchy within the Russian Church. The Georgian Church, on the contrary, tried to extend its jurisdiction over the Sokhumi Eparchy, its canonical territory. The episcopal assembly held in Sokhumi (12 April 1917) served this purpose. It was mainly attended by the Georgian clergy, which represented the vast majority of parishes in Sokhumi Eparchy.

On 24-27 May 1917, the Abkhazian Church Congress was held in Sokhumi. It can only be conditionally called “ecclesiastical congress” because the majority of the delegates were secular figures of various faiths. Of more than a hundred of the clergymen serving in Sokhumi Eparchy by 1917, only eight were ethnically Abkhaz. The congress was chaired by Communist-atheist Abkhaz public figures (*Simon Basaria, Samson Chanba, Mikheil Tarnava*, and others). Teacher Simon Basaria was elected as the chairman of the church congress, and *Vasil Agrba*, the priest of the Church of St. Iliia the Prophet in Murgudzirkhva, an active member of the Communist Party (sic!), was elected as the co-chair. *Nestor Lakoba*, the future leader of the Abkhaz communists, addressed the congress. *Mikheil Tarnava*, who had a communist orientation, also made a report on the church issue. M. Tarnava grossly distorted history. He portrayed the Catholicosate of Abkhazia as a national ecclesiastical organization of ethnic Abkhazs. Nevertheless, a fairly balanced resolution was adopted, which was an achievement of the Abkhaz nobility (*Alexandre Sharvashidze, Tatash Marshania*, etc.) and the delegation of the Provisional Government of the Georgian Church (*Parmen Gotua, General Vasil Gabashvili, Davit Nizharadze*, etc.) (**Georgian Orthodox Church, 2016**: 115, 133-135). The hopes of the Russian clergy that the Abkhazian parishes would remain under the authority of the Holy Synod of the Russian Church did not come true. The congress demanded the establishment of an independent Abkhazian church headed by a bishop had to be elected by the Abkhaz people (**Gamakharia, 2011**: 5-8; **Gamakharia, 2005**: 781).

On 8-17 September 1917, the first assembly of the Georgian Church after the restoration of the autocephaly was held. Abkhazia and Samurzakano sent 22 delegates to the assembly. Among them was *Raphael Chkotua*, later the Minister for Abkhazia in the Government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. He also addressed the assembly. Bishop *Kyrion (Sadzaglishvili)* was elected to lead the revived church. The assembly approved the statute of the church board, which provided for the establishment of Tskhumi-Bedia Eparchy with its location in Sokhumi. As the jurisdiction of the Georgian Church was not yet fully extended to Abkhazia, the Tskhumi-Bedia Eparchy was temporarily assigned to the

Chqondidi Eparchy. With the efforts of Metropolitan *Ambrosi (Khelaia)* of Chqondidi and the support of Catholicos-Patriarch Kyrion II, by the end of 1917, it was possible to temporarily transfer most of the Georgian parishes of Abkhazia (55 parishes) to Chqondidi Eparchy (**Gamakharia, 2005: 748-749, 783-786**). The declaration of the state independence of Georgia on 26 May 1918, the determination of the status of Abkhazia within it and the stabilization of the situation there also raised the issue of reorganization of Sokhumi Eparchy.

On 1 September 1919, the government of the Autonomous Abkhazia adopted a decree on the management of the Orthodox Churches. Church property was transferred to Abkhazia and Episcopal Cathedral was declared vacant (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997: 450-451**). The Georgian Catholicosate Council appointed Metropolitan Ambrosi as a provisional ruler of Sokhumi Eparchy on 11 September 1919. On 7 October 1919, the Special Ecclesiastical Assembly of Abkhazia was held. It was attended by 350 delegates. The congregation made historic decisions. From now on, Sokhumi Eparchy, which was renamed as Tskhumi-Apkhazeti Eparchy by the decision of the Assembly, was returned to its Mother Church. Metropolitan Ambrosi was unanimously elected as the head of Tskhumi-Apkhazeti Eparchy (**Gamakharia, 2012: 113-117**). On 17-23 October 1919, the Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia *Leonidé (Okropiridze)* visited Tskhumi-Apkhazeti Eparchy (**Gamakharia, 2006a: 241-281**).

The delegation of Tskhumi-Apkhazeti Eparchy, headed by Metropolitan Ambrosi, took an active part in the work of the 3rd Assembly of the Georgian Church, which was convened on 27 June 1920. Among other issues, the Assembly discussed the situation in Abkhazia (**Gamakharia, 2005: 825-826**).

Despite the difficult political situation, financial problems, and other difficulties of an objective and subjective nature, Tskhumi-Apkhazeti Eparchy was on a clear path of revival. Churches were built and parishes were opened in Kochara, Varche, Lechkopi, Tsebelda, Chkhortoli, Otobaia, and others in 1919-1920. Tskhumi-Apkhazeti Eparchy included the churches of Gagra, Abgarkhuk, Bombora, and others, which, for different reasons, did not participate in the assembly of the Abkhazian clergy on 7 October 1919. Within one year the number of parishes in Tskhumi-Apkhazeti Eparchy had increased from 93 to 100. The discrimination against parishioners on national grounds had been ended. The Orthodox nations – Georgians, Abkhazs, Greeks, Russians – were given the unrestricted right to worship in their mother tongue.

CHAPTER X. SOVIET ABKHAZIA IN 1921-1953

§1. The Political and State Status of Abkhazia in Soviet Georgia in 1921-1931

On 4 March 1921, the 31st Division of the 9th Army of Soviet Russia occupied Sokhumi. *Arzaqan Emukhviri*, the leader of the autonomous Abkhazia, emigrated. The Provisional Revolutionary Committee of Abkhazia chaired by *Isaki Zhvania* handed over the power to the Abkhazian Revolutionary Committee (Revkom) (on 6 March 1921), which was appointed by the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party(b). The Revkom consisted of *Efrem Eshba* (chairman), *Nestor Lakoba* (deputy chairman), and *Nikoloz Akirtava. Petre Aghniashvili*, People's Commissar of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Abkhazia, became a member of the Revkom in June 1921 (**Communist**: 29.06.1921).

The Abkhazian Revkom sent a letter to V. Lenin and J. Stalin on 26 March 1921 and asked them whether the Soviet Abkhazia should be an independent republic or just an administrative unit and what would be the general policy in Abkhazia (**Dzidzaria, 1957**: 31). The authors of the letter did not oppose the status of an administrative unit, but preferred to declare Abkhazia as an independent republic within the Russian Federation. The proposal was motivated by the alleged anti-Georgian mood of Abkhazia's population. Similar Letters were sent to the Kavbiuro in Rostov and to Grigol (Sergo) Ordzhonikidze, the head of the Kavbiuro in Tbilisi. Ordzhonikidze agreed with the idea of declaring Abkhazia an "independent" republic, but refused to its joining to Russia on the grounds that the West would consider it to be an annexation of Abkhazia by Russia (**Ordzhonikidze, 1956b**: 200-201; **Menteshashvili, 1998**: 59-60).

On 28 March 1921 a meeting of the representatives of the occupation authorities – the Kavbiuro of the Central Committee of RCP(b), Georgian Communist Party and Abkhazian Revkom – was held in Batumi with the participation of *Grigol Ordzhonikidze, Shalva Eliava, Sergo Kavtaradze, Malakia Toroshelidze, Efrem Eshba, and Nestor Lakoba*. They discussed the issue of the Soviet government and the structure of the Communist Party in Abkhazia and determined: "**Until the Congress of the Abkhazian Soviets**" (emphasis added – **J.G.**) the issue of Soviet Abkhazia's joining to the RSFSR or the Georgian SSR remains open and Abkhazia is declared as socialist republic. The party organization before the conference (emphasis added – **J.G.**) bears the name – Orgburo of RCP(b) in Abkhazia and works in accordance with the instructions of the Kavbiuro of the Central Committee of RCP(b). The decrees of the Revkom of Georgia should be a guide for the Revkom (Abkhazia) so that there is no contradiction in the actions of both Revkoms" (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997**: 469). This decision became the basis for the declaration of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia on 31 March 1921.

It should be mentioned that the problem of Abkhazia had never been a matter of discussion among the Soviet Russia's party or state authorities. Neither had V. Lenin any

involvement with the Abkhazian issue. All the problems concerning the status of Abkhazia were decided by Kavbiuro in Tbilisi or during the personal meetings between G. Ordzhonikidze and J. Stalin, the People's Commissar (minister) for Nationalities of RSFSR. Thus, the attempt of separatist historiography to link the declaration of the Abkhazian SSR to V. Lenin is groundless (**Bgazhba O., Lakoba S., 2015:** 355).

The "independence" of Abkhazia was a fiction and no one recognized it. The fictional status was invented for suppressing Georgia's desire of restoring her sovereignty. Pavel Sitin, the former military attaché of Russia in the Georgian Democratic Republic, who continued his spy activities in Tbilisi in Soviet times too, sent to Moscow the "plan" of fighting against the "Georgian chauvinism" (i.e. state independence of Georgia – **J.G.**) on 22 April 1921. Among the other measures (keeping the units of the Red Army in Georgia, especially on the Turkish border; autonomization of Megrelia; supporting the local Russian population; transferring the South Caucasian railway to Moscow), it called for the expansion of the Russian border to the River Bzipi and annexing the rest of Abkhazia after the plebiscite. Otherwise, according to P. Sitin, Abkhazia could join the Mountainous Republic and then, in case of complications, RSFR would have "an obstacle from sea to sea" (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997:** 470-471).

The Georgian Revkom recognized the SSR of Abkhazia on 21 May 1921 and expressed hope that the issue of the relations between the two republics would be finally solved at the "1st Congress of the Workers' and Peasants' Soviets" of both republics (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997:** 473-474). According to the Bolsheviks, the Declaration of the Abkhazian SSR was intended to create the illusion that Abkhazia enjoyed "broader" rights than in 1918-1920. From now on, the Soviet rule equalled to the "independence" for the Abkhazs. As for the elimination of national strife between the Georgians and Abkhazs, the Soviet authorities never had set such a goal. On the contrary, the declaration of the Abkhazian SSR deepened the resentment and distrust planted by the Russian Empire (and not by the Mensheviks as the Bolsheviks claimed).

Like in the Tsarist Russia, the anti-Georgian propaganda and persecution of the Georgians intensified in "independent" Abkhazia. It is obvious that one of the main goals of Abkhazia's declaration of "independence" was to inspire the national discord and to implement a plan to separate it from Georgia. Nevertheless, the attempt to separate Abkhazia from Georgia failed. In order to avoid unnecessary complications, Stalin and Ordzhonikidze did not commit another serious crime. The newly elected leaders of Abkhazia E. Eshba and N. Lakoba were constantly emphasizing that the "independence" was declared temporarily, "*for a minute*", that it was only a "*signboard*" (**Gamakharia, 1991:** 117-118).

Actually, Abkhazia has not been a truly independent political entity even "for a moment." The appointment of Abkhazia's regional party leaders and heads of state structures was approved by the decision of the Kavbiuro headed by the Georgian Bolsheviks

and operating in Tbilisi. The state structures of Soviet Georgia sent their decrees issued in Georgian to the Revkom of Abkhazia “for the reference and guidance” and “for correct execution.” The Georgian Revkom also considered Abkhazia as its territory. On 14 April 1921, it discussed the question of the Tkvarcheli mines, on 21 April issued one billion-ruble-loan to Abkhazia, and on 30 May discussed the Bzipi concessions. The same issue was discussed by the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party on 21 May 1921, the day of “recognition” of Abkhazia's “independence.” Revkom declared that it would not object to the “signing this concession by the Georgian government, if it was sound and useful” (**Gamakharia, 1991:** 120-121). The Kavbiuro, which was conducting Moscow’s policy in the Caucasus, also did not consider Abkhazia as an independent republic. The plenary sessions of this body were attended by the representatives of Abkhazia, the Mountainous Republic and Dagestan, as autonomous regions, only in a consultative capacity (**Gamakharia, 1991:** 121-122).

The low political status of Abkhazia is indicated by Lenin's letter to the Caucasian Communists (14 April 1921). It is addressed to the Bolshevik organizations of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Dagestan, and the Mountainous Republic, but not Abkhazia (**Lenin, 1970b:** 198-200). Abkhazia is not mentioned in the draft resolution of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the RCP(b), which was written by V. Lenin (28 November 1921) regarding the Federation of Transcaucasian Republics. It only mentions Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia (**Lenin, 1970a:** 255). This fact was reaffirmed by V. Lenin on 1 September 1921 when he was presented with a concession agreement between the governments of Georgia and Abkhazia on the processing of the Bzipi timber. V. Lenin ordered his aide V. Smolyaninov to find out whether the Georgian government kept the clause that it could not sign agreements without the consent from the government of RSFSR. In this case, the Abkhazian government is not mentioned at all (**Lenin, 1980:** 270).

There does not exist a single document in which Soviet Russian government, the RCP(b) Central Committee, the legislative bodies – the congresses of the Soviets and the Central Executive Committee – mention the independence of Abkhazia. The People's Commissariat of Nationalities of the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic considered Abkhazia as a part of Georgia. Its head J. Stalin wrote to A. Enukidze (1 September 1921), the Secretary of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee that “*Abkhazia is an autonomous part of independent Georgia. Because of this she does not and should not have the independent representations in Russia. Neither can she get a loan from the RSFSR*” (**Menteshashvili, 1998:** 67). This is confirmed by N. Lakoba’s statement made at the meeting of executive persons of Abkhazia on 23 July 1921: “*The Soviet Georgia or Abkhazia are economically independent, but politically they all submit to the centre through the Communist Party via the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party and the Kavbiuro of the Central Committee of RCP*” (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997:** 475). The Abkhazian SSR was not a subject of international law, while Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan,

who signed the Treaty of Kars with Turkey on 13 October 1921, formally remained as subjects of international law in 1921. Abkhazia, obviously, could not sign such documents. Thus, it is quite clear that Abkhazia was not an independent political entity even in the Soviet sense (i.e. directly subordinated to Moscow), much less a subject of international law in 1921. It remained a part of Georgia. It was only formally (temporarily, “for a minute”) called the Soviet Socialist Republic. Practical steps were soon taken to eliminate the existing formality. On 5 July 1921, the Kavbiuro decided to conduct party work in Abkhazia in order to transform it into an autonomous republic within the Georgian SSR (**Menteshashvili, 1998: 67**). On July 23 of the same year, at the meeting of the executive persons of Abkhazia, N. Lakoba was talking on the impossibility of Abkhazia’s joining to Russia and, taking into account ethnographic and historical conditions, about the need to establish federal relations with Georgia (**Gamakharia, 1991: 123-124**). On 16 November 1921 the Kavbiuro adopted the following decision:

1. *“The existence of independent Abkhazia is considered to be economically and politically inexpedient;*
2. *To offer comrade E. Eshba to present his final conclusions regarding the joining of Abkhazia to the Georgian federation on the contractual basis or to the RSFSR as an autonomous okrug (region)”* (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997: 481-482**).

This document is highly interesting because it allowed Abkhazia to choose one of two options: either to join Georgia as a “treaty republic” or to join the RSFSR as merely an autonomous okrug. Prominent Georgian scholar Levan Toidze has justly pointed out that the status of an autonomous okrug “was lower by two levels.” It is commonly believed that this was a sign of “discrimination of Georgia of sorts” (**Toidze, 1999: 301; Papaskiri, 2012a: 174; Papaskiri, 2020: 149**). On 16 December 1921, the Georgian SSR and the Abkhazian SSR signed the union treaty. The Commissariats for military, finances, national economy, post and telegraph, justice, maritime transport, as well as the special commission and workers’ and peasant’s inspection were united. Abkhazia was becoming the member of all regional unions, first of all, of the Federation of Transcaucasian Republics, through Georgia, which gave it one-third of her seats (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997: 483-484**).

The 1st Congress of the Abkhazian Soviets approved the union treaty with the Georgian SSR on 17 February 1922. The joining of the Abkhazian SSR to the Georgian SSR was confirmed by the Constitution adopted by the 1st Congress of the Soviets of Georgia on 2 March 1922. According to it, *“On the basis of free self-determination the Georgian Socialist Soviet Republic includes: The Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic of Adjara, the Autonomous District of South Ossetia, and the Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia; The latter is united with the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia on the basis of a special treaty concluded between these republics”* (**Collection of Constitutional Acts, 1983: 73**). Nevertheless, the separatist historians claim that the Abkhazian SSR was not a part of Georgia (**Bgazhba O., Lakoba S., 2015: 356**), but they do not specify which republic Abkhazia was

a part of. Since it was not directly a part of the Transcaucasian Federation, Abkhazia is not mentioned in the union treaty of the Transcaucasian Republics (12 March 1922), as well as in the Constitution of the Federation (13 December 1922). Abkhazia was not a signatory of the Treaty on the Foundation of the USSR /30 December 1922/ (**Formation of the Union, 1972**: 257-259, 349-359, 381-386). This agreement was signed only by the representatives of the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus, and the Transcaucasian Federation (**Gamakharia, 2011d**: 425).

The integration of Abkhazia into Georgia was completed in 1922. It was based on the Constitution of the Georgian SSR and the treaty of 16 December 1921. According to the decision of Kavbiuro (24 November 1921), the Abkhazian Orgburo of the Russian Communist Party became subordinated to the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party. The Abkhazian organization of the Russian Communist Party was transformed into the Abkhazian organization of the Georgian Communist Party by the decision of the 1st Regional Conference /7-12 January 1922/ (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997**: 482).

S. Ordzhonikidze, the party leader of the Transcaucasian Federation, stated the following at the 2nd Congress of the Abkhazian Soviets on 21 December 1923: *“The Abkhazs should know that **Abkhazia is an autonomous republic** and enjoys equal rights in our union.”* S. Ordzhonikidze also referred to Abkhazia as an autonomous republic during a session of the Tbilisi Soviet on 5 September 1924 (**History of the Abkhazian, 1983**: 121. Emphasis added – **J.G.**). He repeated this at the 1924 October plenary session of Central Committee (the RCP(b): *“Our **Autonomous Republics and Districts (Adjara, Abkhazia, South Ossetia) and non-Georgian Population areas did not use the uprising (1924 – J.G.) for separatist purposes”*** (**Gamakharia, 2011d**: 426. Emphasis added – **J.G.**).

According to the first constitution of the Soviet Union (31 January 1924), Abkhazia had the status of an autonomous republic. Paragraph 15 of Chapter IV of Section II of the Constitution states: *“The **Autonomous Republics of Adjara and Abkhazia, the Autonomous Districts of South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Nakhichevan send one representative to the Council of Nationalities”*** (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997**: 488-489. Emphasis added – **J.G.**). Thus, Abkhazia was an autonomous republic according to the first constitution of the USSR, which was in force in 1924-1936. State and party policy in Abkhazia was determined by the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party. It appointed the party executives in Abkhazia. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia periodically made decisions regarding the structure, activities, and personnel of the Abkhazian government.

In the first years of Soviet rule, Abkhazia did not have its own constitution. In 1924-1925, preliminary consultations were held on the removal of the concept of “treaty republic” from the Constitution of Georgia. At the 3rd Congress of the Georgian Communist Party (8 May 1924) N. Lakoba stated: *“Now Lominadze (Secretary of the Central Committee – **J.G.**) tells me that we will remove the word “treaty republic” in one year... We just*

say that we are a treaty republic, and I have the courage to say that the peasantry of Abkhazia will erase these words in two years.” When recalling how the Tsarist government confronted the “**cultural Georgian nation to the Abkhaz people,**” N. Lakoba declared: “*If you look at the **Abkhazs** from a historical point of view, of course, **they could not play any role in the history of mankind** because **this people has neither its own history nor its own script or its own literature**” (Toidze, 1996: 29-30. Emphasis added – J.G.).*

A year later, the 3rd Congress of the Soviets of Abkhazia (26, March – 1 April 1925), without any discussion, approved a completely different constitution (1 April 1925) which in fact repeated the 1922 Constitution of Georgia. Because of this, it was in conflict with the constitutions of Georgian SSR, the Transcaucasian SFSR, and the USSR, as well as the treaty with Georgia. According to the constitution adopted in Sokhumi, Abkhazia was declared a sovereign republic. It also declared the right to leave the Transcaucasian Federation and the USSR, and Russian as the state language (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997: 489-490**). Soon N. Lakoba referred to the 1925 constitution as a “constitutional nonsense” and he was absolutely right in this case (**Lakoba N., 1987: 177**). The main “nonsense” was that the Constitution ignored the fact that Abkhazia was a part of Georgia on the basis of a special treaty and only through Georgia joined the Transcaucasian Federation, and through the latter – the USSR. Therefore, it could not be a sovereign republic, it could not leave the Transcaucasia and the Soviet Union, of which it was not even a direct member.

The Constitution of 1925 was not published; thus, it never came into force. Moreover, the bulletin of the 3rd Congress of the Soviets, issued by the Central Executive Committee of Abkhazia, states: “The congress decided to complete the work on the project submitted to the congress to bring it in line with the constitutions of the Georgian SSR and the Transcaucasian SFSR” (**Congresses of Soviets, 1964: 673**). Therefore, the constitution, which was never discussed and published, but was adopted on 1 April 1925, was recognized only as a draft by the Central Executive Committee of Abkhazia. This fact is simply omitted in the separatist historiography. On 6 September 1925 the Transcaucasian Regional Committee of the Russian Communist Party approved the proposals of the Commission of the Central Executive Committee of the Transcaucasian SFSR and decreed:

1. *It is necessary to formalize the order of the relations between the SSR of Abkhazia and the SSR of Georgia in the constitutional way and revise the Constitution adopted at the 3rd Congress of the Soviets of Abkhazia;*
2. *In order to regulate the national question, the Abkhazian Regional Committee of the Party and Council of the People’s Commissars of Abkhazia, based on the existing decrees of the Transcaucasian CEC and the Georgian CEC, should elaborate the project on the language-usage and present it to the CC of the Communist Party of Georgia;*
3. *The national composition of the districts and region should be taken into consideration during the elections of the Soviet and professional organs (Toidze, 1996: 25).*

The issue of the Abkhazian Constitution was discussed on the sessions of in the CC of the Communist Party of Georgia on 6 and 31 July 1925 (**History of the Abkhazian, 1983:** 197). On 11 September 1925 the Bureau of the Abkhazian Regional Committee of the Georgia Communist Party charged the Government and Central Executive Committee of Abkhazia with the revision of the articles of the Constitution concerning the relations with Georgia presenting the new draft of the Constitution. The Constitutional commission headed by N. Lakoba prepared the draft of amendments to the Constitution of Abkhazia and presented it for the ratification to the Secretariat of Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party on 27 October 1925. The Secretariat approved the draft and instructed the CEC of Abkhazia to ratify it *“in the Soviet style”* (**AMIA:** Collection 14, List 2, Case 364, p. 63). The amendments concerned the issues of the “sovereignty” and the state language(s). The new draft limited the independence of the Abkhazian government not only by the constitutions of the Transcaucasian SFSR and the USSR (the original version), but also by the treaty relations with Georgia. Abkhazian, Georgian, and Russian were declared as state languages (**Toidze, 1996:** 25).

The amendments found their reflection in the 1926 Constitution of Abkhazia. Its adoption was preceded by the ratification of the Constitution of Georgia at the 3rd Session of the Central Executive Committee of Georgia which was held in Sokhumi on 11-16 June 1926). On this session N. Lakoba presented the report of the government of Abkhazia. As a representative of the “small nation,” he spoke about defending the rights of other nationalities and the union with Georgia. N. Lakoba said: *“The Abkhazian Republic was understood by some people, as if it means the republic only for the Abkhazs. It does not reflect the reality. In Abkhazia the main nations according to their quantity and weight are the Abkhazs, Georgians, Armenians, and Greeks.”* He also paid attention to his political opposition: *“They base their tactics on the following matter: If Abkhazia wants to leave Georgia it goes, if it wants to stay – it will stay in Georgia. In order to avoid any misunderstanding in the future, it is necessary to state clearly that Abkhazia cannot leave Georgia and does not want it at all. But together with the Soviet Georgia Abkhazia will go even to the netherworld”* (**Shamba T., Neproshin, 2004; Gamakharia, 2007d:** 346).

The 5th chapter of the Constitution of Georgian SSR, which was adopted by the 3rd Session of the Central Executive Committee of Georgia, was regulating the relations between Georgian SSR and Abkhazian SSR. Without any changes, the 5th chapter of the Georgian Basic Law was copied to the first actual Constitution of the Soviet Abkhazia and became its 2nd chapter. The Constitution of the Abkhazian SSR was adopted by 3rd session of the Abkhazian CEC on 27 October 1926 (**Congresses of Soviets, 1964:** 711-729) and ratified by the 4th Congress of the Abkhazian Soviets (5-10 March 1927).

The Constitution of the Abkhazian SSR states that the Republic of Abkhazia is a socialist state of workers and peasants, which is a part of the Georgian SSR by the virtue of a special treaty, and a part of Transcaucasian Federation through Georgian SSR. Abkhazian, Georgian, and Russian were declared as the state languages. The representatives of Ab-

khazia participated in the work of the congresses of the Soviets of Georgia. The Congress elected the fixed number (also determined by the Congress) of them to the Georgian Central Executive Committee. Codes, Resolutions, and decrees of the Georgian Central Executive Committee were mandatory in Abkhazia as well. The decrees of the congresses of the Abkhazian Soviets, sessions of the Abkhazian Central Executive Committee, and government that were unconstitutional were nullified by the Congress of the Georgian Soviets or Georgian Central Executive Committee. The budget of the Abkhazian SSR, after its approval, was the part of the budget of Georgian SSR.

At first glance, the power-sharing between Tbilisi and Sokhumi was quite distinctive. However, the Soviet constitutions were of a formal nature and the real authority belonged to the party apparatus. Any decision in any field issued by the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party was mandatory not only for the party organizations of Abkhazia, but also for all state institutions. In addition, the decisions of the party or state apparatus of the Transcaucasian SFSR and the USSR were obviously obligatory in Abkhazia. Thus, Abkhazian SSR could not administer any of the spheres of state life. Meanwhile, the Abkhazian authorities had much more rights in the Democratic Republic of Georgia (**Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997**: 451-453, 466-469).

As it was mentioned above, the “Abkhazian SSR” – the so-called “Treaty Republic” – was the peculiar form of autonomy created to perform a specific function in the specific historical situation. Following the strengthening of the Soviet rule, its function had been exhausted by the end of the 1920s. It became evident that the political and legal status of Abkhazia had to be brought in line with the Constitution of the USSR. The necessity of this was implied by N. Lakoba, when he stated at the 6th Congress of the Georgian Communist Party on 4 July 1929: “*Abkhazia itself will have to correct something in her constitution; To say that Abkhazia is dissatisfied with Georgia is complete nonsense*” (**Toidze, 1996**: 26). According to him, the political equality of the workers of Georgia and Abkhazia had been ensured for a long time, and Georgia was doing everything to eliminate the inherited economic and cultural inequality.” This was a hint that the SSR of Abkhazia had fulfilled its mission and expired its function. In addition, it should be mentioned that there was a re-organization of the autonomies within Russia in the 1920s and 1930s. More numerous and developed nations (compared to the Abkhazs), with enormous material resources, retained or received the status of autonomous districts. In the best-case scenario, they stayed or became the autonomous republics.

On 17 April 1930, the 3rd Session of the Central Executive Committee of Abkhazia discussed the issue of revising the treaty relations between Abkhazia and Georgia. The Government of Abkhazia prepared the reference for the session and stated that “*the treaty of 16 December 1921 has lost its real significance and, therefore, it can be considered only as an agreement on the unification of the Abkhazian SSR and the Georgian SSR, while the real relations between these republics are clearly defined in their constitutions.*”

We have to acknowledge that the name "Treaty Republic" has no real meaning" (Toidze, 1996: 27). The session took into consideration these circumstances and removed the name "Treaty Republic" from the Constitution of Abkhazia and replaced it with the "Autonomous Republic." At the same time, the powers given in the 1927 Constitution were not revised. The constitutional amendments were finally approved by the 6th Congress of the Abkhazian Soviets on 11 February 1931.

N. Lakoba also stated at the congress that *"the issue of relations between the workers of Georgia and Abkhazia has been completely resolved ... and has been removed from the agenda."* He also criticized the Abkhazian Institute of Language and Literature for not considering the possibilities of the Abkhazian language and trying to *"translate the untranslatable"* into this language, as well as for *"the attempts to prove that the Abkhazian literature existed even before Adam. It has not existed in history and put an end to it"* (Gamakharia, Gogia, 1997: 503, 504). With this criticism N. Lakoba dealt a pre-emptive blow to the separatist-minded staff of the institute, who could have rallied against the latest constitutional amendments. The 6th Congress of the Georgian Soviets confirmed the decision of the 6th Congress of the Abkhazian Soviets on 14 February 1931 and reflected the amendments in the Constitution of the Georgian SSR. The 16 December 1921 Treaty was declared invalid (Congresses of Soviets, 1964: 557-561).

The constitutional decisions of the 6th congresses of the Soviets of Abkhazia and Georgia coincided with the separatist uprising in the Gudauta district against the collectivization, in which N. Lakoba's mother also participated. It is not excluded that behind these speeches N. Lakoba was standing (Bgazhba O., Lakoba S., 2015: 358-359). N. Lakoba left a profound impact on the history of Abkhazia of 1920s-1930s. From February 1922 he chaired the Council of People's Commissars of Abkhazia; from April 1930, when the government and the Central Executive Committee had been merged, he served as a chairman of the Central Executive Committee, a position he held until his death at the end of 1936. His name is associated with both the reconstruction of that period and the bloody terror. Like other Soviet and party leaders, N. Lakoba was an executioner. He was particularly cruel to the participants of the 1924 uprising. N. Lakoba, as the chairman of the special tribunal (the so-called "Troika"), in a single session held on 15 and 17 September 1924, sentenced 13 people to death. Among them was *Vasil Gurjua*, ethnical Abkhaz, a member of the Seim of the Transcaucasian Republic in 1918, the People's Council of Abkhazia in 1917-1921, the Constituent Assembly of Georgia in 1919-1921, a great patriot of Abkhazia and the whole Georgia (AMIA: Collection 6, Case 23480, p. 145-146).

It was terror and violence that manifested the nature of the Soviet government, the Communist regime, whose typical representatives were Nestor Lakoba and other leaders of Abkhazia, regardless of nationality. N. Lakoba established a clannish, ethnocratic, separatist regime, which pursued a chauvinist policy in Abkhazia (Papaskiri, 2007: 110-113, 117, 122-123. On N. Lakoba's activities see: Anchabadze J., 2016: 324-338; Ancha-

badze J., 2017: 189-197). His working style and complete neglect of the local party organization, irritated the leadership of the Georgian SSR, namely, Lavrenti Beria (**Papaskiri, 2007:** 122-126). For a long time, only closeness to Stalin saved N. Lakoba from accountability. When he died in Tbilisi under unknown circumstances at the end of December of 1936, he was buried as *“an experienced Bolshevik and a tireless leader in building socialism in Abkhazia.”* However, soon the Soviet government declared him to be *“an enemy of the people.”* From February to September 1937 the Central Executive Committee (i.e. the government) of Abkhazia, was led by *Aleksey Agrba*, who was replaced by *Avksenti Rapa-va* (November 1937 – November 1938).

The process of unification of the USSR and the formation of a totalitarian political system was completed with the adoption of the “Stalin’s Constitution” at the 8th Extraordinary Congress of the Soviets on 5 December 1936. The Transcaucasian Federation was abolished and Georgia became a direct member of the USSR in the same year. The new Constitution of the Republic was adopted by the 8th Extraordinary Congress of the Georgian Soviets on 13 February 1937. On the basis of the Constitution of the Georgian SSR, the 8th Extraordinary Congress of the Abkhazian Soviets adopted the new Constitution of the Abkhazian ASSR on 2 August 1937 (**Sovetskaya Abkhazia, 1937:** 04.08). According to this constitution, the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia was a socialist state of workers and peasants, which was a part of the Georgian SSR.

§2. The Separatist Actions of Abkhaz Bolsheviks in the 1920s-1930s

At the beginning of 1931, as it was already mentioned, the transformation of the so-called “Abkhazian SSR” into Abkhazian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic marked the official recognition of the situation, which existed for nearly 10 years. The demagogic promises made in due course by the Georgian Bolsheviks to the Abkhaz comrades to support their “heroic struggle” against the Georgian Democratic Republic were the main reason why official Tbilisi and Moscow were content with the “independence” of the so-called Abkhazian SSR for such a long time. The Communist leaders of Georgia, who were condemning the national policy of Mensheviks, never thought that they were inspiring the anti-Georgian mindset in Abkhazia. This short-sighted, treacherous propaganda of the puppet Bolshevik Regime of Georgia can be clearly seen in the speech of Sergo (Grigol) Ordzhonikidze, the leader of Southern Caucasian Communists, at the 1st Congress of the Georgian Communist Party. He was “exposing” *“Menshevik’s anti-popular policy” and was saying that they “showered with blood the meadows and mountains of poor Southern Ossetians, Adjarians, and Abkhazs”* (**Ordzhonikidze, 1956a:** 226; **Sagaria, 1981:** 39).

Such ideological postulates were creating fertile soil for the realization of Abkhaz Bolsheviks’ separatist thoughts. Efrem Eshba and, especially, Nestor Lakoba, while recognizing Abkhazia’s being inside the borders of Georgia on words, were actively working on seceding Abkhazia both politically and culturally. It is probable that they covertly ordered

to create the historical and political basis for the “state independence” of Abkhazia. The above-mentioned publications of Simon Basaria, Semion Ashkhatsava, and Konstantin Kudryavtsev were serving this goal.

The Abkhaz Bolshevik leadership was not content with historiographical “achievements” only and it was working in other direction too. N. Lakoba and his team took under their complete control the state apparatus. Only Abkhazs were appointed to the key positions. The official Tbilisi, fearing the possible implications, “was not noticing” the wilfulness of the Abkhaz Bolsheviks. The superficial attitude of the Georgian Communists can be clearly seen in the speech of *Levan Ghoghoberidze*, one of the party functionaries, at the Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in 1926. L. Ghoghoberidze justified the discriminative personnel policy in Abkhazia and openly stated that the Abkhazs had to have priority when appointed to the key positions even though “*they were in minority compared to the Georgians*” (**Sagaria, 1981: 184**. Emphasis added – **Z.P.**).¹

The Georgian society, unlike the Bolshevik leaders of Georgia, was worried regarding the chauvinistic policy in Abkhazia. There were numerous publications in the newspaper “Socialist-Federalist” in 1921. The authors stated that the “independence of Abkhazia” was only on paper and in reality it meant the complete dominance of the Russians. The state language is Russian, theatre is Russian, newspapers are Russian. The Abkhaz leaders Efrem Eshba and Nestor Lakoba did not care at all about the interests of the Georgian population (**Gamakharlia, Gogia, 1997: 479, 486; Darsania, 2000: 152**). Their sole goal was to establish the ethnocratic regime. Such a regime was established by N. Lakoba around 1925 and the adoption of Constitution was his attempt to move out of the Georgian control completely.

The transformation of the Abkhazian SSR into the autonomous Soviet republic in February 1931 seriously affected the separatist forces, who, for nearly 10 years, were feeding lies to their compatriots. This act showed everyone the falseness and demagoguery of the so-called “Leninist national policy.” The myth that the Communist regime “gave” the “liberty and state independence” to the Abkhazs, who were “oppressed” by the so-called “bourgeois-nationalist” Georgian government, had burst like a soap bubble. As we have already mentioned, that “independence” was a fiction from its very beginning and the act of February 1931 was just formalizing the relations which were formed between Georgian SSR and Abkhazian SSR after the so-called “union treaty” of 16 December 1921, according to which Abkhazia effectively became the part of the Georgian SSR.

The separatists were very angry with the transformation of the “Abkhazian SSR” into autonomy. On 18 February 1931, a week after the creation of Abkhazian SSR, the “Ab-

¹ The fact that the Georgians were in majority at that time (in 1926) is admitted even by Abkhaz historian *Stanislav Lakoba*. According to 1926 census, the Abkhazs were 55,918, while the Georgians – 67,494 (**Lakoba S., 1990: 99**).

khazs' popular gathering" started in the village of Duripshi (Gudauta district). It continued till 26 February (Brief, 2016: 4-15). The official Soviet historiography explained this gathering with the Abkhazs' discontent regarding the collectivization, although this viewpoint has been revised today. According to the well-reasoned argument of the above-mentioned *Stanislav Lakoba*, this unrest was directly connected with the change of the Abkhazia's political status (Lakoba S., 1990: 90-91).

The situation became tense. The Abkhazs openly stated that "since the Russian state both in the past and in the present was conducting the policy of exterminating the national minorities," they had "only two ways out: either take arms and defend their rights, or leave Abkhazia" (Brief, 2016: 9). It is presumed that this separatist unrest was inspired by N. Lakoba and his accomplices. The scholars paid attention to the fact that N. Lakoba's mother Shakhusna was at the head of the protesters and acted as a protector of some kind (Lakoba S., 2004: 108).

This reckless venture of the Abkhaz separatist leadership did not reach its goal. Nestor Lakoba was summoned to Moscow where he supposedly had a confidential meeting with J. Stalin. Despite the special friendship with N. Lakoba, "the chief of all the peoples in the World" could not afford any exception for the Abkhazs, even though he greeted their "heroic struggle" against the "black gangs of Tbilisi government" back in 1918 (Stalin, 1947: 96; Toidze, 1999: 297). J. Stalin had his perception of the state system to be established in the former Russian Empire. According to it, even the officially sovereign states (first of all, Georgia) had to become a part of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic as autonomous republics. Therefore, any attempts of certain Abkhaz historians or political scientists to allege that J. Stalin had special feelings towards his homeland and because of those sentiments had liquidated the Abkhazian SSR, are groundless. **The only goal of J. Stalin, as well as of his mentor, "the great chief of the world proletariat" V. Lenin, was the creation of the world Communist empire in the form of "one and indivisible Russia."** They never cared about the national and state interests of the peoples living in the former Russian Empire. At the same time, the change of Abkhazia's political status was not something unique.¹ It was in full compliance with the party line and the political course of the Soviet leadership. Such facts were common in the other regions of the Soviet Union. For example, the Nakhichevan Soviet Socialist Republic, created in July 1920, became the autonomous region in February 1923 and later, as an autonomous republic, was incorporated in the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. The Stavropol, Kuban, and

¹ We cannot avoid mentioning the blunder made by the noted German legal scholar *Angelika Nußberger* in her book about the Russian-Soviet state and law history. According to her, in 1924 Stalin demoted the "independent" Abkhazian Soviet Socialist Republic into autonomous republic and made it a part of Georgian Republic / „*Warum hatte Stalin Abchasien, das bis 1924 eigenständige Republik war, zu einer autonomen Republik zurückgestuft und der Republik Georgien einverleibt?*“/ (Nußberger, 2010: 45. See also: Papaskiri, 2012a: 168-169; Papaskiri, 2020: 137).

Black Sea Soviet republics were created in 1918, but later they became just administrative districts in the RSFSR (for details, see: **Schneider, 2007**).

Repressions of the 1930s are one of the main topics used by the ideologists of the Abkhaz separatists in their anti-Georgian campaign. According to them, the repressions were especially fierce in Abkhazia and the main culprits were Joseph Stalin and Lavrenti Beria, the “almighty Georgians,” along with the Communist leadership of Georgia.

It is well-known that the 1930s marked the climax of the Soviet repressions, which started in V. Lenin’s times. The totalitarian regime considered that the class contradictions became the most evident in the 1930s and the hostile elements started their struggle for power. Thus, the repressions started throughout the whole country. Of course, Georgia was no exception. Since the Bolsheviks were not able to fully ensure the loyalty of Georgian intelligentsia, the repressions were extremely fierce here. Among the victims were *Mikheil Javakhishvili, Paolo Iashvili, Titsian Tabidze, Evgeni Mikeladze, Sandro Akhmeteli*, etc. The leading figures of Georgian Bolshevik elite were also executed and terror was not confined only to the so-called “*National Uklonists*.” Their fate was shared by many of those, who played a significant role in the so-called “Sovietization of Georgia” and who were holding the leading positions in the state and party structures afterwards. Most notable among them were *Mamia Orakhelashvili, Shalva Eliava, Levan Ghoghoberidze, Samson Mamulia, Mikheil Kakhiani, Lavrenti Kartvelishvili, Mariam Orakhelashvili*, etc.

In order to show the mercilessness of the Georgian Communist government towards the “hostile elements,” we can recall the case fabricated against the clergymen, whose only “guilt” was their caring about the Georgian church. Among the 21 of the executed clergymen there were *Besarion Vashadze, Mikheil Naneishvili, Ioseb Mirianashvili, Ilarion Okropiridze, Giorgi Epitashvili, Ivane Chitadze, Ermile Gogolishvili, Ivane Kaadze, Malakia Tsiklauri, Samson Mdinarishvili, Ioane Bobokhidze, Prokopi Chigogidze, Giorgi Darchia, Elizbar Anchabadze, Giorgi Tsulaia, Ioane Pantsulaia, Apolon Apkhaidze, Nikoloz Beshkenadze*, and others (**Vardosanidze, 2001**: 195). Because the above-mentioned persons never belonged to the clerical elite and were just the ordinary churchmen, their names say nothing to the society unlike Nazari Lezhava, the Metropolitan of Kutaisi, executed in August 1924, or Catholicos-Patriarch *Ambrosi (Khelaia)*, who practically became the victim of government’s pressure. Who knows how many such unknown persons became the victims of the Communist regime?!

The repressions of the 1920s-1930s brought great sorrow for Georgia. The terror consumed the best representatives of Georgian society. Thus, it is baseless to seek the evil among Georgians and in Georgia as it is done by the Abkhazs. That evil was born by the Soviet totalitarian system, which is mourned so much by the ideologists of the Abkhaz separatism. It is naïve to think that this was the product of the activities of the “great Georgians” J. Stalin and L. Beria. There is no doubt left that the ideological inspirer and chief organizer of the Bolshevik Red Terror was Vladimir Lenin (See: **Rozin, 1996**: 236-

248). J. Stalin was just continuing Lenin's "great deeds." He had faithful executives among whom Lavrenti Beria should be distinguished. For several years L. Beria was the First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party and since 1938 he became the head of the main apparatus of the Soviet repressions – the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs. Of course, Abkhazia could not avoid the repressions, but it would be incorrect to claim that they were extremely fierce there. Neither was Lavrenti Beria the main culprit, even though he detested Nestor Lakoba, the leader of the Abkhaz Bolsheviks and "personal friend" of "great chief."

The Abkhaz historians put all the blame on J. Stalin and L. Beria. They are concealing the fact that the Abkhaz Communists were actively participating in the process of liquidating the "enemies of the revolution." N. Lakoba himself was not "as innocent as a lamb." Meanwhile, Aleksey Agrba, N. Lakoba's successor as a Chairman of Central Executive Committee of Abkhazian ASSR, was L. Beria's close companion. It was thanks to L. Beria's recommendation that A. Agrba was appointed to the post of the Head of State Political Directorate of Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Republic in 1931. A. Agrba was personally leading the campaign of exterminating the "counter-revolutionary, diversionary-subversive, spy, terrorist, and rebellious" organization created by N. Lakoba (**Lakoba S., 1990: 132**).

Along with the party leadership (Nestor Lakoba, Efrem Eshba, Mikheil Chalmaz, Mikheil Lakoba, etc.) the known representatives of the Abkhaz intelligentsia (Vianor Ancha-badze, Samson Chanba, Simon Basaria, Mikheil Tarnava, Razhden Kakuba, Victor Kukba, etc.) became the victims of the repressions in 1930s and beginning of 1940s. The Georgian population of Abkhazia, as well as other ethnical groups living there, also suffered. Thus, it was the universal tragedy, and not a genocide of the Abkhaz people organized by Stalin-Beria leadership of Georgia, as it is claimed by Stanislav Lakoba (**Lakoba S., 1990: 91**) and other ideologists of Abkhaz separatism. This "accusation" is one of the central points in their anti-Georgian propaganda. Unfortunately, lately some foreign scholars backed them up.

We have to especially mention certain German scholars, who first prepared and published materials (in two volumes) on the Bolshevik terror in Georgia (**Bolshevik order, 1, 2015; Bolshevik order, 2, 2015**) and then the general work on Georgia (**Georgia on Its Way, 2017**). Without exaggeration these publications (especially the 3rd volume) are the ideological diversion against Georgia. They are subversive in their sense and serve the Russian imperial scenario of discrediting Georgia. It is enough to mention the clear suggestion that the Georgian state is not ready to take its place in the Euro-Atlantic family, which is made in the prologue. The authors have doubts that the "non-stable economic situation" and, first of all, the "nationalistic tendencies" which make "questionable" the strengthening of "Western values." Moreover, the authors state that they decided to add the third volume to their research on the "Great Terror" of 1937-1938 because of the

“alarming aspects of the nationalistic tendencies” in Georgia (**Georgia on Its Way, 2017: 10**).¹

§3. The Myth of the Georgian Attempt to Eradicate the Ethno-Cultural Individuality of the Abkhaz People at the end of the 1930s and in the 1940s

The Abkhaz historians’ insinuations regarding the Abkhazian alphabet script and school education reform represent one of the most outrageous examples of falsifying the historical reality and, on the basis of this falsification, creating another myth. They declare that the change of the script and the abolition of the so-called “Abkhazian school” were the attempt to eradicate the ethno-cultural individuality of the Abkhaz people. They want to declare the decisions of the central government of the Soviet Union as the local initiative of the Georgian leadership, which was directed against the Abkhaz people. In reality, the opposite had happened.

The new Constitution of the Soviet Union adopted at the 8th Congress on 5 December 1936 marked the changes happening in the country, especially, in its federative structure. The so-called Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic was abolished and Georgian, Armenian, and Azerbaijan SSR were directly incorporated into the USSR. At the same time, the leadership of the Communist party and the Soviet state took steps to elevate the status of the so-called “union republics.” That was why they decided to change the script of the so-called “small nations” and base the alphabets of the languages of the peoples of autonomous republics on the script of the corresponding Soviet republics.

Since the 1990s, the new works were dedicated to the analysis of the official documents of the Soviet government and the party leadership. We should especially mention the publications of Grigol Lezhava, the known scholar of the 20th c. history of Abkhazia, and single out his thorough research on the historical roots of Georgian-Abkhaz confrontation and the role of Russia in inspiring the conflict. Based on the relevant data, he shows the essence of the script reform and the ineptitude of the demagogic charges of the Abkhaz separatists towards official Tbilisi (**Lezhava, 1997**).

The transition of the Abkhazian alphabet to Georgian script never was the initiative of Georgian government. It was the expression of the Kremlin policy of russification of dozens of “small nations” living in RSFSR via the unification of their alphabets using the Cyrillic letters. In the 1920s the Soviet government conducted the reform of their writing systems and based their scripts on Latin alphabet (See: **Yakovlev, 1936: 26-38**). The Abkhazian script also underwent this change in 1926 (**Bgazhba, Kh., 1967: 58-59; Gvantse-ladze, 2012; Gvantse-ladze, 2000: 83**). Soon, the official Moscow found that this act con-

¹ The Georgian historians criticized the biased approaches of German scholars both during the preparation and after the publication of these volumes and proved the groundlessness of those statements (See: **Bolshevik order, 1, 2015: 375-551; Georgia on Its Way, 2017: 19-110, 123-158; Gamakharia, 2017**).

tradicted its imperial desires, since it hindered the process of getting those nations in the area of Russian literacy. Thus, in 1936 it was decided to correct the “error” made in 1922 and began the new reform of the “small nations” alphabets. In 1941 this process was finished and the Latin-based alphabets were transitioned to the Cyrillic script (**Gvantse-ladze, 2012; Gvantse-ladze, 2000: 83**). Although, formally the decision was that the alphabets would be transitioned to the scripts of corresponding republics, but in reality the Cyrillic script was used in nearly all cases. The exception was only Georgian SSR, but not because of J. Stalin. The real reason was that Georgia was the only Soviet republic with original alphabet. The other Soviet republics with autonomies – Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan – did not have original alphabets. Moreover, their alphabets were also based on the Cyrillic script.

That was the real reason of changing the Abkhazian alphabet’s Latin script with the Georgian one. The situation with the Ossetian language was even more interesting. In the South Ossetian Autonomous District it was transitioned to the Georgian alphabet, while in the North Ossetian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, which was part of RSFSR, the Latin script was replaced with Cyrillic. Thus, the same language had two different scripts in two different republics (officially, “states”) of the Soviet Union.

The preparation for the reform in Abkhazia started in 1937, after the decision of the 15th Conference of Abkhazian Organization of Georgian Communist Party to transition the Abkhazian alphabet to Georgian script. *Dimitri Gulia, Arsen Khashba, Dimitri Chagava, Mushni Khashba, Mikheil Delba*, the well-known representatives of the Abkhaz intelligentsia, were “ecstatic” with this decision and supported it unanimously (**Lezhava, 1997: 115-116**). The extremely interesting material, namely the protocols of the discussion held in the Institute of Abkhazian Culture by Nikolai Marr regarding the preparation of the reform, can be found in the personal archive of Simon Janashia, the famous Georgian historian. This material was published by Teimuraz Gvantse-ladze, the known scholar of Abkhazian language (**Protocols, 2011**). The meeting took place in Sokhumi on 4-5 December 1937. There were eight Georgian, four Russian, and 21 Abkhaz scholars among 33 participants. The Abkhazs were represented by their elite scholars like *Simon Basaria, Khukhuti Bgashba, Nikoloz Geria, Dimitri Gulia, Giorgi Gulia, Mikheil Delba, Bagrat Katsia, Nikoloz Pateipa, Giorgi Shakirbai, Konstantin Shakril, Platon Shakril, Giorgi Dzidzaria, Kondrat Dzidzaria, Andrey Chochua, Mushni Khashba*, and others (**Gvantse-ladze, 2012; Gvantse-ladze, 2000: 83**). It was during this meeting that the participants had worked out the document, which became the basis for the script reform (**Gvantse-ladze, 2012; Gvantse-ladze, 2000: 88-89**).

Although there were several participants of the discussion (Simon Basaria, Konstantin Shakril, Platon Shakril, etc.), who never liked any expression of Georgian-Abkhaz unity, the idea of transitioning the Abkhazian alphabet to Georgian script met no objections. Of course, the absence of opposition can be explained by the then-existing political situation, but it does not change the fact that the transition of the Abkhazian language from

Latin to Georgian script in 1938 took place with the unanimous consent of the Abkhaz intellectuals. Thus, all the statements from the Abkhaz historians and politicians that this act was aiming the eradication of ethnical identity of the Abkhazs, are completely false. These blatant lies have the only goal of inspiring the anti-Georgian attitude among the Abkhazs.

Meanwhile, the absence of the opposition can be also explained by the simple fact that the Georgian script had superiority over the Cyrillic one regarding the Caucasian languages. It was acknowledged even by those Russian high administrators, who participated in the creation of the Abkhaz alphabet in imperial times. Gen. Peter von Uslar, the known Caucasiologist, linguist, and ethnographer, underscored that the Georgian script was the most suitable for the Caucasian languages that did not have an alphabet. Nevertheless, the imperial administration chose the Cyrillic script. The same Gen. von Uslar openly stated that using the Georgian script would cause significant “troubles” for spreading the Russian literacy in the Caucasus (**Uslar, 1887: 48-49; Sikharulidze, 2006**). Evgeniy Veidenbaum, the other Russian ethnographer, openly stated that the restriction of the Georgian language and Georgian script were the main reasons of creating the Abkhaz alphabet. He said that “*the Abkhaz language, which has no literature, is destined to vanish in the close or distant future,*” and that it had to be the Russian, not Georgian, the language of culture and education among the Abkhazs. According to E. Veidenbaum, “*the creation of the Abkhaz script was not the aim, but the means of weakening the need for the Georgian language and replacing it with the state language through the church and school*” (**Inal-ipa, 1965: 163-164; Anchabadze Z., 1976: 119-120**). Thus, it does not need a lot of thinking to figure out, which script was more suitable for the Abkhaz language from the scholarly viewpoint and which alphabet was intended for the “*depriving of individuality*” («обезличивание») of the Abkhaz people.

Along with the transition of the Abkhazian alphabet to Georgian script, the Abkhaz separatists are blaming Georgians for the abolishment of the “Abkhaz national schools.” According to them, the transformation of those schools into Georgian ones was aimed at eradicating the Abkhaz ethnical identity. This reform began from the 1945-1946 school year and was based on the party institutions’ decisions. The Abkhazian ASSR and Georgian SSR party leadership adopted resolutions “*On the improvement of the Quality of Teaching and Education in the Schools of Abkhazian ASSR*” on 13 March 1945 and 23 June 1945 (**Lakoba S., 1990: 93**).

It is worth mentioning that the reform was covering only the so-called “Abkhaz schools” (the Russian schools continued their functioning without any changes). Meanwhile, those schools were Abkhaz only in name. It is well-known that teaching in the Abkhazian language was conducted only in the primary school (1st-4th grades), while beginning from the 5th grade the pupils were taught in Russian. Therefore, those schools were Russian in reality. As a result, several generations were not able to study the official state

language of their Soviet republic – Georgian SSR. It is easy to figure out that this was a continuation of the policy first adopted in the Russian Empire. The main goal of that policy was to break the historical-cultural unity between the Georgians and the Abkhazs and speed up the russification of the latter. At the same time, the leadership of the Georgian SSR is not the one to be blamed for making this reform. Although the separatists state that it was the Georgian initiative, the available data clearly shows that the school reform was born in Kremlin. Moreover, it should be mentioned that both Tbilisi and Sokhumi had postponed that reform for several years. According to the decisions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR, adopted in 1937-1938, the Soviet government issued the resolutions on transforming the national schools into “*the Soviet (i.e. Russian – Z.P.) schools of the usual type.*” The language of teaching should be “*either the one of the relevant union republic or Russian*” (Lezhava, 1997: 111-112). Those resolutions should be implemented and the reorganization of the schools should be finished before the beginning of the 1938-1939 school year. The People’s Commissars of Education of the corresponding union Republics were responsible for the implementation of those resolutions (Lezhava, 1997: 112).

Despite the direct order, the Georgian leadership, unlike other republics, did not conduct the school reform in Abkhazia in the 1930s. Nevertheless, they had to obey the next time when the Soviet government returned to this issue. On 9 January 1945 the special commission was created. It elaborated the recommendations, which were followed during the school reform in Abkhazia (Lezhava, 1997: 134-135). It should be also mentioned that the representatives of the Abkhaz intelligentsia, first of all, well-known Abkhaz pedagogues like Bagrat Katsia and Nikoloz Geria, supported the decision to change the language of education to Georgian (Lezhava, 1997: 133). Along with them, party officials and known scholars like Mikheil Delba (later the Chairman of Council of Ministers of Abkhazian ASSR) and Andrey Chochua (Director of Abkhazian Scientific-Research Institute of Georgian Academy of Sciences) actively participated in the preparation of school reform. Of course, it is possible that this “enthusiasm” from the Abkhazs was “ordered” from the high circles, but there were no objections at that time.

The first protest against the reform happened in February 1947, when Constantine Shakril, Bagrat Shinkuba, and Giorgi Dzidzaria, three young scholars of the Abkhazian Scientific-Research Institute by Nikolai Marr, wrote a letter to the Central Committee of CPSU (Abkhazia in the Soviet, 1994: 81-87). Moscow sent the letter to Tbilisi, to the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party. There it was decided that the complaint would be studied by Petre Sharia, the philosopher and the Secretary of Central Committee on Ideology. P. Sharia came to Abkhazia, studied the question, concluded that there were no irregularities, and summed up his findings in the report to Kandid Charkviani, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of Georgian Communist Party (Lezhava, 1997: 126). On 2 August 1947 the authors of the complaint were summoned to the Ab-

khazian Regional Committee of Georgian Communist Party, where P. Sharia advised them to renounce their letter. The scholars agreed and prepared the so-called “avowal.” It is safe to say that this “repentance” saved them from the party punishment the least.

There is one more topic used for the zombification of the Abkhaz society, namely the so-called “mass migration of Georgians” to Abkhazia in 1939-1953. Mainly it is tied up with the organized migration of the Western Georgian population from the regions damaged by the earthquake in 1940s. The Abkhaz separatists consider this process, which was initiated by the central government of the Soviet Union (**Decree №1447, 1939: 22-23**), as Georgian Communist leadership’s purposeful action aimed at the Kartvelization of Abkhazia.

In Georgian historiography (and in this work too), based on the relevant sources, it is clearly shown that the Georgian population was in majority on the territory of the present-day Abkhazia from the ancient times till the 20th century. Thus, any claims of certain Abkhaz historians and politicians that the Georgians became the ethnic majority in Abkhazia only after the so-called “organized mass settlement” in the 1930s-1940s, have nothing in common with the reality. It is the falsification of history. At the same time, if not the great tragedy of the Abkhaz nation, which was inspired by the Russian Empire, the number of the Abkhazs would be larger in the 1930s-1940s. Of course, when the part of the Abkhaz population left their homes in the 1860s-1870s and migrated to Ottoman Empire to mark their protest against the Russian governance, the representatives of other nations – Russian, Armenians, Greeks, Georgians (especially, from Western Georgia), took their place. This was a natural process. The only question is why the Abkhazs are so frustrated with Georgians migrating to the part of their own country? **Abkhazian ASSR was a part of Georgian SSR officially, and it was one state.** There is no logic in declaring as a crime the migration from one part of the country to another. Moreover, in the USSR **everyone was the citizen of the Soviet Union**, and not of Georgian SSR or Abkhazian ASSR. Thus, **any Soviet citizen could change the living place** (with some restrictions applied to the cities, because of the need for registration) **and move there.** The “organized settlement” (we are not meaning the forceful deportation of some nations, which were declared as “criminals”) was also common and it happened not only in Abkhazia, but in the other parts of the Soviet Union too. Usually it was motivated by the economic needs. We can remember Kazakhstan, where hundreds of thousands of Russians were settled in order to work on the virgin soils. The great masses of the Russian population were settled in different national republics when building the industrial giant factories. This was the situation in Georgia too, where the Russian settlements arose in Zugdidi, Tsalendjikha, and Gali regions during the process of building the Enguri hydro-electrical station and Enguri paper industrial complex.

It is strange that the Abkhaz separatists are always worrying about the migration of tens of thousands of Georgians to Abkhazia and never talk about the increase of the Rus-

sian and Armenian populations. Meanwhile, **the number of Russians in Abkhazia had increased nearly 62 times from 1886 to 1989** /there were 1216 Russians according to the 1886 census and 74913 according to the 1989 census/, and **the number of Armenians had increased 70 times** /1090 Armenians according to the 1886 census and 76514 according to the 1989 census/ (**Population of Abkhazia, 2021**). What was the “harm” of the Georgian “migrants”? Maybe, the fact that they transformed the desolated regions into blooming places.

Today everyone knows who the real creators of material wealth in Abkhazia were. For the second time, the Abkhazs are tested by history. The first occasion was in the 16th-17th centuries when the highland tribes of the Jiko-Abkhazs with “barbarian” mentality destroyed the flourishing country of Georgians and Abkhazs with its developed economy and Christian culture. Meanwhile, the former Georgians, who gradually became Abkhazs, actually initiated the national and cultural self-awareness of the present-day Abkhazs. It is impossible to doubt the Georgian (Megrelian) roots of five founders of the Abkhaz intellectual elite. They were: **Dimitri Gulia**, the founder of the Abkhaz national literature and one of the creators of Abkhaz alphabet; **Ivan Papaskiri**, the patriarch of the Abkhaz prose; **Iua Koghonia**, the Abkhaz poet; **Andrey Chochua**, well-known Abkhaz scholar and pedagogue; **Giorgi Dzidzaria**, the famous Abkhaz historian. Of course, there were many others, who took part in the development of Abkhaz culture and science, but these five persons gave the special impulse to the formation of the national and cultural identity of the Abkhazs. Such is the Georgian “reinforcement” to the Abkhaz people.

CHAPTER XI. THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SITUATION IN ABKHAZIA FROM THE 1950S TO THE BEGINNING OF THE 1990S

§1. The Separatist Protests in Abkhazia in the 1950s-1970s

The death of *Joseph Stalin* in March 1953 and later the disappearance of *Lavrenti Beria* from the political stage created a new situation in the Soviet Union. *Nikita Khrushchev* and the leadership of the CPSU pretended to start the dismantling of the Stalinist system. The campaign was launched to “correct the mistakes” made during the periods of cult of personality and the so-called “*Berievshchina*.” The school reform in Abkhazia and the transition of Abkhaz alphabet to the Georgian script were declared examples of such mistakes. In 1954 the Abkhaz alphabet was transitioned to Cyrillic script. The so-called “Abkhaz” schools were “restored” and returned to the situation existing till 1945, meaning that the teaching in the primary school was in Abkhaz, but beginning from the 5th grade it was conducted in Russian. As *Grigol Lezhava* correctly states, it meant the “*reanimation of the previous tendencies of russification of the Abkhaz population*” (**Lezhava, 1997: 150**).

The 20th Congress of CPSU and the protest of the Georgian youth during the tragic days of March 1956, which ended with the massacre organized by the Soviet leadership (see in detail: **Georgia after Stalin, 2016**), gave a new impulse to the anti-Georgian mood in Abkhazia. The separatist forces started to send letters to Moscow and criticize the national policy of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party. Moreover, the Abkhazs openly demanded “*to punish the organizers and active participants of the nationalist demonstrations in Georgian and Abkhazia on 5-9 March*” (**Lezhava, 1997: 157**). The frustration of the Abkhaz separatist was not incidental. They were afraid of the enthusiasm with which the Georgians (especially youngsters) living in Abkhazia responded to the events in Tbilisi.

The separatist forces became more active as *Nikita Khrushchev* further strengthened his positions in the party leadership of the Soviet Union. Their decisive attack was launched in 1957 and they used the publication of *Pavle Ingorokva's “Giorgi Merchule”* as a pretext (**Ingorokva, 1954**). As it was already mentioned, *P. Ingorokva* stated in his book that the contemporary Abkhazs were not the descendants of the “*Abazgoi*”-“*Apsilae*” and the “*Abkhazs*” of the Late Antique Period and Medieval times, and that the “*Abkhazs*” of the older times ethnically belonged to the Kartvelian world. On 11 April 1957 the Abkhaz Communist leadership and the representatives of the Abkhaz intelligentsia sent telegrams addressed to *Nikita Khrushchev*, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of CPSU, and other party or state institutions like the Central Committee of CPSU and the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Those telegrams contained the demand to separate Abkhazian ASSR from the Georgian SSR (**Lezhava, 1997: 1166**). At the same time, on 11-13 April the unrests began in Sokhumi. Certain groups of the Abkhazs surrounded the building of the Regional

Committee of the Communist Party. The Abkhaz students of the *Sokhumi State Pedagogic Institute* and Pedagogic College stopped their studies. Some representatives of the Abkhaz intelligentsia went to the villages and summoned them to the protest demonstrations (**Lezhava, 1997: 166-167**). Thus, the background of a “total disobedience” was created. The Georgian leadership of the Communist Party immediately reacted to these actions and held the session of the Bureau of Central Committee, which declared incorrect any discussions on the issues doubting the historical past of the Abkhaz people. At the same time, the Bureau of the Central Committee of Georgian SSR expressed its discontent that the Abkhazian Regional Committee of the Georgian Communist Party was not able to contain the anti-social actions of certain hostile elements (**Lezhava, 1997: 167-168**).

The Abkhazian Regional Committee of the Georgian Communist Party held its session on 15-16 April 1957, agreed to the decisions of the Bureau of the Central Committee of Georgian SSR and declared them as “obligatory to fulfilment” (**Lezhava, 1997: 169**). The decisions of the Central Committee of the Georgian SSR and the Abkhazian Regional Committee appeased the political situation to the certain degree in the autonomous republic and stabilized it. This was the end of the first “total revolt of the Abkhazians.”

The separatist forces in Abkhazia had chosen the correct moment for their actions against the official Tbilisi. The Abkhazs used the Kremlin anger towards the Georgians because of their “anti-Soviet unrests” of 5-9 March 1956. Their letters and telegrams “added fuel to the fire” and gave an additional impulse to the anti-Georgian hysteria in Moscow. G. Lezhava correctly states that under the pretext of “correcting the mistakes of the Stalinist leadership” the fertile soil was created for the restoration of the nationalist movement in Abkhazia (**Lezhava, 1997: 155**). At the same time, we should stress upon the capitulatory attitude of the Georgian Communist leadership, which from the very beginning defined the actions of the Georgian side as a “mistake” and punished only Georgian participants of this discord. The Georgian Communist leadership reaped the results of its actions ten years later, in 1967, when the new anti-Georgian unrest began in Abkhazia.

The ideologists of the Abkhaz separatist movement once again used the scholarly publications, which, from their viewpoint, represented the falsified history of the Abkhazs, as a pretext for the next wave of nationalist hysteria. The symptoms of the “all-around” protests first were expressed in 1965 when the separatists “anathematized” *“The Bzipi Dialect of the Abkhazian Language,”* the book of *Khukhuti Bgazhba*, the known Abkhaz philologist, linguist, and literary specialist (**Bgazhba, Kh., 1964**). The Abkhaz separatists alleged that some Abkhaz surnames were not explained correctly in the book. Because of the “committed sins,” Khukhuti Bgazhba was dismissed from the position of Director of Institute of Abkhazian Language, Literature and History by Dimitri Gulia.

In 1966 the 3rd volume of famous Georgian historian Niko Berdzenishvili’s works was published in Tbilisi. It contained his essay *“A small Remark on the Big Issue”* (**Berdzenishvili, 1966a**). The Abkhaz separatists saw the denial of Abkhazs’ ethnical individuality

in some statements given in this essay and protested against them. In reality, the essay did not deal with the ethnic issues at all and the author was just talking about their “*historical and cultural*” belongingness to the Kartvelian world. Moreover, in the second part of the essay, where N. Berdzenishvili was assessing the person of Kelesh-Bey Sharvashidze, he refers to the “*present-day Abkhazs as a kindred nation to the Georgians*” (see in detail: **Papaskiri, 2007:** 161-164; **Papaskiri, 2010:** 284-287).

The unrest started when the Abkhaz students from Tbilisi higher education institutes sent the letters of complaints to Sokhumi (**Kvarchia, 2020:** 110-112). Those letters were addressed both to their relatives and the official structures of the autonomous republic. The complaints were answered by the students of Sokhumi State Pedagogical Institute and the research fellows of Institute of Abkhazian Language, Literature and History by Dimitri Gulia (**Kvarchia, 2020:** 117-149).

Despite the fact that the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party declared the publication of N. Berdzenishvili’s book and some other researches on 31 March 1967 as a mistake (**Lezhava, 1997:** 177-182), about 400 Abkhazs surrounded the building of Abkhazian Regional Committee of the Georgian Communist Party on 7 April. Later they went to the Summer Theatre and occupied it. The “mutineers” were not satisfied with the results of meeting with the leadership of the autonomous republic and they demanded the involvement of the official Moscow. They prepared the letter to the Central Committee of CPSU and once again demanded the secession of the Abkhazian ASSR from the Georgian SSR and its transformation into the “independent” Soviet Republic (**Kvarchia, 2020:** 145-146; **Lezhava, 1997:** 172). On 10 April the document was ready. The letter had to be delivered by the delegation headed by *Tamara Shakril*, the docent of Sokhumi State Pedagogical Institute (**Kvarchia, 2020:** 146-147; **Lezhava, 1997:** 172-173).

The separatist delegation came to Moscow by train from Adler. They demanded the meeting either with one of the secretaries of the Central Committee of CPSU or with *Alexei Kosygin*, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union. Their attempt failed and they were forced to leave the “documents” in the reception of the Central Committee of CPSU and return to Sokhumi (**Lezhava, 1997:** 174-175). Meanwhile, the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party took some measures to defuse the tension. On 12 April 1967, after the end of the session of Georgian SSR’s Supreme Soviet, the special meeting was held with the deputies from Abkhazia. During this meeting “*the actions of certain representatives of the Abkhazian intelligentsia*” were condemned (**Lezhava, 1997:** 182). On 18 April the body of active party functionaries gathered and also condemned the “illegal gathering” of the Abkhazs on 7-9 April. They also addressed the party, Soviet, Komsomol, and labour union organizations and appealed them “*to strengthen the labour and state discipline, and express their intransigence towards any kind of breach of Soviet order and Socialist law*” (**Lezhava, 1997:** 186).

Despite some strict assessments given by the party leadership to the new “revolt” of the Abkhazs, the separatists did not consider themselves as losers. Moreover, the personnel changes conducted by the Georgian SSR’s party leadership gave them hope to some degree and created a background for the further strengthening of their positions. The members of Abkhaz nomenclature who were the organizers of the “revolt,” were not punished at all. The influence of *Valerian Kobakhia*, the First Secretary of the Abkhazian Regional Committee, and *Bagrat Shinkuba*, the Chairman of Presidium of Abkhazian SSR’s Supreme Soviet, had even increased. Only *Tamara Shakril* was dismissed from the Sokhumi State Pedagogic Institute, although she was transferred to the research position in the Institute of Abkhazian Language, Literature and History by Dimitri Gulia. Meanwhile, some repressive measures were taken against the Georgian members of party nomenclature. Thus, one more precedent of punishing only Georgians was created. This emboldened the separatist ideologists, who did not miss any pretext to demonstrate their “readiness to fight” (**Lezhava, 1997: 186-192**).

1970s marked the new wave of tension in Abkhazia. In 1972 *Eduard Shevardnadze* became the leader of Georgian SSR and started to change the old party elite. This process affected Abkhazia too. E. Shevardnadze was able to replace *Valerian Kobakhia* with *Valeri Khintba* on the position of the First Secretary of the Abkhazian Regional Committee. This frustrated the separatist circles in Abkhazia. They considered it as the continuation of Stalin’s and Beria’s policy. Nevertheless, they did not immediately revolt and waited for the pretext to start the new unrest. Such pretext soon presented itself when the discussion began regarding the new book of *Shalva Inal-ipa*, the Deputy Director of Institute of Abkhazian Language, Literature and History by Dimitri Gulia. This book was dedicated to the Abkhazs’ ethnical and cultural history (**Inal-ipa, 1976**). Sh. Inal-ipa enjoyed great authority among the separatists, who were finding historiographical proof of some kind regarding the necessity of creating the independent Abkhaz state in his books. While such hints were a little bit bleak in the previous publications and because of this the Georgian scholars did not express their protest openly, in the new publication the author declared Abkhazs as “one and the only aboriginal population” of Abkhazia.

Sh. Inal-ipa’s this and other “findings” (the linguistic questions were also covered with a biased approach) were followed by critical reaction from the Georgian historians and philologists. They presented their reviews but the Georgian Communist leadership abstained from their publishing. Instead of it, they charged the Abkhazian Regional Committee of Georgian Communist Party with organizing the discussion. The dispute took place in Sokhumi, namely in the Institute of Abkhazian Language, Literature and History by Dimitri Gulia of Georgian Academy of Sciences in March 1977. During the discussion practically everyone heavily criticized Sh. Inal-ipa’s book. We should especially mention Prof. *Zurab Anchabadze*, the Rector of Sokhumi State Pedagogical Institute, who spoke for nearly 1,5 hours and proved the fallacy of Sh. Inal-ipa’s main postulates. Z. Anchabadze

was joined in Sh. Inal-ipa's criticism by Prof. *Giorgi Dzidzaria*, Director of the Institute of Abkhazian Language, Literature and History, Prof. *Khukhuti Bgazhba*, and others. Z. Anchabadze and G. Dzidzaria prepared the account of the discussion which was simultaneously published by all three official newspapers ("*Sovetskaya Abkhazia*," "*Sabchota Abkhazeti*," and "*Apsny Kapsh*") of the autonomous republic on 14 May 1977 (for the Russian text see: **Abkhazia in the Soviet, 2009**: 54-59; **Papaskiri, 2012**: 586-592. For details see: **Papaskiri, 2012**: 20-23). The criticism of Sh. Inal-ipa's book given in that account angered the separatist circles. This marked the beginning of their revival, which became evident at the end of 1977.

The time of new unrest was not incidental. On 7 October 1977 the new Constitution of the Soviet Union was adopted and there began the work on the constitutions of Soviet and autonomous republics. The leaders of the separatists wrote another letter of complaint on 10 December 1977 and addressed it to *Leonid Brezhnev*, the Secretary General of the Central Committee of CPSU and the Chairman of Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of USSR, and *Mikhail Yasnov*, Chairman of Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of RSFSR (**Abkhazia in the Soviet, 1994**: 164-187).

The letter of complaint was signed by the representatives of the Abkhaz intelligentsia and it repeated the accusations which were made periodically from 1950s. At the same time, it also included one new postulate. The separatists considered it as a discrimination that the autonomous republics, unlike the Soviet republics, could not leave the union republic, and demanded this right. They also reminded the Soviet leadership that the Abkhazian Revolutionary Committee asked to include Abkhazia in RSFSR in 1921. (That was the reason because of which Mikhail Yasnov was one of the addressees of this complaint.) The Central Committee of CPSU refused to deal with this letter of complaint and sent it to the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party and its Abkhazian Regional Committee. This caused the anger of the separatists who sent numerous telegrams to the highest authorities of the Soviet Union. Despite this, the political leaderships of Georgian SSR and Abkhazian ASSR took principled attitude towards the destructive actions of the authors of complaint (**Lezhava, 1997**: 194). Moreover, *Alexei Jenia* (the editor of "*Alashara*" magazine), *Yuri Argun* (Director of Abkhazian State Museum), and *L. Akhuba* (the deputy editor of newspaper "*Bzyp*") were expelled from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (**Lezhava, 1997**: 204).

The bold decisions of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party caused irritation in official Moscow. The Soviet leadership decided to show that the last word in dealing with Abkhazia belonged to Moscow. E. Shevardnadze and his team were not able to hold ground and made some concessions. V. Khintba was dismissed from his position. The expelled members were reinstated in the CPSU. Nevertheless, the separatists did not succeed in getting the main prize. *Boris Adleiba* became the First Secretary of the Abkhazian Regional Committee. Georgian population of Abkhazia was regarding him as positively as V. Khintba.

On 21 May 1978 active party functionaries of the Abkhazian ASSR gathered in Sokhumi and discussed the questions concerning the new Constitution of the autonomous republic. *Ivan Kapitonov*, the Secretary of the Central Committee of CPSU, gave a lengthy speech there. He categorically denied the possibility of Abkhazia's seceding from Georgia and becoming the union republic. He also considered giving the autonomous republics the right to leave their union republic as legally impossible (**Lezhava, 1997: 195**). I. Kapitonov repeated those postulates before the separatist protesters who held a demonstration on Lenin's Square in Sokhumi. Those statements angered the separatists so much that they forced him to stop his speech. The protesters refused to listen to Eduard Shevardnadze too. The tension grew. E. Shevardnadze and I. Kapitonov had had to leave the place. Nevertheless, the Supreme Soviet of the Abkhazian SSR "unanimously" adopted the new constitution and there was no mentioning of the possibility to secede from the Georgian SSR in it. The second demand of the separatists also was not met and the Georgian remained as one of the official languages (along with the Abkhazian and Russian) of the autonomous republic. Despite this, the conflict did not end.

The situation became tense once again in the Autumn of 1978. This time the separatists were angered with the fact that Georgian *Iuza Ubilava* was appointed as a Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the autonomous republic. Beginning from the Spring of 1978, the Abkhaz separatists demanded that all three highest positions in the autonomous republic – First Secretary of the Regional Committee of the Georgian Communist Party, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, and Chairman of the Council of the Ministers – had to be filled by the people of Abkhaz origin. Thus, they were just abusing the Georgians, who were not only the 43% of the population in the autonomous republic (in contrast, the Abkhazs were just 17% of the population), but also had much higher percentage of the members of the Communist Party. Despite this, the Georgians never used their superiority in numbers and did not demand to appoint the Georgian to the position of the First Secretary of the Regional Committee, who was holding the real power in the autonomous republic. The Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, which was officially the highest position of the autonomous republic, was also always "elected" from the Abkhazs. The Georgians were confined with the chairmanship of the Council of the Ministers, but the separatists did not want to give even this position to them. They wanted to get control over all the branches of power (as a rule, the Chairman of the Supreme Court of Abkhazian ASSR was also an Abkhaz in the 1960s-1970s) and establish their ethnical dictate in the autonomous republic. The separatists had already chosen their candidate for the chairmanship of the Council of the Ministers. It was *Valerian Kobakhia*, whose dismissal from the position of the First Secretary of the Abkhazian Regional Committee of the Georgian Communist Party in 1975 they considered as unjust. The separatists wanted the political rehabilitation of their leader, which would increase their popularity.

From 25 September to 2 October the protests took place in the cities and district centres (Sokhumi, Gudauta, Tkvarcheli, and Gagra), as well as in some villages. Part of the roads were blocked and some shops stopped to work. The Abkhaz students of the Sokhumi State Pedagogical Institute stopped attending their lectures. They were inspired by their professors and lecturers who were the chief organizers of the protests (See: **Paspakiri, 2012:** 24-27). Nevertheless, the separatists had to retreat. They were not able to repeat their success of May 1978, when, because of the protest from national-separatists, the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party changed its decision and replaced the newly-appointed Georgian *Galaktion Natchkebia* with the Abkhaz *Astiko Gvaramia* on the position of the First Secretary of Gagra Regional Committee. This unprecedented event in the organizational activities of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union marked the weakness of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party and its leader E. Shevardnadze. In the Autumn of 1978 the Abkhaz separatists failed in removing Iuza Ubilava. Nevertheless, they still got a concession from the official Tbilisi, which agreed on Valerian Kobakhia's political rehabilitation. He replaced *Bagrat Shinkuba* on the position of Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and once again became the leading political figure of the Abkhaz elite. The separatist ideologists considered this as their win and it was not a groundless thinking.

The Georgian political leadership, fearing the new complications in Abkhazia, was conceding the initiative. The separatists used this opportunity and strengthened their positions. Their main weapon was the joint decree of the Central Committee of CPSU and the Council of the Ministers of the Soviet Union "*On the Measures for Further Development of Economics and Culture in Abkhazian ASSR*" (**Abkhazia in the Soviet, 1994:** 275-278). This decree was practically identical to the decree of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party "*On the Measures for Further Development of Economics and Culture in Abkhazian ASSR and Strengthening the Organizing, Ideological, and Educational Activities among the Workers of Autonomous Republic*" (**Abkhazia in the Soviet, 1994:** 279-286). The fact that the joint decree omitted the need for the "strengthening the organizing, ideological, and educational activities among the workers of autonomous republic" meant that official Moscow was not going to pay attention to the nationalist propaganda of the so-called "*Underground Regional Committee.*" Thus, Moscow was putting all the responsibility on official Tbilisi. It also made ground to think that the actions of the separatists were justified, their demands were constitutional, and there were no problems in the sphere of "ideological education" in Abkhazia.

§2. The Political Processes in Abkhazia in the 1980s and the Beginning of the 1990s

The first half of the 1980s was marked with the frequent changes among the political leadership of the Soviet Union. Against this background, the political life became more active in the whole country. Abkhazia was no exception. The separatist forces began their

preparations for the new campaigns. Meanwhile, Mikhail Gorbachev, the new and energetic leader of the Soviet Union, launched his new political course of "Perestroika." It meant not only the refusal from the outdated dogmas of the Socialist doctrine in the economics, but the liberalization of the social and political life and the establishment of the democratic values. The main achievement of Perestroika and Glasnost was the freedom of speech, which gave the opportunity to discuss openly the problems. It quickly became evident that the "triumph" of "Leninist national policy" was a myth and self-delusion, and that the "national question" was not solved in the Soviet Union. The politics of Glasnost gave impetus to the democratic renovation and it spread over all the circles of society. The dissident groups became more active; the national movement started in the union republics. Georgia, the Baltic states, and Moldova were in the vanguard of this movement. The informal organizations – the Popular Fronts – had been formed. The rising national movement in Georgia did not hide that its main goal was achieving state independence. The chief slogan of this struggle was *Ilia Chavchavadze's* motto "*Motherland, Language, Religion.*"

The revival of the national movement in Georgia frightened the Abkhaz separatists, since it covered not only the centre, but the regions too. The Georgian population of autonomous republic, which previously was not politically active, started to raise its voice. The local regional organizations of the informal Georgian entities were formed. The most notable among them was the *Abkhazian Organization of Ilia Chavchavadze Society*. The Georgian students, especially the ones of the Abkhazian State University, actively participated in the all-Georgian national movement.

The Abkhazs answered with the new wave of the anti-Georgian campaign. The separatist propaganda was totally based on the Pharisaic slogans of defending the "*holy principles of the Leninist national policy*" and the invincibility of the Soviet state. Of course, the official Moscow quickly answered the "heroic efforts" of the Abkhazs to defend their "Soviet motherland" and provided them with the "intellectual" assistance. The advisors from Moscow helped their "Abkhaz comrades" to elaborate the so-called "Abkhaz Letter," which was sent to the Presidium of the 19th Conference of CPSU. They also added as an annex the goals of the so-called "national-liberation movement." Naturally, the "Abkhaz Letter" never became a subject of discussion at the conference. The centre this time decided to conduct the local explanatory activities with the representatives of the Abkhaz intelligentsia and workers' collectives (**Abkhazia in the Soviet, 1994: 383; Lezhava, 1997: 32, 217**).

The situation soon changed. The anti-imperial protests of the Georgian youth (first of all, the November 1988 protests in Tbilisi¹) caused the anxiety in the Kremlin. Moscow

¹ In November 1988 the large-scale protest demonstration started in Tbilisi and quickly shook the Soviet Union. The protest was directed against the intended changes in the Soviet Constitution, which was significantly restricting the sovereignty of the union republics. The protests

“remembered” the Abkhaz claims to Tbilisi (**Chervonnaya, 1993: 60**) and took steps for the creation of the strong anti-Georgian front in Abkhazia. The group of Abkhaz intelligentsia, with the support of governmental circles, first of all, from the functionaries of the Abkhazian Regional Committee of the Georgian Communist Party, stepped up and practically formed the first Abkhaz “national-patriotic” organization – *“The Popular Forum of Abkhazia – Aidgylara.”* On 13 December 1988 the first congress of *“The Popular Forum of Abkhazia”* adopted the program and statute of the organization (**Lezhava, 1997: 218**).

The new organization showed its aggressive anti-Georgian attitude from the very beginning. Besides, the leaders of *“Aidgylara”* demonstratively expressed their loyalty to the CPSU and the Soviet motherland. Since the Georgian national movement’s main goal was to demolish the Soviet empire and gain the state independence, “the conflict of interests” was unavoidable. The leaders of Georgian national movement understood it and attempted to find the ways of reconciling with the separatists. On 3 December 1988, even before the official foundation of *“Aidgylara,”* the Georgian informal organizations held a rally in Sokhumi. The leaders of Georgian national movement – *Merab Kostava, Zurab Tchavtchavadze, etc.* – addressed the Abkhaz brothers and called on them to build the united Georgian state where the Abkhazs would have all the means for the economic and cultural development and enjoy the new level of self-government. Nevertheless, they were not met adequately by the Abkhazs.

On 18 March 1989 the Abkhaz gathering was held in Likhni (village in Gudauta district). The party leadership of the autonomous republic, headed by *Boris Adleiba* and *Valerian Kobakhia*, was among the thousands of participants. The gathering adopted the draft of the *“Likhni Address of 18 March 1989”* to the Central Committee of CPSU, the Supreme Soviet, and the Council of the Ministers of the USSR, and *“The Resolution of the Abkhaz People”* (see: **Abkhazia in the Soviet, 1994: 452-463**). The separatists blamed the Georgians and Georgia for all their calamities in those documents. They claimed that the “Leninist national policy” was not followed in Georgia. The separatists demanded the immediate “correction” of the “tragic mistake” made in 1931 when the “independent” Abkhazian Soviet Socialist Republic, “without the consent from the Abkhaz people,” was transformed into an autonomous republic in the Georgian SSR. Thus, they wanted the secession of the Abkhazian ASSR from the Georgian SSR, which contradicted both the Constitution of the USSR and the Constitution of Georgian SSR. The documents were signed by all the party leaders of Abkhaz origins including B. Adleiba and V. Kobakhia. This

gradually grew into mass hunger strike. The Soviet leadership was frightened and rejected the idea of changing the constitution. This was the first significant victory of the Georgian national movement. The Kremlin response was swift. The official Moscow supported the creation of the separatist “national movements” in Abkhazia and so-called “South Ossetia,” where the anti-Georgian “popular fronts” – *“The Popular Forum of Abkhazia – Aidgylara /Unity/”* and *“Adamon Nikhas”* – were formed.

fact proved to be decisive in the further development of the events. The local Georgian population, which was not politically active beforehand, answered this demarche with an all-around protest.

The situation was aggravated by the fact that the elections of the People's Deputies of the Soviet Union had to be held on 26 March 1989. Meanwhile, on 25 March ten thousand Georgians gathered in Sokhumi. There were demonstrations in other towns and regional centres of Abkhazia on the same day. They were organized by the informal organizations. The protesters condemned the actions of the separatists and asked the Abkhazs not to betray the centuries-old historical Georgian-Abkhaz friendship and fraternity. Besides this, the protesters criticized the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party, its Abkhazian Regional Committee, and, most of all, the Kremlin imperial policy.

The separatists were frightened by the scale of the Georgian protest. Thus, they immediately concocted the new telegram of complaint addressed to *Mikhail Gorbachev*. They specifically underscored that the protesters in Sokhumi "*used the Menshevik symbols and anti-Soviet, anti-Russian, and anti-Abkhaz appeals.*" Besides this, they demanded the "immediate involvement" of the central government "to normalize the situation" in Abkhazia (**Lezhava, 1997: 226**). Such actions could no more stop the Georgian residents of Abkhazia and the new wave of protests followed. The largest among them was the protest rally in Leselidze on 1 April 1989. The participants gathered from all the districts of Abkhazia. When the students from Sokhumi were returning, their buses were twice attacked by the Abkhazs, first nearby village Bzipi, second at Akhali Atoni. As a result, up to 10 Georgian students were wounded or harmed physically. The attacks were coordinated by Konstantin Ozgan, the First Secretary of Gudauta Regional Committee of Georgian Communist Party.

The information about the attack on the buses of the Leselidze rally participants quickly spread over the whole Georgia. On 2 April the spontaneous rally was held in Sokhumi. The protesters condemned the provocation of the separatists. At the same time, it was decided not to follow the emotions and to refrain from the similar answer. Despite this, the situation in Sokhumi was becoming increasingly dangerous. The Georgian students of the Abkhazian State University stopped attending the lectures. The party leadership of Georgia was seriously concerned with the situation in Abkhazia. In the beginning of April, the joint session of the bureaus of Central Committee of Georgian Communist Party and its Abkhazian Regional Committee was held in Sokhumi. The representatives of Georgian and Abkhaz intelligentsia were invited to attend it. The chairman was *Jumber Patiashvili*, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of Georgian Communist Party, who was patiently listening to the "complaints" of the Abkhazs regarding the "destructive actions" of Georgian population. Meanwhile, the other Georgian members of party leadership tried to restrain the emotions of the Abkhaz participants and advised them not to press the issue of seceding the Abkhazian ASSR from the Georgian SSR. The joint session ended without any results.

Such ineptitude of the Georgian leadership caused further outrage among the national-patriotic forces. On 4 April 1989 the permanent rallies started in Tbilisi. The protesters blocked the Rustaveli Avenue in front of the House of Government of Georgian SSR. At first, they asked for the punishment of the organizers of "*Likhni Gathering*," but later the demands evolved to the withdrawal of the Georgian SSR from the Soviet Union and the restoration of independent Georgia. The situation in Abkhazia also was tense. On 6 April the extraordinary session of the Abkhazian Regional Committee of Georgian Communist Party replaced *Boris Adleiba* with *Vladimir Khishba*, who previously held the position of the Deputy Minister of Forestry of Georgian SSR. This proved to be a belated decision which was not able to stop the escalation of the situation either in Abkhazia or in Tbilisi.

The energization of Georgian population was becoming more and more evident. The government was not able to prevent the protest gathering in Gulripshi, which was held on 8 April. The protesters once again condemned the destructive activities of the separatists. Meanwhile, the situation was aggravating in Tbilisi where in the early hours of the morning of 9 April the military operation was conducted in order to disperse the rally. The innocent people (mostly women) were killed and thousands were poisoned by the gas used by the Soviet military.

The tragedy of 9 April 1989 did not stop the anti-imperial protests, which were gaining strength throughout the whole Georgia. Georgians in Abkhazia were especially active. Their standard-bearers were the Georgian students and professors of the Abkhazian State University which became the epicentre of confrontation. We need a small digression in order to explain why the issue of the university became the most significant in Abkhazia (for further details, see: **Papaskiri, 2004:** 212-238; **Papaskiri, 2007;** **Papaskiri, 2009:** 283-294; **Papaskiri, 2010:** 319-334; **Papaskiri, 2012:** 65-79).

The decision to found the university (on the basis of the pedagogic institute) was made by the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union on 5 February 1979. This fact had a great significance for the cultural life of Georgia on the whole. The founding of university in Sokhumi was unusual for the Soviet reality. It was an exception since only RSFSR and Ukrainian SSR had more than one city with university. This was already established policy and because of this the Kremlin previously rejected the proposals from the Georgian leadership to transform the existing higher education institutions into universities in Kutaisi, Batumi, or Sokhumi. Meanwhile, the idea of founding university was used for the political speculations by the separatists. The problem was aggravated by the fact that the universities were already established in the autonomous republics of the RSFSR. The separatists demagogically argued that there was no university in Abkhazia because of the opposition of Tbilisi. Thus, they used it as an additional leverage to demand the withdrawal of the Abkhazian ASSR from the Georgian SSR. In reality, even the Abkhazs knew it very well that the decision-maker was the official Moscow, not the Georgian leadership. Only after the events of 1978, fearing that the situation could become unmanageable, the Kremlin de-

cided to make some concessions. The party leadership of the Georgian SSR was able to take some kind of initiative into its hands. They prepared the special document regarding the measures to be taken in Abkhazian ASSR in order to calm the situation.¹ The official Moscow approved this document without any significant amendments (except the title).

The establishment of the Sokhumi State University (on the basis of the existing Sokhumi State Pedagogic Institute) was one of the measures given in the document. As it was already mentioned, the Council of the Ministers of the Soviet Union approved this measure and issued a decree on founding the Sokhumi State University. It is interesting that the official name of the university given in every official document issued by the official Moscow (up to the break-up of the Soviet Union), was **Sukhumi State University**. Despite this, because of the pressure from the Abkhaz separatists, the joint decree of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party and the Council of the Ministers of 23 April 1979 denoted the new higher education institution as **Abkhazian State University**.²

The leaders of Abkhaz separatists wanted to transform the Abkhazian State University into the Abkhaz national higher education institution. This was the aim of creating the so-called “Abkhazian sector” in the University. Previously, in the Sokhumi State Pedagogic Institute there were only two sectors: Georgian and Russian. Since usually only Georgians were studying on the Georgian sector and they also were a significant part of the students on the Russian sector, Georgians were nearly 2/3 of the overall number of the students. This caused irritation of the separatist circles, who demanded opening the so-called “Abkhazian sector.” At a first glance, this was a logical and correct demand, since it would give the Abkhaz students the opportunity to study in their native language, but the problem was that, as it was already mentioned, the teaching language in the so-called “Abkhazian schools,” beginning from the 5th grade, was Russian. The study process was conducted in Abkhazian only in primary schools. Thus, the idea of teaching in Abkhazian on the University level was unfeasible. The Abkhazs understood it themselves. Their goal was to increase artificially the number of the Abkhaz students. As a result, the decision was made to divide the quotas in the following way: 40% – Russian sector; 30% – Georgian sector, 30% – Abkhazian sector. The students were eligible for the so-called “Abkhazian sector” if they knew Abkhazian language (or at least could read and write in Abkhazian). There was one more issue too. The creation of the “Abkhazian sector” gave the separatists the opportunity to demand the increase of the Abkhazian-speaking professors and lecturers. Formally, they had to conduct lectures in Abkhazian, although as the future

¹ We are talking about the above-mentioned decree “On the Measures for Further Development of Economics and Culture in Abkhazian ASSR and Strengthening the Organizing, Ideological, and Educational Activities among the Workers of Autonomous Republic”

² While in Georgian it meant the **State University of Abkhazia**, in Abkhazian it was “translated” as the “**Abkhaz State University**.” In Russian translation it can be understood in both ways, although the Georgian reading is more correct grammatically in Russian too.

process has shown, this was a false argument. In 1979-1989, no one thought seriously about the transformation of the study process to Abkhazian even in secondary and high schools, not talking about the university. At the same time, the Abkhazs reached their goal and changed the ethnical picture in the university. In 5-6 years, the number of the Georgian students has decreased, while the number of the Abkhaz students and lecturers increased significantly.

Despite all the efforts of the Abkhaz separatists, at first they were not able to establish their control over the university. This was because of Zurab Anchabadze, the first rector of the university and the Corresponding Member of Georgian Academy of Sciences, who believed in Georgian-Abkhaz unity. When he passed away in 1984, the situation changed and the Abkhaz separatists started to gain their positions in the university. They were led by *Oleg Damenia*, Deputy Rector of the university. Although, he failed to win the post of the Rector in the elections held in April 1988, the situation had not changed much. The new Rector *Aleko Gvaramia*, who was elected owing to the votes from the Georgian professors and lecturers, soon switched the positions, started to show himself as an active supporter of the Abkhaz separatists' interests, and opposed the process of revival of the Georgian self-awareness. This caused the protest among the Georgian professors and students of the university.

The active protest of the Georgian students was inspired by the anti-imperial and anti-Communist propaganda of Georgian professors and lecturers, first of all, of the young scholars working at the Chair of History of Georgia-Abkhazia. Under their guidance the first student hand-written journal *Tskhumi* was prepared. The manuscript journal angered the Abkhaz professors and students. As it turned out, for them the propaganda of Georgian national statehood and Georgian-Abkhaz unity (all the articles were written in this spirit) was unacceptable. The separatists were especially afraid of the fact that the Georgian students wanted to co-operate with the Abkhaz students and involve them in the preparation of journal. Their frustration was also amplified by the date, when the journal was issued. The authors dedicated the journal to the 70th anniversary of the restoration of Georgian independence and demonstratively put the date on the title page: 26 May 1988. Following the demand from the Abkhaz separatists, the rector organized a private discussion of the journal. Nevertheless, they were not able either to ban journal or force the change of its name. This was the first serious victory of the Georgian students and professors of the Abkhazian State University.

The same Georgian students and professors were the first to protest against the anti-Georgian Likhni gathering. At first, they just demanded from the Abkhaz leadership of the university and rector Aleko Gvaramia to repudiate their signatures from the "Likhni Address," but the latter refused to do it. Then, after the 9 April tragedy, the students and professors boycotted the study process and went to strike. The Abkhaz part of the university addressed the Georgians and asked them to return to the lecture halls, but, at the

same time, they refused to satisfy any of the demands. Meanwhile, the situation quickly aggravated. The Georgian population, led by the national forces, joined the students. The Communist leadership of Georgia, headed by Givi Gumbaridze, the new First Secretary of the Central Committee, was confused and the conciliatory mission of Nodar Chitanava, the newly appointed Chairman of the Council of Ministers, was fruitless. After its failure, the protesters started to think about leaving the Abkhazian State University and founding the Sokhumi Branch of Tbilisi State University. They became more radical and started the sitting action and hunger strike in front of the building of Georgian Dramatic Theatre by Konstantine Gamsakhurdia.

The protest was supported by the students of Georgian Institute of Subtropical Agriculture, another higher education institution located in Sokhumi, and representatives of the Georgian intelligentsia of Abkhazia. The leaders of informal organizations also were active. As a result, soon the Georgian workers also went on strike and joined the protesters. Facing the growing protest, the Georgian government decided to found the Sokhumi Branch of Tbilisi State University by the decree of Georgian Council of Ministers of 14 May 1989 (**Issue of Abkhazia, 2000:** 51). The Georgian students and professors greeted this decision with great enthusiasm, considered their mission as accomplished, and stopped their protest.

The opening of the Georgian university angered the separatist part of the Abkhaz population. On 15 May they held a gathering at Lenin square in the centre of Sokhumi and condemned the decision of the Georgian government. They forced Vladimir Khishba to come to the rally and give a promise that he would achieve the abolition of Sokhumi Branch of TSU. The protesters expressed their approval of this promise and dissolved (**Kvarchia, 2020:** 201-202).

This time the Georgian government did not make concessions to the separatists and made no amendments to its decision. In spring 1989 the Georgian government was more afraid of the protest of Georgian population in Abkhazia than the one of the Abkhazs. The Georgian response to the Likhni gathering proved that they would not stay idle and they would defend their rights in the future. This became clear after the elections for the Congress of the People's Deputies of the Soviet Union. There were three contenders for the one of the seats in Sokhumi: Abkhaz Aleko Gvaramia, Rector of Abkhazian State University, Georgian Revaz Salukvadze, Director of Sokhumi Institute of Applied Physics, and Russian Boris Lapin, Director All-Soviet Institute of Experimental Pathology, which was situated in Sokhumi. At first, it was considered that Aleko Gvaramia was a favourite, since he was supported by the party nomenclature and some representatives of Georgian intelligentsia, but it was before the Likhni gathering. After that, the Georgian residents of Sokhumi united around Revaz Salukvadze, who easily won the elections.

Those elections had shown to the Abkhaz separatists that the democratic process that had started in the Soviet Union was dangerous for them since it would make it im-

possible to establish the minority dictate in the autonomous republic. Therefore, they made their choice for the reactionary forces who fought for the preservation of the Soviet empire and the Communist-totalitarian system. Meanwhile, the whole Georgia was on the other side of the barricades. On 26 May 1989, for the first time under the Soviet regime, the day of the Georgian State Independence was celebrated in Sokhumi. The students and professors of the newly opened Sokhumi Branch of TSU were among the organizers.

Meanwhile, the situation around the Sokhumi Branch of TSU quickly aggravated. The leadership of the autonomous republic (Vladimir Khishba, Valerian Kobakhia, Otar Zukhbaia) was trying to reconcile the situation, but their efforts were vain. Once again the Abkhazs demanded its closure and the return of the Georgian students and professors to the Abkhazian State University. At the same time, they were not ready for the compromises. When the Abkhaz separatists figured out that they could not “restrain” the “revolt” of the Georgians. Thus, they decided to involve the official Moscow, which sent the Deputy Minister of Education to Sokhumi. When this visit also ended without results, the group of People’s Deputies (upon the request of the Abkhaz deputies) came to Sokhumi, but they also failed in achieving their goals (**Papaskiri, 2004:** 239-240; **Papaskiri, 2010:** 335-336; **Papaskiri, 2012:** 78-79). The separatists were more and more frustrated with the functioning of Sokhumi Branch of TSU, which was preparing for the entrance exams. At the beginning of July 1989, Bagrat Shinkuba and Aleksey Gogua, the Abkhaz members of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, sent the telegram to Anatoly Lukyanov, the First Vice-Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, and Vadim Bakatin, the Head of the State Security Service of the USSR. The Abkhaz deputies were asking for the troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in order to avoid the “clashes” (**Lezhava, 1997:** 253). On 8 July Aidgylara sent an address to Mikhail Gorbachev, the Secretary General of the Central Committee of the USSR and the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. The Abkhaz separatists demanded the establishment of the special governance in Abkhazia with the direct subordination to the official Moscow (**Chervonnaya, 1993:** 70). All those activities were some kind of propagandist cover-up for the massacre, for which the Abkhaz separatists were actively preparing at that time. In contrast with them, the Georgians showed no aggression at all and were trying not to give any pretext to the Abkhazs for the further escalation of the situation in autonomous republic. They were telling the separatists not to follow their emotions recognize the existence of the new university in Sokhumi.

The situation extremely escalated from the 13th of July. The Abkhazs from the districts and villages were gathered in Sokhumi. On 14 July the tension aggravated. At midnight the Abkhazs surrounded the building of the 1st public school of Sokhumi, where the entrance exams for the Sokhumi Branch of TSU had to be held and where the members of the admission commission were accepting the documents. The danger for them was real as Militia was not able to unblock the territory. At the same night the separatists destroyed the temporary memorial of the victims of the 9 April tragedy, which was located on Karl Marx street. In the afternoon of 15 July, the Georgians started to gather on the

quay, in the Rustaveli Park. Around 17:00 about 2000 Abkhazs, who were armed with iron clubs and stones, attacked the Georgians. There began the fight in which was mortally wounded Vladimir (Vova) Vekua, one of the leaders of Abkhazian Organization of Ilia Chavchavadze Society and the Georgian national movement in Abkhazia. About the same time, the Abkhazs raided the building of the 1st public school, destroyed rooms and furniture, and beat unmercifully the members of the admission commission, among whom were some students too. There were shootings in different parts of the city which continued nearly whole night. Only on 16 July the Georgians started to mobilize forces and took the city under their control.

The news about the Sokhumi tragedy immediately spread throughout Georgia. On 16 July tens of thousands of unarmed Georgians from Gali district of Abkhazia and neighbouring districts of Samegrelo started to Sokhumi, but had to stop at the River Ghalidzga, where they were met by armed Abkhazs. Around 1000 armed Abkhazs were sent from Gudauta to Ochamchire by motorboats on 16-17 July (**Chervonnaya, 1993: 70**). The Abkhazs also got the armament in Ochamchire, where they raided the regional office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. All this ended with a tragedy as the Abkhazs shot to death three Georgians from Gali district: Revaz Ekvaia, Nuri Shamatava, and Omar Shengelia. Further escalation of conflict was prevented by the actions of the leaders of the Georgian national movement (first of all, we should mention Merab Kostava) and the political leadership of Georgia. The Soviet internal forces also played a positive role in stopping the confrontation. Nevertheless, 14 people were killed on 15-16 July. Nine of them were Georgians, while five were the Abkhazs.

The tragic events of 15-16 July happened only because of the deeds of the Abkhaz separatists. All the attempts from the ideologues of the Abkhaz separatists to put the blame on the Georgians are absurd. Were they the Georgians who demanded the abolition of the Abkhaz university? Were they the Georgians who raided the building with the Abkhaz students and professors and beat them mercilessly? Were they the Georgians who went to Gudauta by buses and attacked there the peaceful Abkhazs? No, everything was exact to opposite. **It had been the Abkhazs who considered themselves as the “only masters of their homeland” and decided to prohibit to the Georgians to study and work in the Georgian higher education institution in their own country – the Georgian SSR, of which the Abkhazian ASSR was the part.**

We should also mention that the desire of the Georgians to found the university in Sokhumi could not hinder the functioning of the Abkhazian State University, which would retain all its property and the quotas for the students. Thus, the Abkhazs were losing nothing. They just could not accept the opening of the university in which the Georgian would be not just the language of teaching (as it was mentioned above, there was the Georgian sector in the Abkhazian State University), but of the record-keeping too. In the Abkhazian State University, like the higher education institutions of the autonomous republics of the RSFSR, Russian was the language of the record-keeping. The separatists un-

derstood that the opening of the Georgian university in Sokhumi against the background of strengthening of the Georgian national movement, would increase Abkhazia's involvement in all-Georgian processes. That was the reason of their activities and of the bloodshed that the Abkhazs conducted on 15-16 July 1989.

The Abkhaz side, secretly admitting its guilt, was acting according the principle that "the attack is the best defence." They sent numerous letters to the governmental bodies of the Soviet Union with the demands to declare the martial law in Abkhazia because "there was the danger of mass killings of the Abkhazs... by the Georgian extremists" (**Lezhava, 1997: 340**). "Aidgylara" also made a confrontational "address" to colonel general Yuri Shatalin, the Commander of the Internal Troops of the Soviet Union. The separatists alleged that "the planned action... of annihilation of Abkhaz people... was under its way" and that the Abkhazs "were on the brink of catastrophe as an ethnos." Thus, they proposed to Yuri Shatalin "the temporary mobilization of the Abkhaz volunteers" (**Lezhava, 1997: 340**).

Of course, no one threatened the lives of the Abkhazs. Meanwhile, the internal troops of the Soviet Union started the process of requisitioning the arms from the population, which was opposed by the Abkhazs. During such operation two Russian soldiers were killed by Abkhaz militants in one of the villages in Ochamchire district. This was the confirmation that it had been the Abkhazs who were the destabilizing source in the autonomous republic.¹ Actually, it became evident for the official Moscow too. That was why the Soviet government decided to entrust the Georgian SSR Prosecutor's Office with the investigation of the events of 15-16 July. Unfortunately, the official investigation charged only the henchmen and not the organizers of the clashes, i.e. the ideologues of the Abkhaz separatists.

After the tragic events of 15-16 July, the separatists continued to aggravate the situation in the autonomous republic. They were helped by the North Caucasians who launched an ideological campaign against the Georgians and Georgia for "oppressing" the Abkhazs. On 25-26 August 1989 the so-called "representatives of Mountain People of the Caucasus" held their 1st congress in Sokhumi. They founded the so-called "Assembly of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus" and elected the coordinating council chaired by Musa Shanibov, Kabardian by nationality, who was a docent at the Chair of Scientific Communism Theory in the Kabardino-Balkarian State University. The main goal of this move-

¹ In 2009 the Abkhaz separatists tried to rewrite history during the visit of Sergei Stepashin, the former Prime Minister of Russian Federation, who erected the monument at the place of their death. The dedication which was inscribed by the Abkhazs on the monument is even more blasphemous, since it reads: "Eternal glory to the sons of Russia who gave their life for the freedom of Apsny" (**Logua, 2019**). Thus, the separatists allege that the members of the Soviet internal troops, who were killed by the Abkhazs during the operation of their disarming, had sacrificed their lives to the "freedom of Abkhazia."

ment was to found the Republic of Mountain People of the Caucasus with the capital in Sokhumi. This meant the opening of the new ideological front against Georgia. The territory of the present-day Abkhazia, which has been an organic part of all-Georgian ethnical, cultural, political, and state universe from the ancient times, was declared as the “Southern part” of the historically non-existing North Caucasian state, while Sokhumi, one of the oldest Georgian cities, was declared as a capital of this new “state.”

In November 1989 the 3rd session of the “Assembly of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus” was held in Nalchik. The leaders of the “Assembly” demanded from the Soviet government to “restore order” in Georgia and secure the rights of the Abkhazs defined by law (**Chervonnaya, 1993: 79**). During this session the “Assembly” was transformed into the “Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus” and Musa Shanibov was elected as its President. The Confederation united 16 peoples of the Caucasus and each of them was represented with Vice President in the governing body. The position of the Abkhaz Vice President was given to Konstantin Ozgan, one of the leaders of the Abkhaz separatists and long-standing head of the Gudauta regional organization of Georgian Communist Party.

The above-said shows the treacherous policy adopted by the leaders of the so-called “national patriotic fronts” in the North Caucasus towards Georgia and Georgians. They openly supported the Abkhaz separatists and blamed the Georgian government for “violating the rights of the Abkhazs defined by law” (**Kvarchia, 2020: 215-216**). This myth, which was invented by the separatist ideologists and promoted by their North Caucasian “brethren,” had nothing in common with the truth and historical reality. Actually, there were people whose “rights, defined by law, were violated” for several decades, but it had been Georgians, not the Abkhazs. The 250 thousand aboriginal Georgian population, 45% of the total population of autonomous republic, were the second-class citizens in their own country.

Today everyone knows (it was known in 1989 too) how the rights of the Abkhazs were “violated.” For the last three decades only the ethnical Abkhazs were the First Secretaries of the Abkhazian Regional Committee of the Georgian Communist Party. Thus, the Abkhazs held the highest position in the autonomous republic despite the fact that the number of Georgians among the party members was at least three times higher than the one of the Abkhazs. The same situation was in the Supreme Soviet (elected in 1989) of the Abkhazian ASSR, where Abkhazs had 56 deputies from 140 (40.7%), while the Georgians had only 54 deputies (37.9%). The Head of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet (formally, the head of the autonomous republic) could only be an ethnical Abkhaz. The representation of the Abkhazs in the Council of Ministers was even more impressive. Although, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers was an ethnical Georgian, the ethnical Abkhazs were the majority among the ministers and head of departments. For example, from 20 ministers and chairmen of state committees 13 were the ethnical Abkhazs and only five ethnical Georgians. From 15 People’s Deputies elected in 1989 eight were ethni-

cal Abkhazs and five ethnical Georgians. The ethnical Abkhazs were the Chairman of the Supreme Court and Prosecutor of autonomous republic. From eight prosecutors in the districts and the cities five were ethnical Abkhazs (**Marshania, 1995: 11-12**).

Now we will proceed to the issue how the Georgians “oppressed” the Abkhazs in the spheres of culture and education. As it is known, the Abkhazian, along with the Georgian and Russian, was the state language of the autonomous republic. It should be emphasized that no other autonomous republic in the Soviet Union enjoyed such right. (Of course, the constitutions of North Caucasian autonomous republics, whose representatives were so worried with the “sour fate” of the “oppressed” Abkhazs, were no exception.) The Abkhazs were receiving the advantage when selected for the membership of the Writers’ Union of the Soviet Union. They represented $\frac{3}{4}$ of the members of Abkhazian Organization of the Georgian Writers’ Union. In 1988 the Abkhazs were leading the Soviet Union in the books and brochures published in the native language (4.3 units on 1000 people), while the Georgians were in the second set of ten with 0.3 units on 1000 people. In the circulation of those publications on 1000 people the Abkhazs were in the third place behind only the Estonians and Latvians (**Zhorzholiani, 2000: 55**).

There was the Abkhazian State Dramatic Theatre in Sokhumi. The state ensembles of songs and dances were widely acknowledged throughout the world. The state symphonic orchestra and state choir also were successful. There were newspapers, magazines, and journals published in Abkhazian language. There were radio and TV programmes in Abkhazian. Sokhumi was the second (after Tbilisi) educational centre of Georgia. There was a university in Sokhumi (the second in Georgia and fourth in the Southern Caucasus) with Abkhazian sector. All this would be a serious achievement even in the civilized world, but in the USSR it was just unprecedented. There were no national sectors in the North Caucasian state universities. Moreover, they did not have even the primary schools in their native languages, while there were 73 Abkhazian and mixed schools (Abkhazian sector in a Russian school) in Abkhazia (**Zhorzholiani, 2000: 53-54**), whatever limited was teaching in Abkhazian in them. There were about 20 scientific-research institutions in Abkhazia. Among them the Institute of Abkhazian Language, Literature and History by Dimitri Gulia should be especially mentioned. It was the leading centre of Abkhazology. Thus, even the brief glance into the cultural and social life of Abkhazia shows the complete falseness of the charges in the “violation of the rights of the Abkhaz people” made by the so-called “friends” of the Abkhazs.

The beginning of *Perestroika* in the spring of 1985 the process of democratic renovation in the USSR irreversible. The Kremlin started to lose its positions. The national liberation movements spread over the union republics. Georgia, along with the Baltic republics, was in the vanguard of the struggle for the restoration of national statehood. After the tragic events of 9 April, the new Communist leadership of Georgia tried to follow the political processes in the republic. Thus, the extraordinary 13th session of the Georgian

Supreme Soviet adopted the historical decree "About the Guarantees to Secure the State Sovereignty of Georgia" on 9 March 1990. In this decree the supreme body of Georgian government officially verified the findings of the Commission for the political and legal evaluation of issues regarding the violation of 7 May 1920 treaty between Georgian Democratic Republic and Soviet Russia. It was recognized that *"the invasion of the Soviet Russia's troops in Georgia in February 1921 and the seizure of the whole territory was the military intervention and occupation with the aim to overthrow the existing government from the legal viewpoint, and the annexation from the political viewpoint"* (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 18-19**). Based on above-said, the Supreme Soviet of Georgia officially declared "illegal and void" the so-called "worker-peasant union treaty" "between Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic and Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic" of 21 May 1921 and the union treaty "On the Creation of Federative Union of Transcaucasian Soviet Socialist Republics" of 12 March 1922. It was also declared that the necessity of beginning the "negotiations about the restoration of the independent Georgian state, because the 30 December 1922 treaty on the creation the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics was illegal" (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 19**).

It was not the only instance of anti-Soviet revolt from the then Georgian Communist government. The Georgian Supreme Soviet officially expressed its negative attitude towards the establishment of the office of President of the Soviet Union and practically forbade the Georgian delegation in the Supreme Soviet of the USSR to participate in the debates regarding this question. The Georgian leadership argued that the union republics were the sovereign states, thus Georgia had to have her own president if such office was established in the Soviet Union. Otherwise, the existence of the presidency in the Soviet Union without Georgia having such office meant the recognition that Georgia was not a sovereign state. Besides, the actions of the President of the USSR for the preservation of the territorial integrity of the Soviet Union should not restrict the right of the union republic to leave the USSR and the union republic had to be the guarantor of her own sovereignty (**Lezhava, 1997: 274**).

Those decisions of the official Tbilisi showed to the Kremlin that the Communist government of Georgia was taking specific steps towards the withdrawal from the Soviet Union and achieving the state independence. The Soviet leadership became frustrated and quickly answered with the law "On the Regulations for the Resolution of the Issues Concerning the Withdrawal of the Union Republics from the Soviet Union," which was signed by Mikhail Gorbachev, who had already become the President of the USSR, on 3 April 1990. This bill was violating the 72nd article of the Soviet Constitution according to which the decision of the union republic's Supreme Soviet was enough for the withdrawal from the USSR. The 3 April 1990 Bill demanded "the expression of the free will of the union republic's peoples at the referendum" (twice in five years) in order to "legally" withdraw from the USSR (see: **Regional Conflicts, 2005: 19-21**). Since the law also had a provi-

sion that the votes should be counted separately in the autonomous units or on the territories where the national minorities of the union republics lived in majority (see: **Regional Conflicts, 2005: 19-21**), it was practically impossible for the “rebellious” union republic to withdraw from the Soviet Union without the territorial losses. Thus, this imperial judicial “masterpiece” was quickly christened as the “*law of non-withdrawal from the Soviet Union*” among the population.

The adoption of the 3 April 1990 Law meant that the Kremlin had unmasked itself and ended the renovation of state system. Meanwhile, the idea of restoring the independence became more and more popular in Georgia. The national patriotic forces became very active. On 13 March 1990 the joint conference of the representatives of the national liberation movement opened in Tbilisi. The joint conference of the national liberation movement elected the coordinating body – The National Forum. It united the various organizations. Abkhazia was represented by three members in the National Forum and they were selected by the Abkhazian regional organizations of national political unions (**Kolbaia et al., 1999: 62**). One of the decisions was the appeal to the population to boycott the Georgia’s Supreme Soviet’s elections scheduled for the 25 March 1990. The government was forced to postpone the elections and make amendments to the Constitution of the Georgian SSR. According to the edition of the 49th article, the citizens of the Georgian SSR could unite in the political parties and public organizations and participate in the “mass movements.” At the same time, the public organizations were given guarantees that they would have “the conditions to perform successfully their statutory tasks” (**Kolbaia et al., 1999: 62**). Those amendments were revolutionary because they meant that the multi-party system was established in Georgia.

After the conference held in Tbilisi the consolidation of the Georgian national patriotic organizations took place in Sokhumi too. In March 1990 the National Committee of Tskhumi-Abkhazeti was formed. It united all active organizations except the Abkhazian regional organization of Georgian National Front. The opening of the memorial to the victims of 9 April Massacre in the village of Achadara (near Sokhumi) in April 1990 showed the growing popularity of the Georgian national patriotic forces in Abkhazia. The demonstrations and rallies were held in all the cities and districts of Abkhazia. Their scale frustrated the separatist circles whose main target became *Leonid Otyrba*, the Abkhaz chairman of the local council in Achadara. He was charged with the “betrayal of the Abkhaz people” because his signature was under the decision to allocate the land for the memorial. This ended with tragedy because L. Otyrba was not able to withstand the defamatory campaign and committed suicide.

The political situation in Georgia was becoming more and more intense. The government was using the postponement of the elections for the strengthening of its positions. They considered the 28th Congress of the Georgian Communist Party as a significant stage in mobilizing the governing political forces. At the same time, the leadership of Georgian Communists was showing the unprecedented boldness in their moves. While

the Congress elected the delegates for the 28th Congress of the CPSU, it also adopted the new manifesto and statute of the Georgian Communist Party. It practically abandoned the aim to build the Communism and transformed into the party of liberal-democratic orientation which declared the restoration of the Georgian state independence as its main political goal. There was consensus nearly on all the issues discussed at the Congress. The only time when some discord could be seen was when *Vladimir Khishba* (as he said, on behalf of the Communists from Abkhazia) appealed to the delegates, not to discuss the issue of the withdrawal of the Georgian Communist Party from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which was put forward by some regional organizations. Nevertheless, it became clear at the Congress that the leadership of Georgian Communist Party was controlling the situation in the Abkhazian Regional Organization and that the ethnically Abkhaz first secretaries of city and regional committees – *Valeri Pilia* (Gagra), *Igor Lakoba* (Gudauta), *Sergei Bagapsh* (Ochamchire), and *David Pilia* (Tkvarcheli) – were completely loyal to Tbilisi.

The discord in the national liberation movement began in May 1990. On 7 May several political organizations – *Georgian Helsinki Union*, *The Society of St. Iliia the Righteous*, *The All-Georgian Merab Kostava Society*, *The Monarchist-Conservative Party* – left the *National Forum* and created the political alliance “*Round Table—Free Georgia*” (**Shvelidze, 2008: 89**). The Abkhazian regional organizations of those parties also left the National Committee of Tskhumi-Abkhazeti and formed the regional organization of their alliance. As it was proved in the future, this decision seriously hindered the process of consolidation of national patriotic forces in Abkhazia, although, at first, it did not show up. During the May of 1990 all the Georgian forces were united when celebrating the restoration of the Independence Day on 26 May 1990. The large-scale demonstrations were held in Sokhumi, Gagra, other cities and district centres of Abkhazia. Besides, some organizations became interested in the event and requested the informative lectures on the subject. One of such lectures was held in the All-Soviet Institute of Experimental Pathology of Soviet Academy of Sciences, where the Russians were the majority among the workers.¹ Such loyal attitude from the Russian-speaking population frightened the Abkhaz separatists who intensified their anti-Georgian propaganda among them.

The Abkhaz separatists answered the activities of the Georgian population with their new protests. On 28 May “*Aidgylara*” organized the spontaneous gathering of the Abkhazs and demanded the immediate dismissal of the party and Soviet leadership of Abkhazia. The crisis, which began after 18 March 1989, became extremely “hot” politically in the summer of 1990. At the beginning of August, part of Abkhaz delegation put for-

¹ It should be mentioned that the lecture was organized with the initiative and active participation of *Boris Lapin*, the director of the institute and the Academician of the Soviet Academy of Medical Sciences. At the same time, he was also a member of Bureau of Abkhazian Regional Committee of the Georgian Communist Party (**Papaskiri, 2007: 273; Papaskiri, 2012: 95**).

ward the initiative to held the extraordinary session of Abkhazian ASSR's Supreme Soviet to discuss the question regarding the "guarantees for securing the statehood of Abkhazia" and adopt the declaration "about the state sovereignty of the Abkhazian Soviet (not **Autonomous – Z.P.**) Socialist Republic." In answer to this, the Georgian side took the countermeasures. On 23 August 582 deputies of all levels gathered in Sokhumi (the initiative came from the Georgian national patriotic organizations) and appealed to their Abkhaz colleagues to abstain from convening the session with such a provocative agenda. This appeal was successful since the Abkhazs were not able to gather sufficient number of the deputies. Only 68 from 138 deputies (less than half, which was necessary for the quorum) came to participate, but the Abkhaz leadership still decided to held the "session." This was just the beginning of completely illegitimate actions of the Abkhaz separatists, which reached its apogee on 23 July 1992. (On that day the Abkhaz delegation of the newly-elected Supreme Council of Abkhazia, ignoring all the judicial norms, with 33 votes instead of the necessary 44 votes, "annulled" the 1978 Constitution of Abkhazian ASSR and "restored" the so-called "1925 Constitution of Abkhazian SSR.")

The Chairman of the Presidium of the Abkhazian ASSR's Supreme Soviet *Valerian Kobakhia* presented the report on the "*legal guarantees for securing the statehood of Abkhazia*" on the so-called "session." Both the report and the decree adopted by the "session" were full of falsifications of historical facts. Their goal was to convince the society in the false and ungrounded postulate that Abkhazia had nothing in common with Georgian state historically and that the Abkhaz people had the monopoly to decide the issue of their national statehood (**Important milestone, 2002; Regional Conflicts, 2005: 30-32**). The "session" also declared that Abkhazia was the founding member of the USSR on 30 December 1922, which was ridiculous since even the Georgian SSR (whose part was Abkhazian SSR as a "treaty republic") was not a direct member of the Soviet Union at the date of its foundation. This lie had its political aim. The Abkhaz separatists wanted to "prove historically" their right to participate, along with the union republics, in the consultations regarding the elaboration of the new union treaty (**Important milestone, 2002; Regional Conflicts, 2005: 32**). Even more provocative was the "Declaration on the State Sovereignty of Abkhazian Soviet Socialist Republic" (not the **Autonomous SSR**, but the Soviet Socialist Republic). It was declared that the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazian SSR (sic!) expressing the will of the people, was implementing the indisputable right of self-determination of the Abkhaz people, and was proclaiming the state sovereignty of the Abkhazia Soviet Socialist Republic (**Important milestone, 2002; Regional Conflicts, 2005: 32-33**).

Such was a historical and legal "masterpiece" "adopted" at the so-called "10th session of the Supreme Soviet of the Abkhazian ASSR." (It should be mentioned that the Supreme Soviet could not legally adopt such documents even in its full strength.) The official Tbilisi quickly answered this demarche of the Abkhaz "legislators." On 26 August 1990 the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR held its special session and gave the

evaluation to the “decisions” of the so-called “10th session” of Abkhazian ASSR’s Supreme Soviet. The Presidium unequivocally stated that the “documents” “adopted” at the so-called “10th session” of Abkhazian ASSR’s Supreme Soviet legally represented the groundless attempt to “change the national-state and administrative-territorial system of Georgian SSR” and “the gross violation of the constitutions of Georgian SSR, Abkhazian ASSR, and the USSR.” Thus, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR declared the “decisions” of 25 August 1990 “void and legally non-binding” (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 34-35**).

The correct and well-grounded historical and legal assessment was given to the “decisions” of the so-called “10th session” on the real 10th session of the Abkhazian ASSR’s Supreme Soviet, which was convened on 31 August 1990. All the regulations were met this time. The session, which was held in the assembly hall of the Georgian Institute of Subtropical Agriculture, was attended by 72 deputies (out of 138), which was more than a necessary half. The session stated that the decisions of the so-called “session” “violated the historically established territorial integrity of Georgia” and were “ant-constitutional, illegal, and judicially ungrounded.” Based on the above-said, they were declared void (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 35-36**).

Meanwhile, the official Moscow, which became extremely worried because of the strengthening of the centrifugal tendencies in certain union republics and especially in “rebellious” Georgia, took new measures against those republics. On 22 September 1990 the “1st Congress of the national-state and national-territorial formations and peoples without their own statehood” was convened in Moscow. According to Svetlana Chervonnaya, the main goal of this congress was the preparation of the “special viewpoint” of the “autonomies” and “peoples without statehood” if the democratically elected governments of the relevant union republics would not sign the new union treaty (**Chervonnaya, 1993: 93**). The centre chose Vladislav Ardzinba, the future leader of the Abkhaz separatists, as some kind of the “first violin” at this congress. At that time, V. Ardzinba held the position of the chairman of subcommittee on the legal status of autonomous republics, autonomous districts, and autonomous areas of the Soviet Union’s Supreme Soviet. He was also a personal favourite of Anatoly Lukyanov. Because of this, he received the “honour” to be the first presenter at the congress after the chairmen of the Chambers of Nationalities of the Soviet Union’s and RSFSR’s Supreme Soviets. The Abkhaz delegation was acting as the “impact force” whose mission was to push through the idea of new “union treaty” at the congress.

Despite all the efforts of the Kremlin, the process of disintegration of the USSR was becoming irreversible. The union republics (Georgia was no exception) were preparing for the first multi-party elections. The first multi-party parliamentary elections were held in Georgia on 28 October 1990. Both proportional system and single-seat constituencies were used in those elections. The elections ended with the triumph of political alliance

“Round Table—Free Georgia” whose leader was Zviad Gamsakhurdia. It got nearly 56% of proportional votes and won the majority of the single-seat constituencies. Georgian Communist Party took the second place with 24% of votes. The other parties and alliances were not able to pass the 4% barrier.

There were elected 16 deputies from Abkhazia in the Supreme Council of Georgia. 10 of them represented the single-seat constituencies. “Round Table—Free Georgia” emerged as a true winner both in proportional system and single-seat constituencies in Abkhazia too. It was especially evident in the single-seat constituencies, where the Communist candidates lost every district. The Abkhaz separatists tried to disrupt elections, but were able to do it only in Gudauta and Tkvarcheli districts. They were more successful in discrediting those Abkhazs, who attempted to win the single-seat constituencies. Due to the pressure of the separatists, some of the Abkhaz candidates stopped their campaigns. Unfortunately, the Georgian parties showed their political inexperience and they did not have ethnically Abkhaz candidates neither in their lists, nor in the single-seat constituencies. As a result, for the first time in the Georgian parliamentary history, there was not a single ethnically Abkhaz deputy in the new parliament. This was a serious mistake of Georgian political elite.

On 14 November 1990, the 1st session of the newly-elected Supreme Council chose Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the leader of the “Round Table—Free Georgia,” as its Chairman. One of the most urgent tasks for the new Georgian government was defusing the tension in the autonomous formations. In the autumn of 1990 the situation was especially dangerous in the South Ossetian Autonomous District, where the local separatists took steps to separate the Northern part of Shida Kartli (which the Communists named as “South Ossetian Autonomous District” in 1920s) from the rest of Georgia. On 20 September 1990, when the Communists were still the ruling party in Georgia, the session of the People’s Deputies of the so-called “South Ossetian” District Soviet, in violation of the constitutions of the South Ossetian Autonomous District, Georgian SSR, and the USSR, adopted the decision about the transformation of the autonomous district into “South Ossetian Democratic Republic.” They also adopted the “Declaration regarding the State Sovereignty of the South Ossetian Democratic Republic,” according to which “South Ossetian Democratic Republic” was declared as “a sovereign state in the Soviet Union,” whose “existence” was “guaranteed” by the “constitutions of the Soviet Union and the South Ossetian Democratic Republic.” At the same time, the deputies decided to address the Supreme Soviet of the USSR with a request to grant the “South Ossetian Democratic Republic” a membership of the Soviet Union (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 37-40**).

In this difficult situation the new government of Georgia took an unexpected and unordinary step. Zviad Gamsakhurdia agreed to appoint Vladislav Ardzinba to the position of the Chairman of the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet. Thus, the most notorious leader of the separatists, who was one of the active supporters of preserving the Soviet Union and who

as people's deputy in his hysterical speeches was always trying to discredit Georgia and the Georgians, became the highest political figure in the autonomous republic. Of course, it was well-known for the new Georgian leadership, but because of the serious problems in the so-called "South Ossetia" and with the aim to avoid the "second front" in Abkhazia, Z. Gamsakhurdia agreed to this appointment.

On 4 December 1990, after the long interval caused by the political crisis, the session of the Supreme Soviet of the Abkhazian ASSR opened in Sokhumi. This time all the deputies were present at the session, which meant that the Abkhaz deputies recognized the failure of their "constitutional coup" of August 1990, since the session was held as the one of the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazian **Autonomous** Soviet Socialist Republic. On the session Vladislav Ardzinba was unanimously confirmed as the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet. The Georgian government and Zviad Gamsakhurdia personally were hoping to achieve the loyalty of the separatists' leaders and normalizing the situation in the autonomous republic. Nevertheless, those Georgian politicians who agreed to V. Ardzinba's nomination, did not assess correctly his ties with the reactionary circles in Moscow (**Chervonnaya, 1993: 97**). V. Ardzinba did not even try to justify the confidence of the Georgian government. From the very first weeks it became clear that he never thought to support the building of independent Georgian state and involve the Abkhaz people in this process. It became especially evident in February 1991, when V. Ardzinba was actively involved in the preparation of 17 March all-Soviet referendum for the preservation of the USSR. The Georgian government expressed its negative attitude towards this referendum and on 28 February issued a decree which prohibited the organization of this referendum in Georgia. At the same time, the Supreme Council of Georgia announced the referendum on the restoration of the Georgian statehood, which had to be held on 31 March 1991.

The decision on prohibiting the all-Soviet referendum in Georgia was a direct challenge to the official Moscow, which immediately answered it in Abkhazia. On the same day (28 February), following the directive from the Kremlin, the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazian ASSR "made a decision" to participate in the all-Soviet referendum of 17 March 1991 (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 64**). The Abkhaz separatists and V. Ardzinba himself, along with the organizations representing the Russian-speaking residents, actively appealed to the population to participate in the 17 March 1991 referendum and vote for the preservation of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, soon it became evident that because of the boycott from the Georgian residents, the referendum was doomed to the failure. Thus, V. Ardzinba and his entourage decided to falsify the results. They simply removed from the voters' lists the residents of Gali district, who were boycotting the 17 March 1991 referendum. Thus, decreasing the total figure by approximately 60,000 eligible voters, they "got" the magic number – 50.3% and decreed that the autonomous republic would stay in the Soviet Union. (According to "Lukyanov's Law," if more than 50% of the population of autonomous region voted for the preservation of the USSR, that autonomy would stay in the So-

viet Union.) This was the first serious blow that Vladislav Ardzinba delivered to Zviad Gamsakhurdia.¹

The next issue on which V. Ardzinba openly confronted the Georgian government was the participation in the 31 March 1991 referendum on the restoration of Georgian independence. Although, he did not dare to prohibit the referendum in Abkhazia, but used all the levers to disrupt its conducting. Despite all his efforts, the referendum was successful in Abkhazia. Separatists were able to disrupt it only in Gudauta district and Tkvarcheli. Otherwise, 62% of the eligible voters participated in the referendum in Abkhazia and nearly all of them voted for the restoration of Georgian independence. Based on the results of the 31 March referendum, the Supreme Council of Georgia declared the restoration of Georgian independence on 9 April 1991. On 14 April 1991 the Supreme Council elected *Zviad Gamsakhurdia* as a President of Georgia.

After the 17 March referendum, the Kremlin launched the process of preparing the “new union treaty.” This campaign is known as “Novo-Ogaryovo process” and the heads of the autonomous republics, by the initiative from the Kremlin, were actively involved in it, which was made possible because of the law “On the Division of Authority between the Soviet Union and the Bodies of the Federation” adopted by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on 26 April 1990. This law was equalizing the economic, social, and cultural rights of the autonomous republics with the ones of the union republics (Zverev, 1999: 114-115). It is highly probable that the support, both open and secret, which was given from the Kremlin to the autonomous republics in their yearning for raising to the level of the union republics and becoming the founding members of the “new union of the sovereign state” was the fatal mistake of Mikhail Gorbachev and his associates, which, in the end, resulted in the break-up of the Soviet Union. In the spring of 1991, when M. Gorbachev launched the “Novo-Ogaryovo process,” he did not acknowledge the possible danger and conducted harsh policy against the union republics. Z. Gamsakhurdia, as it was expected, refused to participate in “Novo-Ogaryovo process and rejected the cooperation with Moscow. The Kremlin considered this as a challenge and invited the leaders of autonomies. V. Ardzinba used this opportunity and along with Mintimer Shaimiev (President of Tatarstan) and several other leaders of autonomy, actively supported the plan of modernization of the Soviet empire.

¹ It should be mentioned that the leader of the separatist regime later, in his memoirs, practically confessed to the falsification of March 17 referendum results. He recalls the address of the Georgian General Prosecutor to Vladimir Orlov, the Chairman of the Central Election Committee of the Soviet Union, in which the Georgian side demanded to annul the falsified results of the referendum. In a few months, at the last congress of the People’s Deputies when “the irreversibility of Soviet Union’s dissolution became evident,” V. Orlov told to V. Ardzinba that he was going to send the data to Tbilisi. V. Ardzinba had written that he “**could not permit it.**” Thus, he urged his aide to take the documents and **destroy them (Ardzinba, 2018: 162-163, emphasis added – Z.P.).**

V. Ardzinba's participation in the "Novo-Ogaryovo process" forced official Tbilisi to take steps to separate him from the Kremlin. The negotiations began with his entourage regarding the elections of the Supreme Council in Abkhazia, but they went into deadlock. The Abkhazs demanded the "guarantees of the institutional representation for the people who gave the name to the republic" (Kolbaia et al., 1999: 88-89). In normal language that meant the guaranteed majority for the Abkhazs in the supreme governmental body, which was the violation of every democratic principle. Nevertheless, the Georgian government expressed the unprecedented (and inexplicable) magnanimity and made unjustified concessions. It agreed to the proposals of the Abkhaz separatists and gave them the guaranteed majority in the Supreme Council of Abkhazia. The law on the elections in the Supreme Council of Abkhazia was adopted on 9 July 1991. Based on it, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Abkhazian ASSR created the central election committee on 20 July 1991.

According to the new law, the quotas were established for the nationalities living in Abkhazia. Despite the fact that the Abkhazs were only 17% of the population of the autonomous republic, there were allotted 28 deputies from 65 to them. The Georgians – 45% of the population – could elect only 26 deputies, while all other nationalities – Russians, Armenians, Greeks, etc. (around 35% of the population) – were getting only 11 deputies. This was not an invention as the quotas were common in Abkhazia in Soviet times, but they were unofficial, without any judicial agreement. The Abkhazs were getting majority in the Supreme Soviet as a result of the "democratic elections." This time was different since the Abkhazs understood that in real democracy they would lose the control over the political life in the autonomous republic. That was the reason because of which the separatists demanded the legal agreement which was granted to them by the Georgian government and Z. Gamsakhurdia.

Georgian government's decision to give up the democratic elections and legalize the Abkhaz majority over the Georgians in the Supreme Council of Abkhazia was followed by negative reaction from the opposition. They blamed Z. Gamsakhurdia in the betrayal of the Georgian national interests. The government and its supporters tried to justify the decision. They claimed that it was aimed at defusing the tension and avoiding the provocations from the Kremlin. From our point of view, although holding the elections based on quotas could be somehow vindicated,¹ the official legalizing of Abkhaz supremacy cannot be justified. The utmost concession should be the equal proportion for the Georgians and Abkhazs as a good will despite the majority in population for the Georgian side. Thus, it would show the readiness of the Georgians **to govern on an equal basis** with the Abkhazs in Abkhazia. **The establishment of 28-26 rule meant for the Abkhazs that the Georgian government recognized them as the only aborigines of Abkhazia and gave them a monopoly on ruling it.** This definitely meant that the Georgians, the aboriginal popula-

¹ Of course, it was better to conduct the democratic elections and establish high quorum for the decisions on the constitutional level (Papaskiri, 2005: 139-140; Papaskiri, 2009: 279-280).

tion of Abkhazia, were becoming the second-rate citizens. This decision cannot be considered a compromise since it had been an insult to the 250-thousand Georgian population of Abkhazia. This decision was political, ideological, and historiographical capitulation.

The new election law was violating the rights of the Georgian (and other non-Abkhaz) population not only in getting more deputies. (As it was already mentioned, they enjoyed such advantage in Soviet times too.) There was one more difference from the Soviet practice: The Abkhaz deputies had to be elected in the districts where the Abkhazs were in majority. The Abkhaz leadership feared that the Georgians would be able to elect the Abkhazs who were not supporting the separatists. Thus, the election districts had to be distributed unevenly (analogous to the rotten boroughs in the United Kingdom before the 1830s). That was why they put forward the demand that the scarcely inhabited (mainly by the Abkhazs) districts should have the same number as the densely populated ones. There was created the so-called "conciliatory commission." Finally, the Georgian side agreed to the Abkhaz proposal in return for the changes in the Constitution of the Abkhazian ASSR. On 27 August 1991 V. Ardzinba signed the "Law on the Emendation of the Constitution (Basic Law) of the Abkhazian ASSR." According to it, the following phrase was added to the 98th article of the Constitution of the Abkhazian ASSR: "Law and other acts regarding the legal status of the Abkhazian ASSR are adopted by 2/3 of the overall number of the deputies of Supreme Council of the Abkhazian ASSR as it is defined by the Constitution" (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 80**).

Thus, despite the majority over the Georgians, the separatists would not be able to change the state status of Abkhazia, because even if they were supported by all 11 deputies of other nationalities, they would still fail to reach the constitutional threshold. Also 2/3 of the deputies were needed for the confirmation of the government. It looked like the sides had to compromise on all significant issues, but as the future development has shown, these constitutional amendments stayed on the paper and the Abkhazs started the legal chaos in the autonomous republic.

On 31 October (the first round) and 1 December (the second round) 1991 the elections of the Supreme Council of the Abkhazian ASSR were held. The Abkhazs easily overcame their inner opposition and needed the second round only in small amounts of districts. All the known separatist leaders were elected in the Supreme Council. Unlike the Abkhazs, the Georgians had several candidates in all the districts and the battle between them was fierce. Moreover, in one of the districts for the Georgian deputies there was no winner at all and the Georgian deputation lost one seat. Confrontation did not allow the Georgians to pay more attention to those 11 districts, which were intended for the non-aboriginal nationalities. The Abkhazs, thanks to manipulations of all kinds, were able to push through pro-separatist candidates in five districts, while the pro-Georgians won in six districts. This meant that the separatists controlled 33 seats (28+5), while the Georgians only 31 (25+6), since one of the Georgian seats remained vacant (**Papaskiri, 2007: 322**).

The first session of the Supreme Council nearly unanimously elected Vladislav Ardzinba as its Chairman. Georgian Tamaz Nadareishvili became the First Vice Chairman, while Albert Topolyan, the leader of Armenian political organization “Krunk,” became the Vice Chairman from the non-aboriginal deputies. From nine members elected to the Presidium of the Supreme Council five were supporting the separatists, while four were from the pro-Georgian deputation. V. Ardzinba used this advantage and started to issue the most significant decrees under the aegis of the Presidium of Supreme Council. This was the violation of the 103rd article of the Constitution of the Abkhazian ASSR. It was not the first time when V. Ardzinba was issuing the illegal acts by ignoring the constitutional norms. Throughout 1991 the so-called “legal war” was conducted between Sokhumi and Tbilisi. We have already mentioned some of the facts when V. Ardzinba violated the constitutions and existing legislature. The Georgian government tried to bar such decisions from the execution but mostly failed. We will name some of the normative acts issued with the violation of the Constitution by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Abkhazian ASSR from July 1991.

For example, on 2 July 1991 V. Ardzinba signed the decree of the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of Abkhazian ASSR regarding the Georgian law “On the Creation of National Guard – the Internal Troops of Georgian Republic” and declared it “void... on the territory of Abkhazia.” The separatists declared that the Georgian law was violating M. Gorbachev’s decree “On the prohibition of creation of the armed formations unforeseen by the USSR legislature and on the requisitioning of illegal arms” (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 75**).

On 30 August 1991 the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of Abkhazian ASSR issued a decree regarding the laws of Georgian republic “On the regulation of monetary and credit system,” “On the National Bank of Georgian Republic,” and “On the banks and banking,” and declared them “void... on the territory of Abkhazia” (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 83-84**). On 27 September 1991 the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of Abkhazian ASSR stopped the execution of Order №342 (31 July 1991) of Georgian Ministry of Education on the territory of Abkhazia (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 84-85**). There was also a decree “On guaranteeing the economic basics for the sovereignty of Abkhazia,” according to which the Council of Ministers of Abkhazian ASSR had to secure “the transfer of the all-Soviet and mixed union-republic factories, institutions, and organizations under the management of the governmental bodies of the autonomous republic” (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 85**). On 27 September 1991 the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of Abkhazian ASSR issued one more illegal decree, this time “On the creation of Abkhazian Republican Customs.” According to this decree, the questions regarding the structure, personnel, and activities of the so-called “Abkhazian Republican Customs Service” were co-ordinated with the Customs Committee of the USSR (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 86**).

All the above-mentioned decrees, and several others, were violating the 82nd article of Georgian Constitution, according to which the laws of Georgian Republic were obliga-

tory on the territory of autonomous republics. Thus, the Georgian President and Supreme Council issued decrees stopping the execution of such decisions of Abkhazian Supreme Soviet (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 86-87**). Nevertheless, V. Ardzinba and his entourage did not give ground and started the execution of the illegal decrees. The new illegal decrees were also adopted. On 22 October 1991 the Council of Ministers of Abkhazian ASSR issued a decree "On the measures of transferring the factories and organizations of all-Soviet and mixed union-republic subordination located in the Abkhazian ASSR to the jurisdiction of the Abkhazian ASSR." Official Tbilisi immediately reacted and on 24 October President Z. Gamsakhurdia stopped the execution of this decree (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 88**).

Especially worrying was the decree of Presidium of Supreme Soviet of Abkhazian ASSR from the 28 November 1991 "On the creation of State Security Service of Abkhazia." This decree was creating the independent organization of state security which had to be financed from Abkhazian republican budget. The pretext for such decision was the abolition of the Committee of the State Security of the Soviet Union (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 91**). This practically meant the usurpation of state security functions by V. Ardzinba.

All this proves that even before the election of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia V. Ardzinba was regularly violating the constitution of the autonomous republic and issuing the most significant normative acts via the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Abkhazian ASSR. But the full-scale legal bacchanalia began in Abkhazia after the break-up of the Soviet Union. For example, on 29 December 1991 the Presidium of the Supreme Council of Abkhazian ASSR issued the decree "On the emendation of the regulations on the disposition and functioning of the military units, border and internal troops, the institutions of naval forces on the territory of Abkhazia." According to it, "all the military units, institutions, border and internal troops, the Navy were dispositioned in Abkhazia by the will of the people and Constitution of Abkhazia" and "their further deployment was completely... under the authority of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia." The same decree declared the "property, machinery, armaments, ... building, etc. of the local military governing... structures and the military units №5482, №3697" as belonging to Abkhazia (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 95-96**).

As we see, even when dealing with the issue of utmost importance like the disposition of the foreign military forces (in this case, of Russian Federation, the legal successor of the Soviet Union) at the territory of Abkhazian ASSR, officially the part of the sovereign Georgian Republic, the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Abkhazian ASSR completely ignored the viewpoint of Georgian central government and took unilateral decisions, despite the fact that it had neither judicial right even to discuss it nor the authority to do it. Nevertheless, the military objects were declared as the property of the autonomous republic only, and not of the state (Georgian Republic) on the whole.

On the same day, 29 December 1991, the "all-mighty" Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Abkhazian ASSR issued another decree challenging the central government.

The decree created the Provisional Military Council subordinated to the Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Abkhazian ASSR and put under its authority all the military units and Militia dispositioned on the territory of Abkhazia. Naturally, V. Ardzinba became the Chairman of this council. It is not hard to guess that this so-called "Provisional Military Council" was an embryonic form of the "Ministry of Defence" and it represented the military department. The creation of an independent military structure in Abkhazia was disrupting the Georgian statehood and it was acknowledged in Tbilisi. Unfortunately, there already began the military coup in the Georgian capital and nobody could pay attention to the situation in Sokhumi.

CHAPTER XII. FRATRICIDAL CONFLICT IN ABKHAZIA OF 1992-1993 AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

§1. Political Battles of 1992 prior to the 14 August Tragedy

The tragic events of Tbilisi at the end of 1991 and beginning of 1992 – the violent overthrow of President *Zviad Gamsakhurdia's* government – significantly aggravated the political situation throughout Georgia and led to a large-scale civil strife. The epicentre of the confrontation shifted from the capital to the western regions of Georgia. Tensions escalated in Abkhazia, where the ousted president was supported by a large part of the Georgian population of the region. The local leaders of the “Round Table – Free Georgia” demanded the condemnation of the military coup in Tbilisi from the Georgian society of Abkhazia.

In the given situation, V. Ardzinba and his entourage, step by step, consistently demonstrated disobedience to Tbilisi and made illegal decisions in gross violation of the Constitution and legislation, thus effectively separating Abkhazia from the unified Georgian state or legal space and undermining the state unity of Georgia.

In such a situation, the Georgian deputation of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia could not form a unified position. First Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Council Tamaz Nadareishvili expressed his full loyalty to the interim government of Georgia and had constant ties with the head of the government Tengiz Sigua. During all this time, Vladislav Ardzinba held a wavering position and tried his best to use this difficult situation in Georgia and realize his far-reaching plans. Outwardly, the separatist leader behaved as if what was happening in the rest of Georgia did not concern Abkhazia at all.¹ At the same time V. Ardzinba tried (quite successfully) to establish relations with the supporters of the ousted president and even secretly encouraged them to take anti-Tbilisi actions.

The widespread disobedience campaign in Abkhazia, especially in Sokhumi, which was manifested by the permanent protest rallies of the former government supporters, created a very favourable background for V. Ardzinba for making other unconstitutional normative acts and other important decisions. Thus, on 25 January 1992, the Supreme Council of Abkhazia passed a resolution “*On Laws and other Legislative Acts on the territory of the Abkhaz ASSR due to the Termination of the USSR,*” according to which the laws of the Republic of Georgia were restricted on the territory of the Autonomous Republic (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 104-105**).

The Abkhaz authorities have been particularly active when the fighters of Georgian National Guard appeared on the territory of Abkhazia. Given that the Abkhaz authorities

¹ This did not prevent him from having telephone contacts with Prime Minister T. Sigua and he even expressed a sort of kindness towards him. For example, when asked about his attitude towards the head of the interim government, V. Ardzinba publicly stated: “Two doctors of sciences will always find the common language” (**Papaskiri, 2010: 397**).

had “officially” declared the Georgian National Guard an illegal military formation, the Presidium of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia issued another decree on 20 January 1992, this time “On Additional Measures to Ensure Law and Order in the Territory of the Republic of Abkhazia.” According to this document, the enforcement agencies of the Autonomous Republic (Ministry of Internal Affairs, Prosecutor’s Office, State Security Service, Military formations under “Abkhazian jurisdiction”) were instructed to immediately work together to retrieve weapons illegally stored in the population of Abkhazia (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 97-98**).

A particularly critical situation was created in Abkhazia in 1992. In February, when a battalion of the National Guard of the Republic of Georgia, accompanied by armoured vehicles, under the command of Giorgi Karkarashvili, entered Abkhazia and crossed it all the way to the river Psou, to the state border of Georgia and the Russian Federation. This was a demonstration of force from the new leadership of the country, which was primarily aimed at intimidating supporters of the former government. In addition, the march of the Georgian military forces through the whole territory of Abkhazia should have given some thought to the separatist regime in Sokhumi and forced it to show more loyalty to the Georgian central government. The leaders of the Abkhaz separatists, despite great irritation, did not dare to resist the Georgian army, but after some time, due to the categorical demands of Vladislav Ardzinba, the Georgian troops left the territory of Abkhazia.

In February of 1992, a movement was launched in Sokhumi to consolidate the Georgian national-patriotic Forces of Abkhazia and create a strong anti-separatist front. To some degree, this movement was inspired “from above.” The main initiator of the new movement was Givi Lominadze, the Minister of Internal Affairs of Abkhazia, who by this time had become one of the leading political figures in the Georgian nomenclature. The whole Georgian political elite of Abkhazia joined the new movement: ministers, deputies, etc., as well as the representatives of the scientific and creative intelligentsia, the heads of industrial facilities. The new public movement was named as “Progressive-Democratic Union of Abkhazia” (PDUU). After proper preparatory work, the founding congress of the Progressive-Democratic Union was held on 11 March 1992. The creation of a new public movement with claims of a consolidating force of the Georgian population was considered an important political event, and not only in Abkhazia.

From the very beginning, the new organization launched an active informational and ideological campaign aimed at exposing the destructive, anti-Georgian actions of the separatist leadership of Abkhazia. Newsletters were published in Georgian and Russian languages. According to V. Ardzinba and his entourage, those publications deliberately discredited the Supreme Council and especially its Abkhaz part. Naturally, this caused the extreme irritation of the separatist regime and the response was not delayed: measures were taken to ban the APDK newsletters. On the basis of Ardzinba’s direct instructions, the prosecutor’s office of the Autonomous Republic began working on prosecuting the

publishers of the Newsletter and the PDUА leaders (**Chervonnaya, 1993: 102**). But this initiative failed. It was obvious that the fabricated, the so-called “criminal case” would have no judicial perspective, as the bulletins contained infallible facts that clearly confirmed the anti-state actions of the separatist leadership against the security of the country in general.¹

It was revealed back in winter of 1992 that V. Ardzinba tried his best to take advantage of the crisis in Georgia and consistently took steps to gain state sovereignty. During the discussion of the issue of state symbols (flag, coat of arms) in the Supreme Council the Abkhaz side categorically demanded to accept the analogue of the so-called flag of the Confederation of Caucasian Peoples as the state flag even though the leaders of this organization openly stated their goal of creating an Islamist state in the North Caucasus with Abkhazia as its part, and Sokhumi as its capital. The green colour of the “state flag” was a kind of expression of the Islamist-fundamentalist direction. By adopting symbols similar to the ones of “Confederation,” the Abkhaz separatist MPs were unequivocally indicating that they did not consider Abkhazia as a part of the Georgian state. For them it should be a part of the community of Moslem peoples of the North Caucasus.

These separatist provocations have exacerbated the situation in the Autonomous Republic. The situation turned out to be especially tense by the deployment of the so-called “*Internal Troops Regiment of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia*” in Gali district on the right bank of the River Enguri. It was done on the direct orders of Vladislav Ardzinba. Formally, this issue was agreed with the new leadership of Georgia and the deployment of the “Abkhazian Guard” on the Enguri allegedly was aimed at preventing the supporters of the ousted President Zviad Gamsakhurdia from crossing to the territory of Abkhazia. The separatists openly claimed that the “internal army” fighters were stationed on the “Abkhazian state border with Georgia,” where they guarded the security of the “homeland.” This was most clearly revealed during the incident on the Otobaia-Nabakevi section of the administrative border between Gali and Zugdidi districts, when one of the fighters of the “Abkhazian Guard” was killed in a clash with a small group of Z. Gamsakhurdia’s supporters. This fact was used as an excuse for another “patriotic” agitation. The deceased Abkhazian young man was declared a “national hero,” who fell while defending his “state border” (see: **Papaskiri, 2007: 341; Papaskiri, 2010: 402-403**).

The provocations reached their peak on 5 May 1992, when V. Ardzinba and his entourage “turned down” the candidacy of *Givi Lominadze* proposed by the Georgian side for the position of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Abkhazia. This was a gross

¹ For example, we can refer to the fact of sending the Abkhaz “militants” (officially the fighters of the so-called “Supreme Army Internal Troops Regiment”) from Abkhazia to Grozny to get “military-political training” and gain combat experience. Oleg Damenia, one of the ideologues of Abkhazian separatism, a member of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia, the vice-rector of the university, informed the population about this on Abkhazian television.

violation of the earlier agreement. As it has already been mentioned, during the adoption of the election law that violated the national dignity of the Georgian population of Abkhazia, an unofficial, so-called “gentlemen agreement” was reached between Georgian and Abkhazian sides. According to it, the Georgian MPs had to unconditionally support the Abkhazs’ candidacy for the position of chairman of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia (the highest authority in the Autonomous Republic). For its part, the Abkhaz side should have acted similarly in approving the Chairman of the Council of Ministers (second highest authority in the hierarchy). Nominating a candidate for this position was the prerogative of the Georgian deputation and it had to be approved by the Abkhaz side without any objections.

The Georgian side honestly fulfilled its promises and unanimously supported the candidacy of Vladislav Ardzinba, who was categorically unacceptable to the vast majority of the Georgian population in Abkhazia. However, the separatists did not respond with mutual appreciation, when it came to approving G. Lominadze, the Georgian candidate for the position of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers. Moreover, V. Ardzinba and his accomplices, by completely ignoring the opinion of the Georgian deputies and by a simple majority of votes, approved Vazha Zarandia as the Chairman of the Abkhazian Council of Ministers. Vazha Zarandia was completely unknown to the general public and was “Georgian only in passport /i.e. on paper/”.¹ In fact, he was completely devoid of the Georgian national mentality (**Papaskiri, 2007: 342-343; Papaskiri, 2010: 403-404**).

The appointment of V. Zarandia as a chairman of the Abkhazian Council of Ministers was a continuation of the vicious personnel policy that the Abkhaz nomenclature has been successfully pursuing for the past decades. The essence of this personnel policy was that the so-called People with average skills and abilities were selected for the “Georgian positions.” Their Georgian nationality was only an entry made in their passports and nothing more. The separatists could not allow the promotion of patriotic Georgians to leading positions. They needed people who were lazy, indistinguishable, wordless executors of their will, for whom the Georgian national and state interests were completely alien. The Georgian public figure, who appeared to be “too much of Georgian” and opposed the dictatorship of the Abkhaz authorities, immediately became the object of retaliation by the separatists.

¹ *A few years ago, Vazha Zarandia publicly protested against the reference to him as a “Georgian only in passport.” However, his “explanations” did not dispel any suspicions. Moreover, they further strengthened the opinion that he really has nothing to do with being Georgian. In particular, he boasted that he was, the first and foremost, a “Soviet man with a Soviet world-view” for whom the “petty bourgeois notions and ideas, inciting strife among nations under the slogan of defending national interests” was an unfamiliar phenomenon. The faithful servant of the Abkhaz separatist regime did not stop here and declared with enviable Bolshevik pathos that he was “a communist by faith ... in the literal sense of the word” (Zarandia, 2010. Emphasis added – Z.P., K.K.).*

The decision of Ardzinba and the Abkhaz delegation of the Supreme Council to appoint *Vazha Zarandia* to the highest “Georgian” position in Abkhazia has caused outrage among the Georgians. On 9 May a congress of the Georgian population was held in Sokhumi. It gave a harsh assessment of the facts of gross violation of constitutional and legal norms by the separatist regime and demanded the repeal of all legislative and normative acts adopted by the Ardzinba government in violation of the existing legislation. In addition, the participants of the congress demanded the dissolution of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia and the holding of snap elections. The congress called on the population to unite around the democratic forces and rise up against the complete usurpation of power by V. Ardzinba (Kolbaia et al., 1999: 106).

The congress also made a decision to create *the National Unity Council*, a coordinating body of Georgian public and political organizations in Abkhazia. It united almost all public and political organizations operating in Abkhazia, as well as the local professional and creative unions. The heads of the regional organizations of political parties, other public and political unions, the prominent representatives of the scientific and creative intelligentsia, the heads of industrial units became the members of the council. The Georgian delegation to the Supreme Council of Abkhazia also received its quota in the council. The headquarters of the National Unity Council was located in the so-called “*Tourist Centre by the 17th Congress of All-Union Leninist Young Communists League*” (i.e. Kom-somol). The National Unity Council was originally supposed to act as a deliberative body, but over time, its weight increased significantly and it acquired the role of a “*public parliament*” whose decisions became de facto binding even to the Georgian deputation of the Abkhazian Supreme Council itself (see more in: Papaskiri, 2007: 344-346; Papaskiri, 2010: 404-406).

The first response of the National Unity Council to the separatist provocations was the formation of a Georgian mechanized battalion in Sokhumi. The battalion was stationed in the area of the above-mentioned tourist centre. A battalion was formed as a counterweight to the “*Abkhaz Guard*” (officially the Internal Troops Regiment of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia). The creation of the Georgian military forces made the separatist leadership of Abkhazia to reconsider the issue of V. Zarandia’s appointment. They started to think about negotiations with the Georgian side and nominating a new candidate for the position of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers. Such talks took place even in the office of Sergei Bagapsh, the First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Abkhazia, who was one of the initiators of those consultations.

At the 5 May 1992 meeting, the Georgian delegation made completely substantiated claims to the Abkhaz side regarding the political and legal blunders committed during the appointment of V. Zarandia as the Chairman of the Council of Ministers. The Abkhaz MPs admitted their mistake to some degree and expressed their readiness to correct it at the next plenary session of the Supreme Council. However, the Abkhaz MPs added that they could not support **any candidate nominated by Georgians**. It turned out that the

Georgian side did not have complete freedom in choosing their candidate, while the Abkhazs had this privilege in electing the Chairman of the Supreme Council. With this, the Abkhaz side once again trampled on the so-called Gentlemen Agreement. This statement of the Abkhaz MPs extremely aggravated the situation during the negotiations and the meeting was disrupted (for more details on the course of the meeting and the reasons for the disruption, see: **Papaskiri, 2007: 347-349; Papaskiri, 2012: 126-129**).

Political situation in Abkhazia was gradually becoming more and more tense during May and June of 1992. The situation was especially aggravated after Vladislav Ardzinba overstepped his authority and dismissed *Givi Lominadze* as the Minister of Internal Affairs. According to the unanimous decision of the Abkhaz deputation of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia, the ethnic Abkhaz Alexander Ankvab was appointed to this post. The move by the separatist leader was illegal because under the existing law, he had no right to appoint a new interior minister of the Autonomous Republic without the consent of the Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia.

Meanwhile, the situation in Georgia on the whole was becoming increasingly difficult. The tensions were high in the so-called “South Ossetia”. There was no peace in Western Georgia, mainly in the Samegrelo region, where supporters of the ousted president were vigorously trying to seize control. The meeting of the leaders of the Russian Federation and Georgia – Boris Yeltsin and Eduard Shevardnadze – was scheduled to take place on 24 June 1992 near Sochi in Dagomis. However, on the morning of 24 June, before the official departure of the Georgian delegation to Sochi, the supporters of the ousted president occupied the building of the Georgian TV and Radio. They called on the population to speak out against the Provisional Government of Georgia. Authorities opposed the protest with all available police forces, special services, and the army.

Vladislav Ardzinba took advantage of those events in Tbilisi. He immediately ordered the so-called “Supreme Council Regiment” to deal with the issue in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. They broke into the cabinet and forced Givi Lominadze to leave the ministry building; after that *Alexander Ankvab* was brought into the cabinet. At the same time V. Ardzinba, under the pretext of maintaining public order, mobilized additional armed units and through them blocked the buildings of the Supreme Council and the Council of Ministers, central highways, city streets, and squares (**Kolbaia et al., 1999: 112-113**). In this regard, the faction “Democratic Abkhazia” of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia, which along with Georgian MPs included some other (non-Abkhazian and non-Georgian) MPs, made a tough statement. It said that “a dictatorship, a totalitarian regime is being established in Abkhazia ... objects of strategic importance are in a state of disrepair. Sessions of the Supreme Council are being held under the terror and violence of armed groups. Based on this situation, we came to the conclusion that the parliamentary faction “Democratic Abkhazia” was left with only one way – to leave the building of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia” (**Kolbaia et al., 1999: 113**).

In such a situation, the State Council of Georgia, which at that time was the highest body of government in the country, took the initiative and took steps to start a dialogue with the Abkhaz side. A representative delegation of the State Council and the Government of Georgia headed by *Levan Aleksidze* and *Joni Khetsuriani*, the Minister of Justice of the Republic of Georgia, arrived in Sokhumi. The first meeting of the State Council delegation with the Abkhaz side took place in the meeting hall of the Presidium of Abkhazian Supreme Council. The meeting was opened by Vladislav Ardzinba, who, after a small introduction, strongly criticized the Georgian government and demonstratively left the courtroom. At the meeting L. Aleksidze and J. Khetsuriani, on behalf of the Georgian government, promised the Abkhaz side that the central government would make any concessions on raising Abkhazia's state status within Georgia, but would do so only after the new parliamentary elections and the election of a legitimate government. In fact, there was talk of transforming Georgia into a federal state, in which Abkhazia, as a subject of the federation, would be given the widest possible rights. Despite the energetic efforts of the Georgian delegation to turn the dialogue into a constructive one and somehow find a common language with the Abkhaz side, the first round of talks failed. Confidential Meeting of I. Aleksidze and J. Khetsuriani with V. Ardzinba was also fruitless (**Papaskiri, 2007: 351-353; Papaskiri, 2010: 409-410**).

In a word, it was obvious that the Abkhaz leadership was trying to escalate the situation in every possible way in the Autonomous Republic. Having enjoyed the absence of a legally elected government in Georgia, V. Ardzinba and his accomplices openly confronted the Georgian central government and in fact prepared the ground for Abkhazia's declaration of state independence. There was no doubt that all this was happening by the instigation of Moscow, where the anti-Georgian campaign was gaining momentum.

It is noteworthy that the Georgian National-Patriotic Forces of Abkhazia tried their best to stand up to this campaign and dispel the myth of harassment of Abkhazs by Georgians in Abkhazia. For this purpose, a delegation of the Georgian faction of the Abkhazian Supreme Council and the National Unity Council headed by the first Deputy Chairman of the Abkhazian Supreme Council *Tamaz Nadareishvili* arrived in Moscow in June of 1992. The delegation held a press conference at the Embassy of Georgia in Moscow. It aroused great interest in the local media (for more details see: **Papaskiri, 2007: 353-354; Papaskiri, 2010: 410**).

The Georgian national-patriotic forces of Abkhazia were not limited to ideological counter-propaganda. In order to curb the separatists' raging and prevent the impending bloodshed, they demanded from official Tbilisi to take more effective measures. One of such preventive measures was the creation of a structural subdivision of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Georgia, which would be permanently stationed in Abkhazia. At the end of June of 1992, a joint delegation of the Georgian faction of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia and the Council of National Unity arrived in Tbilisi. A meeting was held at the State Council with Eduard Shevardnadze. This meeting, which lasted about

five hours, ended on a rather optimistic note, and the members of the delegation returned to Sokhumi in the hope that the centre would seriously intervene in the ongoing processes in Abkhazia.

However, official Tbilisi was still very careful. Moreover, the central government of Georgia expressed readiness to recognize the Legitimacy of the so-called “Abkhaz Guard.” The Minister for Defence Tengiz Kitovani arrived in Sokhumi to hold consultations with V. Ardzinba on this issue. He offered the head of the Abkhazian government to unite the “Abkhazian Guard” with the “Georgian Battalion” of the Internal Troops stationed at the tourist centre and put them under the double subordination of the Georgian Ministry of Defence and the Supreme Council of Abkhazia. Thus, the military unit which was at Ardzinba’s full disposal would be formally subordinated to the Georgian Ministry of Defence. However, the idea of “dual subordination” was completely unacceptable to the National Unity Council, which saw it as a kind of capitulation of the central government to the separatists. Eventually this idea failed.

The situation in Abkhazia was seriously affected by events in Samegrelo districts. The Georgian government could not cope with the armed raids of Zviad Gamsakhurdia’s supporters. On 9 July 1992, they attacked the car of Alexander Kavsadze, Deputy Prime Minister of the Provisional Government of Georgia, and captured him. This fact significantly damaged the authority of the new government of Georgia and the country on a whole. The decision of the Executive Committee of the European Football Association (UEFA) to remove Georgian football clubs from the official UEFA tournaments became the first manifestation of distrust towards Georgia. It was a big blow for Georgia, and not only in terms of sports.¹

Meanwhile, the crisis of power in Abkhazia has reached its apogee. The faction “Democratic Abkhazia” of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia continued to boycott the sessions of the Supreme Council. For its part, the Abkhaz part of the Supreme Council stubbornly did not back down and did not compromise. There was an undisguised usurpation

¹ The participation of Georgian teams in official international competitions could have somewhat calm the political turmoil and contribute to the stabilization of the situation throughout Georgia, including Abkhazia. FC “Tskhumi” from Sokhumi was the 1992 Vice Champion of Georgia and the Georgian cup finalist. FC “Tskhumi” was scheduled to take part in the European Cup Winners’ Cup. This fact was promising, since holding European football matches in Sokhumi with the participation of a local club would naturally consolidate all football fans and possibly ease tensions in the society. However, the UEFA leadership, due to the unstable situation in the country, unfortunately not only refrained from holding official matches at Georgian stadiums, but simply banned (sic!) all the Georgian clubs from official UEFA tournaments. There is a reasonable suspicion that *Vyacheslav Koloskov*, the then President of the Russian Football Federation and at the same time Vice President of the World Football Association (FIFA), who was known for his anti-Georgian sentiments, played a significant role in making such a tough decision on the part of the UEFA.

of power by the separatist forces. All this ended with another unconstitutional act. On 23 July 1992, the so-called “session” of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia, in gross violation of the regulations, in the absence of a quorum, passed a resolution “*On the termination of the 1978 Constitution of the Abkhazian ASSR.*” Although, there was also adopted a separate resolution regarding the draft agreement on state relations between Georgia and Abkhazia (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 129**), the 23 July 1992 decisions made by the Abkhaz part of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia, were fairly perceived as the declaration of Abkhazia’s independence both in Abkhazia itself and in other parts of Georgia. It was quite clear that the Abkhaz side, by promising to establish “interstate relations” and concluding a “special agreement” with the Republic of Georgia, was simply trying to turn a blind eye to the international community (**Chervonnaya, 1993: 125**). The draft of the “*Foundations of Relations between the Republic of Abkhazia and the Republic of Georgia*” (authored by Taras Shamba, Doctor of Law and one of the prominent ideologues of Abkhazian separatism) was rather aimed at “civilized divorce” than keeping Abkhazia and Georgia in one state (**Chervonnaya, 1993: 125**).

Of course, all this was perfectly realized both in Sokhumi and Tbilisi. On 25 July 1992, the State Council of Georgia issued a special resolution declaring the decisions of the “session” of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia illegal (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 129-130**). On 28-30 July 1992, the parliamentary faction “Democratic Abkhazia” held a counter-session in Sokhumi, which gave political and legal assessments to the lawlessness committed by the separatists on 23 July (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 131-132**).

Thus, the Georgian deputation of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia did not follow emotions, did not take radical steps, and did not give an excuse to the separatist forces to provoke destabilization. As for the central government of Georgia, it acted even more cautiously and tried in every way to find a common language with the Abkhazian side, which was manifested by the decision of 4 August 1992. As it is known, Georgia was admitted as a member of the United Nations on 31 July 1992. It ended a rather protracted process of recognizing Georgia as an independent state on the international arena and gave Georgia full sovereignty. To commemorate this historic event, the Georgian authorities planned official ceremonies on 4 August and invited the Abkhaz leadership and personally *Vladislav Ardzinba*. However, the leader of the Abkhaz separatists refused to arrive in Tbilisi and he named the lack of his own plane (sic!) as the reason for his refusal. However, all this did not prevent the Georgian MPs (headed by *Tamaz Nadareishvili*) from the Supreme Council of Abkhazia from arriving in Tbilisi and taking part in the ceremonies.

Thus, due to the unconstructive position of the Abkhaz side, another chance to reach a compromise was missed. In this way, the separatists once again demonstrated their unwillingness to a dialogue with Tbilisi. Their goals were completely different. In the hindsight, it is easy to say that V. Ardzinba and his entourage were preparing to inspire bloodshed. They managed to realize this idea in just 10 days.

§2. Fratricidal War in Abkhazia

14 August 1992 is one of the most tragic days in the history of the Georgian and Abkhaz peoples. It was on this day that the armed conflict in Abkhazia began. According to the official version, which is simply impossible to deny, by the decision of the Central Government of Georgia, the **military units subordinated to the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Georgia** (whose sovereignty, within the 1991 borders of the Georgian SSR, was recognized by the international community) **moved into the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia**. It is clear that from a legal point of view, in this case, no violations took place, but when the first convoy of the Internal Troops of the Republic of Georgia approached the village of Okhurei in Ochamchire district, the Abkhaz militants suddenly started shooting from the checkpoint of the so-called “Abkhaz Guard” (an illegal military formation). The second clash took place near the village of Agudzera in Gulripshi district.

The armed resistance of the Abkhaz Guard, which inspired the conflict, came as a surprise, as the central government had agreed in advance with Vladislav Ardzinba personally to move military forces into the territory of Abkhazian autonomy. The fact that the agreement (albeit verbal) between Tbilisi and Sokhumi on the movement of troops into Abkhazia really existed was officially confirmed not by anyone but the Minister of Internal Affairs of Abkhazia at the beginning of war, *Alexander Ankvab (Ankvab, 2003)*, who later became the “President” of Abkhazia. Moreover, as it turns out, on 14 August at 10 am, *Vladislav Ardzinba* contacted by telephone *Rudik Tsatava*, the head of the Gali district administration, and instructed him to meet with the Internal Troops near the Enguri Bridge and to guide them as soon as possible to the Ochamchire district where Igor Gurgulia, the head of Ochamchire district administration, had to meet them. The latter, in turn, had to guide Tengiz Kitovani to the border of Gulripshi district. At the same time, the head of the separatist government forbade R. Tsatava to deploy a 50-member detachment from the incoming military contingent in the Gali district.

Thus, as it turns out, V. Ardzinba gave one message to R. Tsatava, while his “militants” acted completely differently. It is quite clear that all this was not accidental. V. Ardzinba was simply obliged to find out what had happened near Okhurei. Instead, he called on the entire population of Abkhazia to “wage a patriotic war against the Georgian occupiers and aggressors.”

We must state with full responsibility that the central government of Georgia had a full legal right to determine the need to deploy military forces in any region of the country. Thus, the demagogic allegations of the Abkhaz separatists and their patrons and instigators regarding Georgia’s aggression and annexation of Abkhazia are the manifestation of complete political and legal ignorance. Despite this, we believe that the Georgian political leadership should have been more careful when sending troops to Abkhazia so as not to give the separatists an excuse for the provocations. What do we mean? In our opinion,

the first person of the state should not have content himself with the agreement over the phone. Eduard Shevardnadze should have come to Sokhumi himself, meet in person V. Ardzinba, and officially receive from the head of the Autonomous Republic the consent (certified in writing) of the entry of a contingent of the Georgian military forces into the territory of Abkhazia (**Papaskiri, 2007: 367; Papaskiri, 2010: 419-420**). This would probably have avoided any misunderstandings, but unfortunately was not done. As a result, V. Ardzinba was given a chance to realize his reckless intentions. This is how the armed conflict, often called “the senseless war,” began.

Analysts who refer to the 1992-1993 conflict in Abkhazia as “the senseless war,” are claiming that it was a fratricidal war as it indeed was. Was not it absurd when the Abkhazian Papaskiri, who had forgotten his origins, fought the Georgian Papaskiri with a gun in his hand and tried in every way to expel him from Abkhazia?¹ Nevertheless, considering the Abkhazian conflict as a “senseless war” is an injustice to the thousands of soldiers who fell heroically in the wars and who fought for their homeland. This also applies to the Abkhaz youth who deeply believed that they were fighting for the freedom of their native Abkhazia. Their plight is much more tragic, because they really became the victims of a completely wrong and hopeless policy launched by the leaders of Abkhazian separatism. The separatist leaders made these young men fight against their own history, under the banner of the great King Leon II. Of that Leon II, who laid the foundation of a united Western-Georgian state in the 8th century. Thus, the name of the founder of the state, Leon II, was used (and is still used today) as a kind of ideological support against the unified Georgian statehood.

We can categorically state that this is a real insult, a gross falsification of the historical past of the Georgian and Abkhaz peoples. Because it was the Georgians (and not the separatists) who defended the flag and ideals of Leon II, the state created by the deeds of this great king, and its territorial integrity. They protected him not that much from their misguided Abkhaz brothers as from the covert or open aggression of the neighbouring state.

There is no doubt today that the separatists have long been prepared for a bloody clash, and not just from an informational-ideological point of view. Already by 12 o'clock in the afternoon, when the regular units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Minis-

¹ There is a well-known fact that during the hostilities one of the Sokhumi newspapers published the same surnames of the fallen soldiers from both sides (the Sichinavas, the Chitanavas, the Kirias, the Dzadzamias, the Zhvanias, the Akhvedianis, etc.). It has been confirmed that *Arthur Chitanava*, one of the so-called Abkhaz “field commanders,” was distinguished by his cruelty and directly led the mass shooting of Georgians in the village of Eshera in Sokhumi district (**Chkhenkeli, 1996: 46**). *Oleg Papaskiri*, Commander of the so-called “Sukhumi Battalion” and another Abkhaz of Georgian origin, had been accused in executing *Zhiuli Shartava* and his companions (**Papaskiri, 1999a: 133-142; Papaskiri, 2020: 164-165**).

try of Defence of Georgia had not yet entered Sokhumi, Abkhazian radio and television informed the public about the decision of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia “to mobilize adults and hand over weapons to the internal troops of Abkhazia.” According to the decree of the Presidium, “due to the deployment of armed formations by the State Council of Georgia on the territory of the Republic of Abkhazia and due to the real threat to the population and the sovereignty of the Republic of Abkhazia, mobilization of adults aged 18-40, and their enlistment in the Internal Troops Regiment” should have taken place. In addition, the commander of the Internal Troops Regiment was instructed to increase the number of the regiment to 5,000 and create new units “with 500 men in each” (**Regional Conflicts, 2005:** 135). At the same time, Sergei Shamba, one of the leaders of Aidgylara, who was appointed the head of the Republican Defence Staff, addressed the population of Abkhazia on local television and announced the mobilization of the entire population (men from 18 to 45) of Abkhazia (**Chervonnaya, 1993:** 135).

Meanwhile, the units of the military forces of the Republic of Georgia reached the city centre and stopped at the Red Bridge. There were first victims of fighting in Sokhumi. In order to avoid more bloodshed, Georgian formations were ordered not to enter the city centre. The Abkhazs took advantage of this and immediately established their control over the rest of the city. On August 15, a small unit of Georgian troops landed in Gagra vicinity from the sea. On the same day, a government delegation headed by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Georgia Tengiz Sigua and the Deputy Chairman of the State Council Jaba Ioseliani arrived in Sokhumi from Tbilisi, but the talks with the Abkhaz side ended in failure. V. Ardzinba demonstratively refused to participate in the meeting. After the breakdown of the negotiations, the Abkhazs left the city and on 17 August Georgian units without a fight took over the centre and north-western parts of Sokhumi and reached the River Gumista. Emergency rules were announced in Sokhumi. At the same time, the Abkhazs left Gagra and the city came under the control of Georgian units.

After the entry of the Georgian forces in Gagra and Sokhumi, V. Ardzinba launched a large-scale anti-Georgian information and ideological campaign. As early as 17 August, he issued a statement to the “*Parliaments, Presidents, Peoples of the World,*” emphasizing that the Georgian military forces had invaded “*the territory of the Republic of Abkhazia for its occupation*” (**Chervonnaya, 1993:** 142). V. Ardzinba also appealed to the leaders of the North Caucasus republics for help. According to S. Chervonnaya, on 15 August he flew to Grozny, where he met with Chechen leader Dzhokhar Dudayev (**Chervonnaya, 1993:** 144). The separatist leader also appealed to the Cossack Atamans, Russian national patriots, chauvinists, and the so-called “Confederation of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus” for help.

The parliament of the “Confederation of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus” passed a special resolution regarding the events in Abkhazia in Grozny on 17 August. The Confederation directly stated its readiness to engage in hostilities against Georgia (**Cher-**

vonnaya, 1993: 146). Even more challenging was the so-called “Order of the President of the Confederation of Caucasian Mountain Peoples Musa Shanibov and the Speaker of the Parliament Yusup Soslambekov,” which said:

“In accordance with the fact, that all the measures of peaceful settlement of the question of the withdrawal of the occupational forces of Georgia from the territory of sovereign Abkhazia, are exhausted and to carry out the resolution of the CMPC parliament session we order:

1. To all the staffs of the Confederation to be responsible for **providing transfer of the volunteers** to the territory of Abkhazia **for armed resistance against the aggressors.**
2. **To all armed formations of the Confederation** in case of confrontation with any forces join the battle and **use all the means to fight their way through** to the territory of Abkhazia.
3. **To declare the city of Tbilisi the zone of disaster and use all the measures including acts of terrorism.**
4. **To declare all persons of Georgian nationality as hostages on the territory of Confederation.** To detain all Georgians, all the goods destined for Georgia, and to hamper their transfer, etc.” (Avidzba, 2013: I, 521-522. Emphasis added – Z.P., K.K.).

The so-called “Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus” (CMPC) even before the war was overtly against the integrity of the Georgia and instigated the Abkhazs to confrontation. In these circumstances, the Kremlin did not only turn a blind eye to the actions of the “Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus,” but there is every reason to suppose that the “Confederation” acted at the direct instigation of the official structures of Russia. Today, there is no doubt that the so-called “Anti-Russian rhetoric” of the leaders of the Confederation of Caucasian Mountain Peoples, *Musa Shanibov*, *Yusuf Soslambekov*, and others, was merely a “disguise.” In fact, the confederation’s only goal was not to liberate the Caucasian peoples from the Russian imperial clutches, but rather to create a strong anti-Georgian front. There is unequivocal evidence that the armed formations of the “Confederation” were already present in Abkhazia even before the start of the conflict. After 14 August, the number of “Confederates” was increasing day by day (Papaskiri, 2007: 373; Papaskiri, 2010: 424).¹

¹ Most part of the so-called North Caucasian “volunteers” were not the ordinary militants but the well-trained officers of the Soviet Army. First of all, it is necessary to mention Colonel *Sultan Sosnaliev* (Kabardian by birth), the officer of the Soviet army, who was appointed to act as the “Defence Minister” of Abkhazia. Chechen volunteers were the most numerous and well-trained among the Confederates. We should especially note *Shamil Basayev* and his Chechen battalion. (Ironically, that battalion became known as the “Abkhazian battalion” during the First Chechen war.)

Between 17 and 20 August, the separatists, with the active support of Russian military units, were able to establish a strong defensive line along the right bank of the River Gumista. At the same time, in the vicinity of Tkvarcheli, the so-called "Eastern Front" was established. Another front line was passing near Gagra, by the village of Colchida. At the beginning of the armed conflict, the Georgian command could have struck decisive blows both in the direction of the Gumista and in the Tkvarcheli district, but the country's political leadership deliberately avoided bloodshed and refrained from offensive operations.

Meanwhile, the main area of the Russian-Georgian confrontation became the so-called "Eshera Laboratory," which the separatists turned into their bastion. It was from there that they began mass shelling of Sokhumi from artillery units. Any retaliatory firing from the Georgian formations in the direction of "Eshera Laboratory" provoked a strong protest from the Russian side. Despite repeated requests from the Georgian authorities, to evacuate the "laboratory" in order to avoid a clash with Russian military units, Moscow stubbornly turned down this request. It was obvious that the "laboratory factor" was gradually becoming the main advantage in the hands of the Russian military, allowing them to aid the separatists almost openly. Russian bombers got involved in fight, and the separatists spread another myth all over the world: it turned out that not Russian, but the "Abkhaz aviation" (of "unknown origins") was bombing Georgian positions.

And yet, there were no bloody clashes in the first days of the conflict. There was still hope that in a few days it would be possible to quell the armed confrontation. The situation was calm in Sokhumi and other cities and districts (Gagra, Ochamchire, Gulripshi, etc.) controlled by Georgian formations. The vast majority of the Georgian population in villages and towns, especially in Sokhumi, behaved with dignity. Georgians, together with their Abkhaz neighbours, organized round-the-clock shifts in their places of residence and thus maintained public order. This does not mean that there was no criminal offense in Sokhumi, Gagra, Ochamchire or elsewhere. On the contrary, a number of such crimes took place almost every day, and some fighters also joined the criminal elements in them, but it can be said with certainty that there were no raids on the Abkhaz population. Moreover, not only at the beginning of the conflict, but also during the whole armed confrontation, it is practically impossible (for sure in Sokhumi) to record the fact of the murder of an ethnically Abkhaz citizen on the Georgian-controlled territory. Thus, the allegations that genocide was committed not only by Abkhaz separatists, but also by the Georgians are completely unfounded.

Ethnically Abkhaz citizens moved freely in Sokhumi and other Georgian-controlled towns and villages. Although most of the institutions and industries were not functioning, the personnel of Abkhazian nationality (including the professors and scholars of the Abkhazian State University and the Abkhazian Institute of Language, Literature and History by Dimitri Gulia remaining in Sokhumi) received their salaries on time (in Georgian coupons). Not only prominent figures of Abkhazian science and culture were present in

Sokhumi, but also well-known ideologues of the separatist movement, including Alexey Gogua, the head of the Writers' Union of Abkhazia, one of the founders and the first chairman of the Abkhaz People's Forum – Aidgylara, who left to Gudauta only after the tragic events in Gagra. Another representative of the Abkhaz nationalist circles, Professor Shalva Inal-ipa, stayed in Sokhumi during the whole duration of the war.

The Georgian political leadership continued to seek ways for a peaceful settlement of the conflict. They were well aware that the peace in Abkhazia would be impossible without neutralizing the Russian factor. At the same time, Russia should have been removed from the events in Abkhazia without undermining its ambitions as a superpower. That is why Tbilisi was actively calling on the Kremlin to come up with a peace initiative. Russian President Boris Yeltsin, who was quite constructive at that time, responded to the call of the Georgian side and invited Eduard Shevardnadze, Chairman of the State Council of Georgia, to Moscow. The visit took place on 3 September 1992. Besides E. Shevardnadze, the Georgian delegation consisted of Prime Minister Tengiz Sigua, Minister of Foreign Affairs Alexander Chikvaдзе, Minister of Defence Tengiz Kitovani. Along with B. Yeltsin, Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei Kozyrev and Minister of Defence Pavel Grachev participated in the talks from the Russian side. Abkhazia was represented by both Abkhaz (Vladislav Ardzinba, Konstantin Ozgan) and Georgian (Tamaz Nadareishvili) leaders of the local government, but all of them were considered as a part of Georgian delegation. The meeting was also attended by the leaders of the North Caucasian republics and regions of the Russian Federation.

Starting from 3 September 1992, politicians and analysts cannot agree on the evaluation of the so-called "Summary Document of the Moscow Meeting." Some consider it a diplomatic failure of the Georgian side, but in stating their negative position, they make assumptions not from the content of the document itself, but from the fact that Moscow did nothing to realize its terms. According to others, the 3 September meeting in Moscow and the document adopted there was a diplomatic success for the Georgian political leadership. Indeed, if we proceed from the content of the "summary document" itself, which, in our opinion, is the only correct approach, it is very difficult to find anything that would violate the state sovereignty of Georgia.

This is clearly confirmed by the introductory part of the document, which states that ***"the President of the Russian Federation and the Chairman of the State Council of Georgia, who discussed the situation in Abkhazia with the participation of the leaders of Abkhazia, the North Caucasian republics, regions, and districts ... agreed on following..."*** (Regional Conflicts, 2005: 139. Emphasis added – Z.P., K.K.). Thus, the main subjects of the negotiations were the leaders of the two neighbouring states. It was they who **discussed the problem of Abkhazia and agreed with each other. Abkhazia itself** (especially its Abkhaz leader) **was not an independent third party in the negotiations and was member of the Georgian state delegation.** The real victory of Georgian diplomacy was the record of the inadmissibility of ***"any violation of the universally recognized principles***

of territorial integrity and inviolability of borders” (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 139**. Emphasis added – **Z.P., K.K.**). No less important was the fact that the “Summary Document” provided the basis for the deployment of the limited contingent of the military forces of the Republic of Georgia (as much as was necessary to “achieve the objectives of this agreement – the protection of railways and other facilities”) in Abkhazia (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 139**). In this way, the Russian side actually confirmed the legitimacy and expediency of the deployment of the military forces of the Republic of Georgia in Abkhazia.

Finally, the “**Summary Document**” was an international legal act officially signed by Boris Yeltsin and Eduard Shevardnadze, the **leaders of the respective sovereign states – the Russian Federation and the Republic of Georgia**. As for the other participants of the meeting, they only agreed to the document with their signatures and thus took responsibility for its implementation.

Therefore, as it can be seen from the above-mentioned data, the agreement reached in Moscow on 3 September 1992 cannot be considered as the document violating the national interests of Georgia. On the contrary, it was, at that point, undoubtedly a success of Georgian diplomacy.¹ However, one thing is what is written on the paper and the other thing is how it is implemented. Without any exaggeration, it can be said that the Russian side had once again shown its usual diplomatic treachery and had not demonstrated the slightest effort in order to comply with the terms of the “summary document.” On the contrary, at the obvious urging of Moscow, V. Ardzinba almost immediately began to revise the agreement of 3 September 1992.

On 16 September 1992, the leader of the Abkhaz separatists signed a resolution of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia, in which it was completely unceremoniously declared that on 14 August 1992, “*On the day of the invasion of the Georgian army, Abkhazia was a sovereign state, a subject of international law. In such a situation, the invasion of Georgian state troops on the territory of Abkhazia, according to the UN, is an act of aggression*” (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 140**. Emphasis added – **Z.P., K.K.**). V. Ardzinba did not contain himself with this act and on 16 September signed another resolution of the Presidium of the Supreme Council, according to which “*mass terror, physical destruction of people, torture of hostages by the troops of the Georgian State Council in the Re-*

¹ The fact that the document of 3 September 1992 better reflected the position of official Tbilisi is confirmed by V. Ardzinba’s behaviour. As it is known, the leader of the separatists could not hide his anger and admitted that he had forcibly signed the “summary document.” This can be clearly seen from the transcript of the Moscow meeting (see: **Transcript of Moscow, 2017: 263-298**). Moreover, later, V. Ardzinba actually admitted that he did not even think of fulfilling the terms of the “summary document” of 3 September. In his memoirs, he wrote: “*There was nothing left but to sign, but we had to act the way we needed to. In the end, it turned out that way*” (see: **Ardzinba, 2018: 247-248**. Emphasis added – **Z.P., K.K.**). Therefore, V. Ardzinba lied not only to the Georgian side, but also to the President of Russia, the main guarantor of the agreement (see also: **Kmuzov, 2020**).

public of Abkhazia” was declared “the genocide of the Abkhaz nation” (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 141**).

It is quite clear that these two documents were some kind of ideological preparation for not fulfilling the obligations of the 3 September agreement.¹ It was also clear that not everyone in the Russian political establishment liked the constructive decisions of this agreement. It is also indisputable that the aforementioned resolutions of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia were initiated by certain forces in Moscow.² On 25 September 1992, Russia’s supreme legislature passed a resolution completely deviating from the essence and spirit of the Moscow meeting’s “summary document.” In this resolution, the Russian Supreme Soviet strongly condemned the actions of the leadership of the Republic of Georgia, which tried to resolve the “difficult inter-ethnic relations” through violence and almost in the form of an ultimatum demanded the immediate cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of Georgian troops from Abkhazia. Moreover, before the settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia, they instructed the President and the Government to stop “*supplying arms, military equipment, ammunition, as well as supplies and raw materials to the Republic of Georgia under previous contracts...*” and refrain from “*concluding an economic agreement with Georgia*” (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 141-142**).

In a word, it was quite clear that the separatists, with the encouragement and active support from Moscow, were preparing a new great provocation against Georgia. V. Ardzinba traitorously violated the Moscow agreement, and separatist forces launched an attack on Gagra on 2 October 1992. The military forces of the Republic of Georgia in Gagra were quite thin at the time, as the Georgian side withdrew a significant part of the military formations from the Gagra zone in accordance with the 3 September agreement. This paved the way for the Abkhaz separatists to occupy Gagra with the active support of the North Caucasus “militants” and the regular Russian units. The latest Russian military equipment, tanks, and aviation were used during the capture of Gagra. Ships of the Russian Federation Navy blocked the sea area. This whole operation was in fact led by the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Military Forces, Colonel-General Mikhail Kolesnikov (**Kolbaia et al., 1999: 131-132**).

¹ It should be noted that the facts of the “genocide of the Abkhaz nation,” which was allegedly carried out by the “State Council troops ... in the occupied territories”, according to the same decree, took place before 3 September 1992. However, all this did not prevent V. Ardzinba to officially recognize Abkhazia as part of the Republic of Georgia, agree to the deployment of the Georgian military forces to protect railways and other facilities in Abkhazia, and pledge to the disarmament and withdrawal of “illegal armed formations” from Abkhazia.

² There was an active opposition to President Boris Yeltsin in Moscow, which was led by Vice President Alexander Rutskoy and the Chairman of Supreme Soviet Ruslan Khasbulatov. The latent confrontation turned into armed conflict in October of 1993, when B. Yeltsin used the army to subdue the opposition and arrest its leaders.

After leaving Gagra, the Georgian units retreated to Gantiadi-Leselidze and tried to prevent the enemy from reaching the Georgian-Russian state border. The measures taken by the Georgian leadership did not prove to be enough to stop the separatist attack. They continued to advance unhindered, capturing Gantiadi and Leselidze and taking control of the Abkhazian section of the Georgian-Russian state border along the river Psou. The advance of the separatists and confederates was accompanied with the expulsion of the Georgian population from their native lands. The separatists and their migrant allies organized a real massacre in Gagra, Gantiadi, and Leselidze. Thousands of civilians were killed including women, the elderly, and children. The Gagra tragedy was the beginning of the ethnic cleansing and genocide of Georgians in Abkhazia, which later continued in other parts of Abkhazia.

The events in Gagra suddenly changed the nature of the military confrontation. After the tragedy in Gagra the Georgian population of Abkhazia ran out of patience. The Georgians of Sukhumi, Gulripshi, and Ochamchire districts, who had hitherto tried not to intervene directly in the hostilities and, on the contrary, were doing their best for the peaceful settlement of the conflict, this time took up arms and joined the ranks of fighters for the unity of the homeland. Two brigades (23rd and 24th) were formed, which later merged into the newly formed 2nd Army Corps of the Ministry of Defence of Georgia. These brigades were mostly manned by local volunteers. Changes also took place in the state and political structures of Abkhazia. The position of State Minister for Abkhazia has been introduced in the Georgian government. The State Minister actually became the head of the executive power of the Autonomous Republic. The influence of the Georgian part of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia was significantly limited.

On 11 October 1992 parliamentary elections were held in Georgia. V. Ardzinba and his entourage, as well as forces supporting the ousted President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, despite the great efforts, failed to leave Abkhazia out from the election process. In all cities and districts of Abkhazia (Sokhumi and its district, Gulripshi district, Ochamchire and Ochamchire districts), the absolute majority of voters, including Abkhazs and representatives of other nationalities, took part in the voting. For example, about 800 out of 1,500 Abkhaz voters and 10,000 out of 12,000 Armenian voters took part in the elections in the Gulripshi district.

It should be noted that, both then and later (even today), the separatists question the legitimacy of the 1992 Georgian parliamentary elections in Abkhazia, because these elections were not held on the entire territory of the Autonomous Republic. Of course, this inevitable fact cannot be denied, and no one is going to do it. Indeed, for well-known reasons, Georgian parliamentary elections were not held in the Abkhaz-controlled districts of Gagra, Gudauta, and Tkvarcheli. Moreover, supporters of the ousted President Zviad Gamsakhurdia disrupted voting process in Gali district. Nevertheless, residents of Sokhumi and Sokhumi district, Ochamchire and Gulripshi districts, displaced citizens from

Gagra and Gudauta districts, who took refuge in Georgian-controlled areas, as well as a large number of voters in Gali district, who were able to vote in Abkhazia, made up at least 50% of overall voters. This is why the 1992 Georgian parliamentary elections in Abkhazia should be considered legitimate.¹

After the events in Gagra, when, as it was already mentioned, the military confrontation entered a new phase, the situation in Abkhazia became extremely tense. The separatists and their allies became increasingly active. The shelling of Sokhumi started. Every day civilians, including Abkhazs, were dying.² In early November of 1992, the Abkhaz “militants” shut down a high-voltage power line in the Ochamchire district, cutting off electricity to Sokhumi and Gulripshi district. The situation in the areas controlled by the Georgian side was extremely difficult. The disagreement between the military and civilian authorities was noticeable. The State Minister found himself in a very difficult situation in Abkhazia. In fact, it was the crisis of the executive branch. In such conditions, the movement for the formation of the Provisional Government of Abkhazia was initiated by the Council of National Unity. A public meeting was convened in Sokhumi, which decided to establish a Cabinet of Ministers. Tamaz Nadareishvili, the First Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia, was nominated as the head of the government. The decision made in Sokhumi in 1992 was legally signed by the Parliament of Georgia on 26 November.

Positional battles took place during December, both on the Gumista front and in the direction of Ochamchire-Tkvarcheli. The Abkhaz side was actively assisted by regular units of the Russian Federation stationed in Gudauta. On 17 December 1992, the Georgian parliament issued an emergency statement, for the first time stating openly that Russian forces deployed in Abkhazia had become party to the conflict and that they were pursuing an imperial policy of violating Georgia’s territorial integrity together with Russian reactionary political circles (**Issue of Abkhazia, 2000**: 109). The highest legislative

¹ In fact, in this respect, these elections were no different from the 28 October 1990 elections of the Supreme Council of Georgia, when the vast majority of the Abkhaz population, under the pressure from separatist circles, boycotted the parliamentary elections. As a result, as we have already mentioned, for the first time in the last 70 years, the representative of the Abkhaz people has not been elected to the Supreme Legislative Body of Georgia. It is also noteworthy that the Abkhazs boycotted the 26 May 1991 elections of the President of Georgian Republic. However, despite that no one ever doubted the legitimacy of those elections on the territory of Abkhazia. Unlike 28 October 1990 elections, large part of the Abkhaz population in Sokhumi and its districts, as well as in Gulripshi and Ochamchire districts, not only participated in the parliamentary elections, but even managed to elect two Abkhaz MPs (Ada Marshania, Konstantin Salia) into the country’s highest legislative body.

² One of such shellings killed Eter Koghonia, a well-known Abkhaz actor, the chairman of the Abkhazian organization of the Georgian Theatrical Society, People’s Artist of the Georgian SSR and the Abkhazian ASSR.

body of the Russian Federation did not leave the statement of the Georgian parliamentarians unanswered and issued an emergency resolution calling on the Russian president and government to impose sanctions on Georgia on 25 December 1992 (**Regional Conflicts, 2005**: 145-146).

On the night of 4-5 January 1993, the separatists, with the active support of the Russian artillery, carried out the first serious attack on Sokhumi, but the Georgian formations put up fierce resistance and repulsed them. This defeat suppressed the separatists' desire to launch new offensive operations in the direction of Sokhumi for a long time, but the positional battles did not subside. In early March of 1993, with the direct participation of high-ranking generals of the General Staff of the Russian Military Forces, a plan for the operation to capture Sokhumi was drawn up. The attack began on 14 March 1993. The shelling of Sokhumi from all available artillery units started early in the morning, and on the night of 15-16 March the Abkhazs and Russians started simultaneously bombing the city from the land, sea, and air. The bombardment continued throughout the night, after which, on the morning of 16 March, the separatist forces came out to attack the entire front line. They were led by soldiers of the Russian special forces, who had a task to clear up the road. Then, Abkhazian fighters and all kind of mercenaries joined the second echelon. The Russians managed to break through the front line and enter Gumista-Achadara (**Kolbaia et al., 1999**: 141). The turning point in the hostilities was 17 March, when the Georgian military forces launched a counterattack and completely cleared the left bank of the River Gumista. The 15-16 March attack by the separatists and their allies was the largest in the entire military campaign. The Abkhaz side suffered heavy losses (See in detail: **Papaskiri, 2013a**).

Against the background of the heated hostilities, on 17 March 1992, the Parliament of Georgia appealed to the United Nations, the European Parliament, the parliaments of the world, and the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation. The appeal clearly stated that the Russian Federation was in fact waging an undeclared war against Georgia aimed at separating Abkhazia from Georgia and violating Georgia's territorial integrity. The Parliament of Georgia appealed to the world community not to leave "without reaction... Russia's aggressive action" against the sovereign state of Georgia. At the same time, the supreme legislative body of Georgia raised the issue of withdrawal of Russian troops from the territory of Georgia (**Issue of Abkhazia, 2000**: 109).

After the defeat on 17 March, the separatists were completely demoralized, the population was in panic. In such a situation, the Gudauta regime went to the extreme. On 23 March, a group of members of the Abkhazian Supreme Council in Gudauta formally applied to the Russian Supreme Soviet with a request to either include Abkhazia in the Russian Federation, or receive Russian protection (**Conflicts in Abkhazia, 2008**: 165-167). After the attack on Sokhumi on 15-17 March, shootings stopped on the Gumista front, although the Russian air force still bombed the Georgian positions. During one of those

bombings, Su-27 fighter jet of the Russian Air Force was shot down near the village of Odishi in Sokhumi district. This once again exposed the complete falseness of the insolent and cynical assertions of Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev that the Georgians had “painted their own planes as Russian ones” and “bombed their own positions.”

On 22 April 1993, the Georgian Parliament adopted an address to the Abkhaz people. It stated that the fratricidal war in Abkhazia was “*profitable only to the resuscitators of the ‘evil empire;’ that all the misunderstandings... between the Georgians and Abkhazs living in a common motherland for centuries, were inspired by the same ‘evil empire’.*” Georgian MPs called on “*representatives of the Abkhaz people, elders, deputies of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia*” to come together and resolve all the existing problems at the table of negotiations (**Issue of Abkhazia, 2000**: 168-169). Shortly afterwards, on 27 April, the Georgian Parliament passed a special resolution on the withdrawal of Russian troops from the conflict zone in Abkhazia (**Regional Conflicts, 2005**: 169-170).

In response to this, on 30 April 1993, the Council of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation passed a special resolution in which Russian deputies welcomed the “*desire of the people of Abkhazia expressed in the 23 March 1993 appeal to the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation to join or take the protection of the Russian Federation.*” The President of the Russian Federation and the Government of the country were called upon to “*intensify negotiations with the leadership of the Republic of Georgia on the normalization of the situation in Abkhazia in accordance with the norms of international law, first of all, human rights and the right of peoples to self-determination*” (**Regional conflicts, 2005**: 151-152).

Despite the slowdown in hostilities after the crackdown of the 15-16 March separatist attacks on Sokhumi, the overall situation in Abkhazia remained tense militarily, politically, and economically. There was no way to achieve proper coordination between the military and civilian authorities. The Georgian leadership tried to rectify this by establishing a single military-political body – the Defence Council of Abkhazia. This body had to be in charge of all (military, political, economic, and administrative) authority in the Georgian-controlled areas. Tamaz Nadareishvili has been appointed as a Chairman of the Defence Council of Abkhazia by the order Eduard Shevardnadze, the Head of State of Georgia and the Supreme Commander-in-Chief.

On 14 May 1993, Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze met Russian President *Boris Yeltsin* in Moscow and discussed the problems between the two countries and the situation in the conflict zone. The parties agreed to expedite the preparation of documents on the Abkhazian issue “*in the format of the final Moscow summit document of 3 September 1992.*” Most importantly, they reached a ceasefire agreement, which should take effect from 20 May 1993. In addition, the Russian president appointed *Boris Pastukhov*, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, as his personal representative in the conflict zone (**Kolbaia et al., 1999**: 148).

The decisions of the second meeting in Moscow gave some hope to the people of Abkhazia. There was an impression that the military confrontation would end and peace would be established in Abkhazia. Personal Representative of the President of Russia B. Pastukhov immediately embarked on his “peacekeeping” mission and began active consultations with representatives of both sides. He arrived in Sokhumi, where he met both with the leadership of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia and public representatives. The main purpose of Pastukhov’s voyage was to prepare for the visit of a representative governmental delegation of the Russian Federation to Georgia. The delegation included Foreign Minister *Andrei Kozyrev*, Minister for Security *Viktor Barannikov*, and other high-ranking officials, among them B. Pastukhov himself and the famous General *Boris Gromov*, who at that time held a high position in the internal troops of the Russian Federation. The delegation arrived in Tbilisi, where they met with the country’s leadership. After that they visited Sokhumi and Gudauta. In Sokhumi, the governmental delegation of the Russian Federation met with the members of the Defence Council of Abkhazia (see more in: **Papaskiri, 2007**: 399-400; **Papaskiri, 2010**: 440-441; **Papaskiri, 2012**: 157-158).

The Moscow agreement of 14 May 1993 on the ceasefire in the conflict zone allowed the Georgian side to pay more attention to economic and cultural life. Road reconstruction started in Sokhumi. They also started restoring the buildings damaged by the bombing. The leadership of the Autonomous Republic had taken steps to renew the educational process in secondary schools and colleges. The joint decision of the Defence Council and the Council of Ministers on merging the Abkhazian State University and the TSU Sokhumi Branch into a single university is especially noteworthy in this regard.

A draft of a government decree was prepared on the opening of a unified university complex – *Sokhumi State University by Zurab Anchabadze*. It was approved by a joint decision of the Defence Council and the Council of Ministers. The fact that the newly established Sokhumi State University was named after Professor Zurab Anchabadze, the founder and first rector of the Abkhazian State University, the Corresponding Member of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, was not accidental. In this way, the Georgian side honoured the prominent Abkhaz scholar, a kind of a symbol of Georgian-Abkhaz historical brotherhood and unity. But soon the situation on the front became tense again, which changed the overall situation in Abkhazia.

On 24 June 1993, the separatists violated the Moscow agreement of 14 May and resumed active hostilities. They started the mass shelling of Sokhumi, which resulted in civilian casualties. The Russian military developed the plan of occupying the city by the landing operation in the vicinity of Tamishi, to establish control over the Oчамchire-Sokhumi railway and roadway, and thus isolate Sokhumi. At the same time, a large-scale attack from the River Gumista and the capture of strategic heights around Sokhumi was planned. The implementation of this plan began on 1 July, when the separatists were able to capture the village of Kamani. They staged a real slaughter there as dozens of civilians,

including ethnical Abkhazs, were killed.¹ On 2 July a landing operation of the Russian special forces was carried out in the vicinity of Tamishi. Separatists and mercenaries moved from Tkvarcheli to join them.

At the dawn of 2 July, the enemy managed to overcome the resistance of the Georgian units, strengthen the Labra-Tamishi section, and establish control over the roadway (Kolbaia et al., 1999: 150). Thus, Sokhumi was, in fact, cut off from the rest of Georgia. Under such conditions, the Georgian command decided to shift the focus to destroying the Tamishi landing troops. Georgian units attacked the enemy from two sides – Sokhumi and Ochamchire – simultaneously. For the first time during the entire Abkhazian campaign, units of the National Guard loyal to the ousted President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, led by Vakhtang (Loti) Kobalia, took part in hostilities against the separatists. After a week (2-10 July) of fierce fighting, the Georgian soldiers defeated the enemy and destroyed the main part of the landing troops. The rest of them retreated to Tkvarcheli (Kolbaia et al., 1999: 151).

Thus, the separatists and their patrons failed in achieving one of their goals. Nevertheless, it cannot be argued that the July campaign was a failure for the Abkhaz side. On the contrary, during the battle for Tamishi, on 5-9 July, the separatist units attacked Georgian positions from the River Gumista, managed to break through it in several places, and took the following villages of Sokhumi district: Akhalsheni, Guma, and part of Shroma. As a result, the separatist established their control over strategically important heights around Sokhumi, which later decided the fate of the military confrontation in their favour. The separatist units, with the active support of the Russian military, continued the attack and gradually moved closer to Sokhumi. The Georgian side failed to put up serious resistance this time as well and was forced to intensify the peace dialogue again. In this situation, the decision was made in Tbilisi to dismiss *Tamaz Nadareishvili* as the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Abkhazia and the Defence Council of Abkhazia, and to appoint *Zhiuli Shartava*, Member of Parliament of Georgia, to those positions.

Zh. Shartava was quite active as the head of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, but the military situation could not be improved. Moreover, by the end of July, the situation in the direction of the Gumista had worsened. There was a real threat of losing Sokhumi. In such a situation, an expanded meeting of the Defence Council was held in Sokhumi, in which the participating military and other competent persons assessed the situation on the fronts (especially in the direction of the Gumista). They stated that the signing of an agreement on ceasefire was extremely difficult but the only solution. Thus, it was decided to sign the infamous Sochi Agreement on a ceasefire in Abkhazia and on a Mechanism to Ensure Its Observance of 27 July 1993.

¹ It was there that they executed Yuri Anua, a well-known Abkhaz public figure, one of the pillars of Georgian-Abkhaz brotherhood and friendship, the restorer of the Kamani Church. Together with him Father Andria (Kurashvili) was killed.

According to this agreement, the parties were to cease hostilities at 12:00 pm on 28 July 1993. The following activities were prohibited: The transfer of additional troops and other armed units into the conflict zone, the mobilization and uncoordinated movement of troops and other formations, the delivery of weapons and ammunition, the construction of military infrastructure facilities. From 29 July, the tripartite Georgian-Abkhaz-Russian temporary control groups (3-9 people in each) were to start functioning. They had to supervise the observance of the ceasefire regime and would be located in Sokhumi, Gulripshi, Ochamchire, Gudauta, Akhali Atoni (New Athos), Tkvarcheli, Gagra, and Gali. By 5 August, a Joint Commission for the Settlement of the Situation in Abkhazia should be set up with the participation of representatives and observers from the United Nations and the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 154-155**). According to the agreement, the parties should create conditions for the resumption of the “normal work of the legitimate authorities in Abkhazia” (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 156**). The step-by-step demilitarization of Abkhazia had to begin in 10-15 days after the cease-fire. The units of Georgian army had to be moved to other parts of Georgia, while the so-called “volunteers” had to leave Abkhazia. The local Georgian and Abkhaz units had to form “the multi-ethnic internal troops of Abkhazia.” The Russian troops stationed in Abkhazia had to remain strictly neutral (**Regional Conflicts, 2005: 155**).

Of course, the Sochi agreement was not ideal for the Georgian side, but it cannot be said that it was absolutely disadvantageous (even in such a difficult situation as it was by the end of July), let alone a traitorous document. The 27 July 1993 Sochi agreement did not seem to contain any direct violation of Georgia’s sovereignty. Its main drawback was that the agreement did not contain a real mechanism for controlling its implementation and that it, like the 3 September 1992 Moscow Agreement, was not fulfilled and eventually appeared to be a mere scrap of paper.

Since 28 July 1993, when the ceasefire agreement came into force, there had indeed been a period of peace in the conflict zone, although from time to time the separatists still violated the ceasefire. The process of negotiation for the settlement of the conflict began. The Georgian side was led by Zhiuli Shartava, Chairman of the Defence Council and the Council of Ministers of Abkhazia. The Georgian side conscientiously fulfilled its obligations under the Sochi Agreement. The gradual disbandment of the battalions began; the command of the 2nd Army Corps of Defence Ministry of the Republic of Georgia was preparing to move to Kutaisi; tanks, combat vehicles, and artillery units were being withdrawn from the conflict zone. But the Georgian society could not tolerate V. Ardzinba’s return to power. Protests were held in Sokhumi, which called on the Georgian government not to allow the return of V. Ardzinba and his entourage to Sokhumi. This action of the Georgian society was heavily criticised in Gudauta. The separatists categorically demanded the resumption of the “activities of the legitimate authorities” as it was provided in the Sochi agreement.

On 9 August 1993 V. Ardzinba, apparently at Moscow's urging, sent a letter to the UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Russian President Boris Yeltsin, accusing the Georgian side of obstructing its commitments and urging them to ensure compliance with the Sochi agreement. By doing so, the separatists and their Moscow patrons were in fact preparing an ideological background for the violation of the ceasefire agreement. On 24 August the separatist leader V. Ardzinba left for Moscow, where he met Boris Yeltsin. It was becoming increasingly clear that the separatists were already preparing for a new assault on Sokhumi.

In preparing for a new attack on Sokhumi, the separatists attached crucial importance to the crisis in Western Georgia, particularly in the Samegrelo region. Supporters of ousted President Zviad Gamsakhurdia by the end of August had significantly strengthened their positions. They, in fact, completely controlled Zugdidi, where not only Z. Gamsakhurdia's loyal National Guard soldiers, but also high-ranking government officials were gathering in order to develop a plan for the military operation to occupy the cities and district centres of western Georgia.

In such a critical situation, the Georgian political leadership came up with an initiative for a major reconciliation, which was to take place in Bagrati Temple in Kutaisi on 28 August 1993, the Day of Assumption of Virgin Mary in Georgian Orthodox Church. On this day, with the direct participation of the Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia Ilia II and the Head of State Eduard Shevardnadze, a multi-thousand reconciliation action took place, which was attended by representatives of various political forces from different parts of the country. The Abkhazian delegation headed by Lorik Marshania, the First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic, well-known Abkhazian statesman and public figure, also arrived in Kutaisi.

On 1 September 1993 the study process was resumed in the schools and higher education institutions of Sokhumi. This had great political significance. It encouraged the Georgian population and raised its morale. Moreover, by doing so, the Georgian side showed the whole world its peaceful attitude, the desire to pursue a peaceful life without any panic, to which it called on the Abkhazs too. But the optimism and hopes of the people who believed in the irreversibility of the peace process and therefore came out so actively with the initiative to start the study process, did not come true. The Abkhaz separatists and their Moscow patrons thought differently and had completely different plans.

On 16 September the Abkhaz side recklessly violated the Sochi agreement of 27 July 1993 and resumed the shelling of Sokhumi. At the same time, the separatists carried out a successful attack on the "Eastern Front" and occupied the roadway and railway in the Adziubzha-Tsageri area. As a result, Sokhumi and the Gulripshi district were virtually besieged and cut off from the rest of Georgia. At the same time, with the support of the soldiers of the Russian special forces and the so-called "Confederates," the separatists launched an attack on Sokhumi using aviation and artillery. Georgian units, which were

left without artillery and armoured vehicles (as it was already mentioned, they were withdrawn from the conflict zone according to the Sochi agreement), heroically resisted them. The perseverance of the Georgian soldiers made impatient the Russian military, including the General Staff of the Russian Military Forces, where the operation was planned. The direct connection of the neighbouring country's main military service with the separatist attack was in fact admitted by none other than the Chief of General Staff, Colonel-General Mikhail Kolesnikov. He openly declared at the session of Russian Supreme Soviet on 16 September that "Sukhumi would be an Abkhaz city the next day."

In such a critical situation, the Head of State Eduard Shevardnadze immediately flew to Sokhumi. On 17 September he met in Adler with Pavel Grachev, the Defence Minister of the Russian Federation. The latter considered that the only way out of the current situation was the deployment of two Russian divisions in Sokhumi and the separation of the warring parties through them. The Georgian side did not accept the proposal of the chief Russian military person. The deployment of Russian divisions into the conflict zone was perceived as Russian occupation of Abkhazia. Taking such a step in a situation when the opposition forces were on the verge of a total attack undoubtedly created a precondition for overthrowing the existing government and, thus, it was very risky for E. Shevardnadze. In addition, there were other motivations. There was still hope that at a critical moment the opposition would, at least temporarily, stop its attack on the government and turn its weapons against the separatists and their allies.

On 18 September E. Shevardnadze issued an *"appeal to all the friends of my homeland"* from besieged Sokhumi. He directly accused high-ranking Russian military and political circles of inciting bloodshed. In such a situation, the Russian government took a kind of ostensible "pre-emptive" measure and issued an ordinance on *"measures taken by the Abkhaz side to violate the ceasefire agreement of 27 July 1993,"* stating that if the Abkhaz side did not continue to comply with the Sochi agreement, Russia would implement measures under international law and cut off electricity to Abkhazia (Kolbaia et al., 1999: 160). All of this has changed virtually nothing, and the separatists, with the active support of the "Confederates," the Cossacks and, most importantly, the regular units of the Russian military forces, continued the attack on Sokhumi.

On 23 September the Gudauta group crossed the River Gumista and occupied the village of Achadara. Thus, began the operation of the seizure of Sokhumi, which ended on 27 September, when the Abkhaz separatists and their allies attacked the city centre from different directions. Bloody battles erupted near the Council of Ministers building, where members of the Defence Council led by Zhiuli Shartava, were present. All attempts to send a rescue force to the defenders of the Government House were in vain and by 1:00 pm the separatists stormed the building of the Council of Ministers.

Zhiuli Shartava and his companions – Raul Eshba, Minister of Industry and Abkhaz ethnically, Guram Gabiskiria, Sokhumi Mayor, and others, were captured and brutally ex-

ecuted. On 27 September the Georgian military forces as well as civilians left Sokhumi. Tens of thousands of people fled to the Kodori Gorge. Many (primarily the elderly and young children) could not bear this Golgotha and found eternal rest in the mountains of Svaneti. A total of about 400 people had died there.

On 28-30 September the enemy continued attacks and occupied Gulripshi, Ochamchire, and Gali. Georgian government troops and units loyal to the ousted President Zviad Gamsakhurdia did not even try to resist and left Abkhazia without a fight. Local Georgian civilians left Abkhazia with them.

This is how the so-called “Abkhazian war” ended. It lasted a little over 13 months. The war brought great trouble to the whole of Georgia. The military confrontation killed more than 10,000 people on both sides, most of them civilians. More than 300,000 people left their homeland and became IDPs in their homeland. The separatists organized a real slaughter for those trapped in Abkhazia.

CHAPTER XIII. CHURCH AND CULTURAL LIFE OF ABKHAZIA IN SOVIET TIMES

§1. Church Life

After the forced Sovietization, the Revkom of Abkhazia in relation to the Church was acting according to a special decree of the Government of Soviet Russia (20 January /2 February/ 1918) “*On the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church*”. This decree practically outlawed the church. The Abkhazian Revkom attacked the Tskhumi-Apkhazeti Eparchy.

Already as a Catholicos-Patriarch, *Ambrosius (Ambrosi Khelaia)* recalled the first days of the Soviet Union: “The almost first act of the new government in Sokhumi was the seizure of a cathedral from the Georgians and Abkhazs and its handing over to the Russians, who did not make up even a quarter of the population of Sokhumi and who did not obey the Georgian Church. Second... the seizure of the priestly house, my expulsion from there, dumping luggage in the street, carrying me from one commissariat to another by armed militiamen” (**Gamakharia, 2012: 486**). Despite the persecution, Metropolitan Ambrosius continued to run the eparchy. In June-July of 1921 he toured the eparchy and was convinced that the people had begun to return to the faith (**Gamakharia, 2006a: 325**).

On 5 September 1921, the third Church Council of Georgia, which was held in Gelati, elected Metropolitan Ambrosius as Catholicos-Patriarch. On the next day after the enthronization (14 October 1921) he ordained *Ioané (Margishvili)* as Bishop of Abkhazia (**Gamakharia, 2006a: 329-330**). To strengthen the position of the new bishop, the famous missionary *Taras Ivanitsky* was appointed as a head of the Sokhumi Cathedral. He was soon replaced by *Anton Giginishvili* from Sokhumi (future Metropolitan of Abkhazia). Bishop Ioané faced quite a difficult situation in Abkhazia, but tried to do his duty.

In order to completely destroy the church, an unprecedented anti-religious campaign and brutal repressions were unleashed. By the decision of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party (11 May 1923) all monasteries were closed (**AMIA: Collection 14, List 1, Case 492, p. 34a**). By 1924, about 1,500 churches and monasteries in Georgia had been closed and their property and valuables were confiscated. The same process was going on in Abkhazia. Authorities first approached the New Athos (Akhali Atoni) Monastery, which was declared a Soviet farm, and the monks were ordered to carry out labour service for eight hours a day (**Pachulia, 1973: 32**). On 11 April 1923, the Georgian government rejected *Nestor Lakoba's* proposal to build a children's city in New Athos. In the summer of the same year, the Extraordinary Commission of Abkhazia discovered a hidden treasure valued at 11-12 thousand gold rubles in the New Athos Monastery, which resulted in the arrest of the senior priest of the monastery *Ilarion (Kuchin)* and several monks (**Gamakharia, 2012: 199**). All monasteries in Abkhazia were closed by 1924. Up to 250 Russian monks from New Athos settled in the highlands, 75 kilometres from Sokhumi, where they pursued agriculture (**Gamakharia, 2012: 224**).

On 24 October 1924, *Mikha Tskhakaia*, Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the Transcaucasian and Georgian Councils, based on a telegram received from Moscow from Nestor Lakoba, demanded “to stop immediately the eviction of 400 members of New Athos artel, the requisition, and the case. If necessary, to transfer it to the Transcaucasian or Georgian Central Committee (CACH: Collection 284, Case 151, pp. 442, 443).

The historical temple of Bichvinta which was a part of the monastic complex of New Athos until 1924, turned out to be “luckier.” On 9 February 1926, the Abkhazian government passed a resolution on creating the Bichvinta State Reserve. The Bichvinta cape with its pine relict grove and Bichvinta Temple was included in the reserve. The creation of Bichvinta State Reserve saved the temple from devastation.

Catholicos-Patriarch Ambrosius, who was released from prison on 10 March 1925, dismissed Bishop *Ioané (Margishvili)*. Metropolitan Christophorus (Christophoré Tsitskishvili) became a new bishop of Abkhazia (7 April 1925). It should be mentioned that both before and after 1943, the Eparchy of Tskhumi-Apkhazeti was part of the Georgian Church and was ruled only by Georgian priests: *Ambrosi Khelaia* (1919-1921), *Ioané Margishvili* (1921-1925), *Christophoré Tsitskishvili* (1925-1927), *Efrem Sidamonidze* (1927), *Melkisedek Pkhaladze* (1927-1928 and 1935-1944), *Pavlé Japaridze* (1928), *Varlam Makharadze* (1929-1935), *Anton Gigineishvili* (1952-1956), *Leonidé Zhvania* (1957-1964), *Roman Petriashvili* (1965-1967), *Ilia Shiolashvili* (1967-1977), *Nikoloz Makharadze* (1978-1981), *David Chkadua* (1981-1992), *Daniel Datuashvili* (1992-2010).

The recognition of the autocephaly of the Georgian Church by the Patriarchate of Constantinople (3 March 1990) further strengthened the integrity of its canonical territory. The situation has changed after the war in Abkhazia in 1992-1993, when the Eparchy of Tskhumi-Apkhazeti under the leadership of Metropolitan *Daniel (Datuashvili)* was forced to leave its canonical territory along with most of the parish in the autumn of 1993. The self-proclaimed Sukhumi-Abkhazia Diocesan Council (1998) was formed under the leadership of Abkhaz priest *Besarion Aplia*. The events that took place in the aftermath of the August 2008 Russian-Georgian war resulted in anarchy in the ecclesiastical issues. On 15 September 2008, a meeting of clergy which was held in violation of canonical rules, decided to terminate the activities of the Tskhumi-Apkhazeti Eparchy of the Georgian Church, and establish the so-called “Abkhazian Orthodox Church” (**Statement of the Extraordinary Assembly, 2011**).

The self-proclaimed “eparchy,” which in fact is under the patronage of the Russian Patriarchate, decided to restore the Catholicosate of Bichvinta. This illegal decision of the Abkhaz clergy was followed by a certain reaction from the Holy Synod of the Georgian Church. According to the decision of the Holy Synod (21 December 2010), the Eparchy of Tskhumi-Apkhazeti of the Georgian Church was renamed to the Eparchy of Bichvinta and Tskhumi-Apkhazeti. His leadership was taken over by the Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia *Ilia II* and he received the title of “*Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, Archbishop of Mtskheta-Tbilisi, Metropolitan of Bichvinta and Tskhumi-Apkhazeti.*”

§2. Education and Culture in Abkhazia in Soviet times

Education and Science. The imperial policy of russification which began from the 1880s continued intensively in Soviet times. The first steps taken by the Soviet authorities in the cultural and educational field in Abkhazia immediately indicated the plans of the Soviet Empire in this direction. The first blow in this regard was received by the Abkhazian and Georgian newspapers and magazines. For example, the Abkhazian newspaper “*Apsny*,” founded by *Dimitri Gulia* (with the support of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia) in 1919, was closed in 1921 (**Gulia D., 1925: 22**). Instead, a new newspaper – “*Apsny Kapsh*” (“*Red Abkhazia*”), was founded. It fully expressed the political interests of the Bolshevik government in Abkhazia. At the same time daily Russian-language newspaper of the Abkhazian Revkom and RCP(b) Orgburo “*Voice of labour Abkhazia*” («*Голос трудовой Абхазии*») became a powerful tool of propaganda. It is noteworthy that the vast majority of the newspaper editors and executives were the Russian Bolsheviks. Later (from December 1926) this newspaper was renamed to “*Soviet Abkhazia*” («*Советская Абхазия*»). In 1937, a Georgian-language newspaper “*Sabchota Apkhazeti*” („*საბჭოთა აფხაზეთი*” – also “*Soviet Abkhazia*”) was founded. It was published under strict censorship. Other Georgian and Abkhazian magazines and newspapers were also founded.

After the establishment of Soviet rule, in Abkhazia, as well as in other regions of Georgia, many of the schools considered ideologically unreliable for the government were abolished or completely transformed. Among them was the Sokhumi teacher’s seminary, which was established during the Democratic Republic of Georgia. Women’s Gymnasium, Women’s Teaching Seminary, Sokhumi 1st and 2nd Primary Schools, Gagra Realschule, Gudauta and Gulripshi Primary Schools, Ochamchire Girls’ Gymnasium, Ochamchire Primary School, Likhni Primary School, Okumi and Otovaia Primary Schools were also abolished (**Sakvarelidze, 1992: 44-48**).

The process of the abolition or reorganization of pre-Soviet educational institutions in Abkhazia took place at the time when Abkhazia was experiencing a lack of literacy skills. According to the 1923 census, the number of literates was only 21.9% of the total population of Abkhazia (**Collection of materials, 1959: 83; Kvaratskhelia, 2006: 6**). On 24 December 1921, the Central Executive Committee of Abkhazia adopted a decree “*On the Elimination of Illiteracy among the Population*” (**Collection of materials, 1959: 81**). On its basis the special schools were established and the whole population of the republic (from the age 14 to 40) was obliged to study how to read and write. Local Georgian and Abkhaz public figures *Mariam (Masho) Dadiani-Anchabadze*, *Andria Chochua*, *Dimitri Gulia*, and others were actively involved in the elimination of illiteracy. The educational network was constantly expanding. In 1927-1928, there were 314 educational institutions with 24 758 pupils in Abkhazia. Among them, there were 9 ten-year schools and 13 seven-year schools, and 4 technical schools, of which 2 were pedagogical, 1 agricultural and 1 industrial school (**Chochua, 1976: 212-213**).

The opening of a boarding school for the Abkhaz children in Tbilisi in 1921 was of special importance in the educational life of the 1920s. Its founder was *Nina Didia*, the wife of the first Abkhaz geographer and cartographer *Mikheil Shervashidze*. Since 1918 Nina Didia lived in Abkhazia and she raised the issue of opening a boarding school for Abkhaz pupils in Tbilisi during the period of the Democratic Republic of Georgia for the first time. Later this school was moved to Gagra (**Dudko, 1961: 87; Kvaratskhelia, 2006: 12**). The aim of the educational policy pursued in the 1920s and 1930s was not to establish a national school. On the opposite, it was directly aimed at the Russification of the educational process and the rapid establishment of the Russian-Soviet self-awareness among the population. Today, these processes can be considered as part of the deliberate Russification policy pursued by the Soviet authorities, primarily towards the Abkhaz population.

In the early 1920s, the first steps were taken to revive the scientific-intellectual life in Abkhazia. In 1922, on the initiative of *Dimitri Gulia* and *Andrey Chochua*, the “*Abkhazian Scientific Society*” was founded, which should serve the development of the Abkhazian national culture, language, and literature. The Bolshevik regime from the very beginning tried to control this new structure and to isolate it as much as possible from the Georgian scientific space. Despite such pressure, members of the “*Society*” still managed to establish close ties with Tbilisi State University and with Georgian scientific circles in general. For its part, the first Georgian university (along with the other Georgian scientific centres) was actively involved in the scientific life of Abkhazia. One of the clearest examples of this were the archaeological excavations in and around Sukhumi at the initiative of the Abkhazian Scientific Society (since 1922) under the guidance of *Giorgi Chubinashvili* (later a world-renowned scientist) and *Leon Melikset-Beg*. Later, in the 1930s, the first expedition consisting of professionals in this field arrived from Tbilisi to register, describe, and scholarly study the ancient architectural monuments of Abkhazia.

Academician Nikolai Marr was actively involved in the revival of the scientific life of Abkhazia. It was on his initiative that a scientific institution, the Academy of Language and Literature of Abkhazia, was established in October of 1925. Its first head was Andrey Chochua, the People’s Commissar of Education of Abkhazia. *Nikolai Marr* himself was elected as an Honorary Chairman. Later, *Dimitri Gulia* became the head of the academy. The decision to establish the academy emphasized the urgent need “*to work in the language of the indigenous population of Abkhazia, to create a national literature, which is almost non-existent and without which the cultural revival of the Abkhaz people is unthinkable*” (**Salakaia, 1982: 8-10**). On the recommendation of Nikolai Marr, youngsters *Arsen Khashba* and *Viktor Kukba* were sent to study in Leningrad. After graduating from university, they completed a postgraduate course and returned to Abkhazia in the early 1930s. They became the first candidates of sciences in the field of Abkhazian philology.

On 5 August 1931, the “*Abkhazian Scientific Society*” merged with the Scientific Research Institute of Abkhazian Language and Literature and was renamed to the Abkhazian Scientific Research Institute of Local Lore. The following three sectors were created at the

Institute: 1) *Abkhazian language, literature, and art*; 2) *Social and historical*; 3) *National economy*. The institute was managed by a directorate which included: *Arsen Khashba*, *Victor Kukba* (Deputy Director), and *Samson Chanba* (Deputy Director). V. Kukba simultaneously headed the language and literature sector, *Anatoly Fadeev* – the social and historical sector. Among other scientists we should note *Alfred Kolakowski*, the Head of the Department of Botany (later Corresponding Member of the Georgian Academy of Sciences).

The main research of the academy was related to the study and development of the Abkhazian language. It also touched upon the methods of teaching Abkhazian language, the collection and study of ethnographic and folklore materials. The Academy played an important role in the development of Abkhazian art and literature (**Dzidzaria, 1972: 118**). The activities of the Academy are connected with the publication of a number of important papers. First and foremost, these are the ethnographic works of *Dimitri Gulia* and others, as well as Abkhazological Essays by *Nikolai Marr* (**Marr, 1938**). It should also be noted that the publications by Nikolai Marr, as well as of the centre established by him, had significantly encouraged separatist tendencies among the Abkhazs.

The name of the Abkhazian Scientific Research Institute had been changed several times. In 1935, the institute was renamed to the Abkhazian Institute of Culture and became first the part of the Georgian branch of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, and then, from 1941, the structural part of the newly established Georgian Academy of Sciences. In 1950 it was renamed to the *Institute of Abkhazian Language, Literature and History* of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR. It was named after Dimitri Gulia in 1960 (**Salaika, 1982: 22**).

During this period *Mikheil Trapsh*, *Andria Chochua*, *Simon Basaria*, *Bagrat Janashia*, *Khukhuti Bgazhba*, and others worked at the institute. At different times the institute was headed by such famous scientists as *Khukhuti Bgazhba* (1953-1966) and *Giorgi Dzidzaria* (1966-1988). In the 1970s and 1980s the institute became a powerful centre of nationalist and separatist ideology directed against the Georgian statehood. This trend became especially evident from 1988, when *Vladislav Ardzinba* became the director of the institute. In 1994, the institute was renamed to the Abkhazian Institute for Humanitarian Studies. Naturally, the Institute of Language, Literature and History of Abkhazia, as almost all the scientific-research and educational institutions of Abkhazia (except the small number of scientific institutions, which were directly subordinated to Moscow) were subordinated to the scientific and educational institutions of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic and was financed from the budget of Soviet Georgia.

The Institute of Abkhazian Language, Literature and History, despite the very unhealthy nationalist conjuncture prevailing there, had become the main centre of Abkhazian studies. Here were created the fundamental works in Abkhazian language¹ and litera-

¹ We should especially mention the accomplishments of *Ketevan Lomtadze*, the well-known Georgian scholar, teacher of generations of Abkhaz and Abaza linguists, in studying the Abkhaz language and in the creation of a scientific school in this direction (**Gvantseladze, 2008: 166-167**).

ture (*Khukhuti Bgaghba, Shota Aristava, Lydia Chkadua, Mirian Tsikolia, etc.*), Abkhazian ethnology (*Shalva Inal-ipa, Lily Akaba, Yuri Argun, etc.*), archaeology (*Mikheil Gunba, Giorgi Shamba, Yuri Voronov, Oleg Bgaghba, Igor Tsvinaria, etc.*), in art history (*Alexey Argun and others*), economics (*Bella Ashuba and others*). Historians were especially successful. A school of historians (*Giorgi Dzidzaria, Arvelod Kuprava, Bajgur Sagharia, Akaki Abshilava, Giorgi Amichba, Grigol Lezhava*,¹ etc.) was established here. They fruitfully studied the problems of the Ancient, Medieval, Modern, and Contemporary history of Abkhazia. Professor *Giorgi Dzidzaria*, a prominent Abkhaz historian, Corresponding Member of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, was the recognized leader of this school. Although most of their works are ideologically obsolete today, they still retain their scholarly value in terms of gathering the factual material.

The establishment of the Sokhumi State Pedagogical Institute in 1932 became a milestone in the cultural life of Abkhazia. It was the first higher education institution in Western Georgia (later, in 1933 and in 1935 correspondingly, pedagogical institutes were founded in Kutaisi and Batumi). The institute trained qualified pedagogical staff in the specialities of physics, mathematics, biology, geography, history, philology, primary education and methodology, preschool education, and physical education in 1932-1979. At different times the Sokhumi Pedagogical Institute was headed by *Andrey Chochua* (1932-1934), *Mikheil Delba* (1936-1937), *Irakli Akhalaia* (1937-1938), *Iason Darsania* (1941-1942), *Rostom Tsulukidze* (1942-1952), *Nizha Khurtsidze* (1952-1957), *Akibei Khonelia* (1956-1957), *Giorgi Dzidzaria* (1957-1965), *Boris Tarba* (1965-1973). Sokhumi Pedagogical Institute had highly qualified professors, distinguished not only in Abkhazia, but also throughout whole Georgia and outside of it. Among them were famous scientists and prominent representatives of their fields: *Vakhtang Adamia, Giorgi Amichba, Valentina Amichba, Saria Amichba, Irakli Antelava, Hazarat Argun, Nutsa Ardashelia, Shota Aristava, Pavle Adzinba, Irakli Akhalaia, Shota Basilaia, Nikandro Basilaia, Ipolite Baghbaia, Viktor Beshidze, Murman Beria, Otar Gabisonia, Leila Garsiashvili, Tatiana Gulia, Dimitri Gulia, Boris Gurgulia, Oleg Damenia, Vakhtang Vakhania, Otar Vakhania, Valerian Zukhbaia, Boris Tarba, Boris Kvartskhelia, Ksenia Kvitsiani, Mikheil Labakhua, Margarita Ladaria, Shota Lashkhia, Dimitri Lemonjava, Kukuri Mgeladze, Shota Misabishvili, Dimitri Ninua, Aliosha Sofia, Guljavar Pirtskhalava, Yazbei Feizba, Vladimer Karchava, Sergo Kishmaria, Eteri Shamba, Valeri Quraskua, Rosalina Shvetsova, Giorgi Dzidzaria, Levan Dzidziguri, Lidia Chkadua, Valerian Chania, Otar Churgulia, Raul Khonelia, Shalva Khubutia, Givi Jobava, and others.*

Zurab Anchabadze, a well-known Abkhazian scholar and public figure, became the Rector of the institute in 1973. During his leadership the Sokhumi State Pedagogical Insti-

¹ At the early stages of their scientific career, the Institute was successfully represented by the following prominent representatives of Georgian historiography: Professor *Zurab Anchabadze*, the Corresponding Member of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, and Professor *Irakli Antelava*, Doctor of Historical Sciences.

tute was transformed into the Abkhazian State University in 1979. It was the second university in Georgia and the fourth in the South Caucasus. It consisted of six faculties (Physics and Mathematics, Geography and Biology, Philology, History and Law, Economics, Pedagogy and Social Professions) preparing the qualified specialists in 18 specialities. After the death of Professor Zurab Anchabadze in 1984, till 1988, the Rector of the university was docent *Zaur Avidzba*. Professor *Aleko Gvaramia* became the first elected rector of the university in 1988.

Along with the above-mentioned representatives of the previous generation, we should mention that the following scholars have special accomplishments in promoting Abkhazian State University as the well-established scientific and teaching institution: *Revaz Absava, Diana Alania, Jambul Anchabadze, Tengiz Antelava, Melor Alphenidze, Shota Akhalaia, Bichiko Baramia, Abesalom Gadelia, Aleko Gvaramia, David Dolbadze, Grigol Zakaraia, Zamo Zarkua, Zara Tarba, Lamara Tarba, Givi Todua, Avtandil Kilasonia, Vladimir Kirtskhalia, Boris Lapin, Teimuraz Mibchuani, Tité Mosia, Mariam Miresashvili, Otar Mikiashvili, Murman Okujava, Zurab Papaskiri, Givi Rogava, Revaz Salia, Revaz Salukvadze, Natela Semyonova-Torchua, Jemal Silagadze, Luara Sordia, Irakli Tabaghua, Niaz Pachulia, Dalila Pilia, Eter Kajaia, Vakhtang Ketsba, Tornike Kipiani, Sergo Sharia, Temur Shengelia, Mikheil Shonia, Temur Chilachava, Revaz Kharebava, Boris Khvedelidze, Eduard Chanturia, Jumber Khubutia, Jemal Jinjikhadze, et al.*

Professors and students of the Abkhazian State University actively participated in the all-Soviet and republican conferences. The Works of the Abkhazian State University were regularly published. The university had close ties with various scientific centres in Tbilisi and all over Georgia. However, the process of developing Abkhazian State University as a successful higher education institution was hampered by the attempts of the separatist-minded Abkhaz professors, who wanted to turn the university into a flagship of the anti-Georgian separatist movement. This was causing the protests from the Georgian students and professors. It was the betrayal from certain Abkhaz professors when they took part in *Likhni gathering* on 18 March 1989, that made it impossible for Georgians and Abkhazs to be together at the university. As a result, the Georgian sector was separated from the Abkhazian State University and on its basis the *Sokhumi Branch of the Tbilisi State University* was established on 14 May 1989 (for more details see: Chapter XI, pp. 262-268).

An interesting page in the history of the cultural and educational life of Abkhazia was written by the *Georgian Institute of Subtropical Agriculture*, which was founded in 1959. It was a significant educational-scientific centre (subordinated to Moscow), with relevant material and technical base, where the students from Europe, Asia, and Africa were studying. The institute prepared qualified specialists in various fields of subtropical agriculture and was the only higher education institution of a kind in the Soviet Union. In 1989, the Sokhumi branch of the Georgian Polytechnic Institute was added to the higher education institutions of Abkhazia.

Ilia Vekua Institute of Physics and Technology of Sokhumi (founded in 1950) was also a part of the scientific life of Abkhazia. The Institute united two secret scientific research centres, which actively participated in creating the Soviet A-bomb in 1945-1949 (on this subject, see: **Bokuchava, 2015**). The *Sokhumi Experimental Station of Subtropical Crops of Nikolai Vavilov Institute of Plant Industry* (founded in 1926) has a unique heritage among the scientific-research institutions of Abkhazia. The collection of more than three thousand species of unique plants existed there.

The Sokhumi *Institute of Experimental Pathology and Therapy* (subordinated to the Academy of Medical Sciences of the USSR), which conducted unique experiments, is of particular note among the scientific research centres in Abkhazia. The *Sokhumi Botanical Garden* and *Sokhumi branch of Research Institute of Tea and Subtropical Crops* were a part of the system of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR. By 1980, there were 17 scientific research institutes in the Abkhazian ASSR (including two higher education institutions – *Abkhazian State University* and the *Georgian Institute of Subtropical Agriculture*), which employed around 1,000 researchers, among whom there were 563 Doctors and Candidates of Sciences, 1 Academician, and 4 Corresponding Members of the Georgian Academy of Sciences (**Abkhazian Autonomous, 1981: 319**).

A great contribution to the development of scientific thought in Abkhazia was made by *Boris Lapin* (1921-2020), academician of the Academy of Medical Sciences of the USSR and Corresponding members of the Georgian Academy of Sciences: *Zurab Ancha-badze, Giorgi Dzidzaria, Alfred Kolakovsky, Revaz Salukvadze*. Significant success has also been achieved by the scholars in the fields of humanities and social and political sciences (*Irakli Akhalaia, Alexey Argun, Hazarat Argun, Shota Aristava, Shota Basilaia, Khukhuti Bgzhba, Valerian Chania, Lidia Chkadua, Otar Churgulia, Shalva Inal-ipa, Revaz Kharebava, Otar Khvingia, Arvelod Kuprava, Margarita Ladaria, Dimitri Lemonjava, Lorik Marshania, Shota Misabishvili, Guljavar Pirtskhalava, Bajgur Sagharia, Leo Shervashidze, Jemal Silagadze, Mikheil Trapsh, Mirian Tsikolia, Vakhtang Vakhania*, and others).

The following representatives of the medical and resort sphere – *Violeta Agrba, Mikhail Akhalaia, Shota Gogokhia, Alexander Grigolia, Bidzina Mgaloblishvili, Nino Mge-ladze, Simon Miminoshvili, Elguja Miresashvili, Nikoloz Rukhadze, Tornike Kipiani, Varlam Shervashidze, Petré Japaridze, Eteri Jikidze*, and others – were well-known in Abkhazia and abroad. *Philip Mamporia, Mikheil Bghazhba, Ioseb Kapanadze, Ioseb Marshania, Margari-ta Mchedlidze, Shota Sichinava, Simon Chochia*, and others achieved great success in agrarian and technical sciences. Abkhazia had, and still has, internationally renowned scientists in the fields of physics, mathematics, and natural sciences (mathematicians *Otar Gabisonia, Aleko Gvaramia, Niaz Pachulia, Temur Chilachava*; physicists *Vladimir Kirtskha-lia, Ipolite Baghbaia*; geographer *Shota Lashkhia*, and so on).

Culture. Abkhazia has been a bearer of general Georgian cultural values throughout the Middle Ages. The ancestors of present-day Abkhazs, along with the Georgians, also

contributed to its creation. As for the present-day Abkhaz national culture – literature, theatre, music, and fine arts – at the professional level it was born in the 20th century.

Abkhazian literature was formed on the basis of centuries-old oral traditions. Abkhaz writers and poets used and reworked many folklore stories and motifs. First and foremost, these activities are connected to *Dimitri Gulia*, who (at the beginning of the 20th century) started the history of Abkhazian literature.

The establishment of the Abkhazian branch of the Writers' Union of the Georgian SSR in 1933 became a special event in the cultural life of Abkhazia. Prior to the founding of the Writers' Union, Abkhazian writers were united in scientific community around *Dimitri Gulia* (1874-1960). Dimitri Gulia studied at the Gori Teaching Seminary and from that time on had close relationship with the Georgian public figures and representatives of culture. He taught Abkhazian language course at Tbilisi State University and had a particularly close relationship with *Ivane Javakishvili*. It was at the initiative of I. Javakishvili that D. Gulia was invited to teach Abkhazian at the university. Along with the students, *Akaki Shanidze*, *Giorgi Akhvlediani*, *Simon Janashia*, *Arnold Chikobava*, *Varlam Topuria* attended the courses in Abkhazian language. Dimitri Gulia considered Georgians and Abkhazs to be the children of one inseparable family and participants of the common historical process. He also pointed out the great role that the Georgian nation had historically played in the cultural and spiritual life of the Abkhaz people (**Churgulia, 1974: 43**).

Dimitri Gulia is the author of the first Abkhazian novella "*Under the Foreign Sky*" (1919) and the first Abkhazian novel "*Kamachich*" (1940), as well as "*short stories*" based on folklore. Dimitri Gulia is rightly called the Patriarch of Abkhazian Literature and Culture. He was also a folklorist, linguist, historian, and teacher. His name is associated with the perfection of the Abkhazian alphabet. Dimitri Gulia tried to enrich the literature of the native people with excellent translations. He translated "*The Knight in the Panther's Skin*" by *Shota Rustaveli* and the poems of *Nikoloz Baratashvili* and *Akaki Tsereteli* from Georgian into Abkhazian. He also translated the Literary works of *Alexander Pushkin*, *Mikhail Lermontov*, and others from Russian into Abkhazian.

Abkhazian poet *Yua Koghonia* (1903-1928) was a junior contemporary of Dimitri Gulia. He made a significant contribution to the development of Abkhazian epic poetry. The motifs of Abkhazian and Georgian folklore are artistically reflected in his works (**Multietnic, 2015: 222**). Along with Dimitri Gulia we should as well mention *Samson Chanba* (1886-1937), a prominent Abkhazian writer and statesman, who made a great contribution to the development of Abkhazian literature. He studied at Khoni Teaching Seminary, wrote and published in Abkhazian, Georgian, and Russian. S. Chanba is the author of the romantic poem "*The Holy Virgin of the Mountains*" (1919), the first Abkhazian drama "*Muhajirs*" (published in 1920 and performed in 1928), another work on the theme of Muhajirs "*Apsny Khanum*" (1923), "*Past Days*" (1929), et al. With these works, he laid the foundation for the national drama and psychological stories in Abkhazia. Samson Chanba

compiled and published the work *“Geography of Abkhazia”* in 1925. He was the Minister of Education of Soviet Abkhazia (in 1921-1925 and in 1930-1932) and the Chairman of the Central Executive Committee. In 1934-1937 he was the chairman of the board of the Abkhazian Writers’ Union. Samson Chanba is considered to be the first Abkhazian playwright, whose works were performed on the stage of Georgian troupe in Sokhumi.

At the dawn of the formation of Abkhazian literature *Mikheil Lakerbay* appeared on the scene (1901-1965). His first work was published in 1919. Notable works from his early period include publicistic articles and harsh social lyrics such as *“In Prison,” “Motherland,” “Dimitri Gulia.”* In the following period, Michael Lakerbay intensively worked in dramaturgy and fiction, wrote historical dramas and comedies for the stage, but became especially famous for his stories *“Abkhaz novellas”* and *“Alamis.”* The writer’s language is laconic, colourful, and full of humour. His works reflect the life of the Abkhaz people. In his novellas the writer revived the past of the Abkhaz people, depicted the episodes of heroism and bravery, friendship and love, hospitality, and revenge in attractive colours, which made life in Abkhazia so exotic in the not-so-distant past (**Churgulia, 1983: 158-159**).

Great is the contribution to the development of the Abkhaz fiction of *Ivan Papaskiri*, who is recognized as the patriarch of Abkhaz prose (1902-1980). After graduating from Sokhumi Teaching Seminary and Pedagogical School in 1928-1929, he continued his studies at the Leningrad Institute of Oriental Languages. Ivan Papaskiri is known as the author of the very first social novels (*“Temir”* – 1937; *“Woman’s Honour”* – 1949) in Abkhazian literature, most of which narrate the life of the Abkhaz people. Scholars point out that Ivan Papaskiri’s work is a history of the Abkhaz people in the 20th century revived in artistic and attractive forms. The novel *“At the Foot of Ertsakhu”* proved to be thematically especially effective. In it the writer painted the brotherhood and friendship of Abkhazs, Georgians, Ukrainians, Russians in attractive colours (**Churgulia, 1983: 153**).

The development of Abkhazian literature was especially influenced by the works of *Bagrat Shinkuba* (1917-2004), the Laureate of the *Shota Rustaveli state Prize* and *Dimitri Gulia Prize*. His activities began in 1935, when his first poem *“Courage”* was published. In 1938 *“The First Poems,”* a poetic collection of B. Shinkuba was published. The novel *“The Last of the Ubykhs”* was especially popular. In it the author tells the tragic story of the Ubykh people who were deported to the Ottoman Empire by the Russian Empire (**Mosia, 2012: 157-187**).

When talking about Abkhazian literature, it is impossible to ignore the works of *Ivan Tarba* (1921-1994). He is a poet of outstanding worldview and aesthetics. His poems are full of human feelings. In this world, he respects eternal values: humanism, love, loyalty, and friendship. Among the Abkhazian writers and poets, Ivan Tarba is one of the most popular among the Georgians. His poems were often translated (and are still translated) into Georgian. In 2021, at the initiative of the Peace Education Centre of Sokhumi State University, Collection *“I love my Abkhazian”* was published in Tbilisi (**Tarba, 2021**). It

clearly shows that Georgians and Georgia in general were as close to the poet as Abkhazs and Abkhazia. This is confirmed by his poems: *"Mtatsminda," "Tbilisi Night," "Ruins of Rustavi Cathedral," "Giorgi Leonidze," "Georgian Iron"* and others. Ivan Tarba is also known for his juvenile poems. In addition to poetic works, Ivan Tarba has written the novels *"Famous Man," "The Sun Wakes Up with Us," "Mother's Eyes,"* and others (**Multiethnic, 2015: 223**).

Poet and translator *Mushni Lasuria* is a prominent representative of Abkhazian literature and culture. His works include the following poetic collections: *"Hope," "Silk House," "Lord of the Waters," "Morning of the Waterfalls,"* etc. The main themes of his works are native Abkhazia and Georgia as a whole, its nature, love, courage, and centuries-old friendship between brothers. He translated *"The Man in the Panther's Skin"* into Abkhazian, for which he was given the *Shota Rustaveli State Prize* (**Multiethnic, 2015: 223-224**).

The feeling of love for Georgia was especially emotionally expressed in the poetry of *Alexey Jonua* (1920-1989), one of the most prominent representatives of the first generation of Abkhazian literature. His poem *"To the poets of Georgia"* should be considered as a clear representation of the poet's national worldview. It unequivocally expresses the author's position on all the problematic issues that have become the basis of the Abkhaz separatists' confrontation with Georgians in recent decades. According to the Abkhaz poet, Abkhazia without Georgia neither was in the past, nor can it exist in the future. He has not the slightest doubt that this unity is eternal and nothing can break it (**Nikoleishvili, 2012: 150**).

Abkhaz poet, prose writer, playwright, and scientist *Giorgi Gublia* (1929-2019), a graduate of the Department of Caucasian Languages at Tbilisi State University, has a particularly warm attitude towards Georgia. In 1970, he successfully defended his dissertation on *"The Artistic Journey of the Abkhaz People's Poet Dimitri Gulia"* in Tbilisi, after which he chaired the newly established Department of Abkhazian Language and Literature at the Sokhumi State Pedagogical Institute. In his works, the poet describes nature and sings sincerely to the sacred feeling of love for nature, woman, homeland. Giorgi Gublia's poetry has an inexhaustible love for his people and Georgia. He considers Abkhazia to be a part of Georgia's soul. The author's lyrics are distinguished by a deep knowledge of the history of Georgia and the psychology of Georgian and Abkhaz peoples.

Famous Abkhazian poetess *Neli Tarba* (1934-2014) was also the graduate of Tbilisi State University. The most important part of the first Abkhaz poetess' works is the cycle of poems *"Georgia,"* which is a tribute to the centuries-old unity of the Abkhaz and Georgian peoples. According to Neli Tarba, her love and loyalty to Georgia was *"taught by Abkhazia and her ancestors"* (**Nikoleishvili, 2012: 151**). *Konstantin (Kumf) Lomia* (1928-1999) has painted Georgian themes with special colours. In this regard his cycle of Tbilisi poems (*"Mtatsminda," "Mtkvari"*) is especially interesting. In them, against the back-

ground of the poetic imagination, he sings to Tbilisi landscapes and considers it as his hometown (**Nikoleishvili, 2012: 151**).

Prominent representatives of Abkhazian literature of this generation are *Boris Gurgulia, Shalva Tsvizhba, Chichiko Jonua, Levarsan Kvitsinia, Shamil Pilia, Shalodia Adjindjal, Alexey Gogua, Djuma Akhuba, Platon Bebia, Nikoloz Kvitsinia*, and others. Most of them were graduates of Tbilisi State University and other higher education institutions in Tbilisi.

The origins of Georgian literature in 20th century Abkhazia can be found in the works of *Giorgi Sharvashidze, Ivané Gegia, Petré Tcharaia, Tedo Sakhokia*, and others. The newspaper "*Soviet Writers of Abkhazia*," which was published by the Writers' Union of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia and mainly represented the Soviet narrative, played an important role in the development of Georgian and Abkhazian literature in Abkhazia. The second half of the 20th century is especially important in terms of the development of Georgian literature. Prominent representatives of the "Abkhazian wing" of the Georgian literature of the XX century were: *Mariam (Putsu) Dgebuadze-Pularia, Mose Gvasalia, Klimenti Gogiava, Shota Akobia, Evgeni Akubardia, Mirian Mirneli, Eteri Samkharadze-Jghamadze, Geno Kalandia, Jano Janelidze, Alexandre Jikia, Nodar Khundadze, Tsiala Ardashelia, Givi Beraia, René Kalandia, Guli Zukhba, Zurab Nakopia, Ramaz Kuprava, Guram Odisharia, Murman Khurtsilava, Vladimir Jologua, Khuta Gagua*, and others (see in detail: **From the history, 2014, 2017, 2020**).

Mariam (Putsu) Dgebuadze-Pularia (1887-1969), one of the representatives of the older generation of Abkhazian writers, was especially loved by the Georgian and Abkhaz readers. Mariam Pularia's first short story was published in 1907, but the real recognition to the writer came after the novel "Golden Ring" was published in Sokhumi in 1952 (**Multiethnic, 2015: 225**). Georgian writer and public figure *Shota Akobia* (1920-1996) is the author of many excellent works, including "*Morning of the Motherland*," "*Birth of the Spring*," "*Roads and Meetings*," "*I remembered you*," "*White Shadow*," "*Love and light*," and so on. In 1984 he was given the *Dimitri Gulia State Prize* and in 2001 (posthumously) was awarded the *Giorgi Sharvashidze State Prize* for his book "*Fatal Times*" (**Multiethnic, 2015: 225**).

The poet and public figure *Geno Kalandia* (1940-2017) occupies a prominent place on the "*Abkhazian flank*" of Georgian literature. He was educated in Sokhumi and Moscow, and worked as a journalist. The first collection of his poems "*Sky and Leaves*" was published in 1966. G. Kalandia's first plays "*Moonlight Hour*," "*The Place-Mother*," and "*The Prodigal Son*" were performed at the stage of *Samson Chanba State Theatre in Sokhumi*. Geno Kalandia is the author of over 40 poetry collections and dramatic plays. In 2002 he was given the *Giorgi Sharvashidze State Prize* for the cycle of poems "*Maxims*." Geno Kalandia was also translating the poems of the Abkhaz poets. Georgian readers got acquainted with certain samples of the poetry of *Ivan Tarba, Alexey Jonua, Constantine Gerchelia, Boris Gurgulia, Platon Bebia*, and others through his translations. His poetry is also translated into several languages. At different times he was the chairman of the Ab-

khazian Theatrical Society, Secretary of the Writers' Union, Chairman of the Union of Creative Persons of Abkhazia, member of the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, member of the Parliament of Georgia. In 2013 he was given the *Shota Rustaveli State Prize* (so far, he is the only one among the Georgian authors of Abkhazia to receive this highest state award for the creative persons) for his contribution to contemporary Georgian literature (**Multiethnic, 2015: 225**).

The poet and public figure *Jano Janelidze* (1933-2009) is also a prominent representative of the Georgian literature of Abkhazia. He is the author of about forty collections of poetry and prose, from which we should choose the collections of poetry and stories: "*June*," "*Window of a dream*," "*Crown of Thorns*," "*At the fresco of the Holy Virgin*," "*From the Crucifixion to the Ascension*," "*Bloody Lea*," "*When the Winners Are Judged*," etc. He has published the diaries of an unknown Abkhaz girl from Tkvarcheli ("The tragedy of Tkvarcheli"). He has been given the *Giorgi Sharvashidze State Prize* and is buried in the *Didube Pantheon* of Writers and Public Figures in Tbilisi (**Multiethnic, 2015: 225-226**).

Eteri Samkharadze-Jghamadze (1928-1993), a Georgian poetess of tragic fate, who with all her creative work sang to virtue and love, became a victim of hatred and evil in 1993. She was killed because she could not give up her "*native sky and land*." Eteri Samkharadze-Jghamadze did not leave her hometown and had fallen "*warmed by the love of the homeland*" at the gates of Sokhumi "*not with a weapon, not with a sword, but with poems in her hand*" (**Multiethnic, 2015: 226**).

The history of Abkhazian culture is unimaginable without the history of the Sokhumi Drama Theatre with its rich traditions, as well as with the theatre lovers of Ochamchire, Gagra, Gali, Tkvarcheli, Gulripshi, and other small theatrical troupes. As it was mentioned above, the history of the Sokhumi Theatre dates back to 1885 and the formation of the theatre-lovers' society in the city. At the beginning of the 20th century, there already was a Georgian professional troupe here. After the forced Sovietization of Abkhazia, the Georgian troupe and the Abkhaz literary-dramatic circle (founded by Dimitri Gulia in 1919) were considered to be unreliable for the Soviet government and were dissolved. In 1927 *David (Dude) Dzneladze* (1889-1971) was sent to Sokhumi to form the professional troupe there. In 1928, David Dzneladze established the Sokhumi Drama Theatre. On its stage the Georgian performances were mainly held. From 1929, *Vakhtang Garik /Vachnadze/* (1896-1937) became the artistic director of the Georgian troupe. He made a significant contribution to the development of professional theatre in Sokhumi. His cooperation with *Samson Chanba* in forming the Abkhazian troupe is especially important. Georgian and Abkhazian troupes have been working in one building since 1930. Due to the shortage of the Abkhaz actors, the Georgian actors participated in the performances of the Abkhazian troupe too. Vakhtang Vachnadze directed not only the Georgian, but also Abkhazian plays: "*Mahajirs*" by *Samson Chanba*, "*Uprising in Likhni*" by *Vladimir Agrba*, and others at Sokhumi Theatre (**Argun, 1982: 7**).

A new, talented generation of directors (*Neli Eshba, Dimitri Kortava, Nikoloz Chikovani, Giorgi Sulikashvili*, and others), educated in Tbilisi, Moscow, Leningrad, and other cities, came to the theatre in the 1970s. The Abkhazian troupe had some excellent actors, People's Artists of the Georgian SSR and Abkhazian ASSR *Minadora Zuhba, Sharakh Pachelia, Alexey Agrba, Mikheil Kové, Eteri Koghonia, Levarsa Kaslandzia*. They played in the performances of the Georgian troupe too. The Georgian theatre was one of the strongest centres of culture in Abkhazia, which contributed to the intellectual and aesthetic perfection of society. At different times *Vaso Kushitashvili, Levan Mirtskhulava, Yuri Kakulia, Anzor Kutateladze, David Kobakhidze, Leo Shavdia, Gogi Kavtaradze, Gizo Zhordania, Giorgi Sulikashvili, Giorgi Zhuruli, Medea Kuchukhidze, Sandro Mrevlishvili, Leri Paksashvili*, and others worked as directors in the Sokhumi Theatre.

Famous actors, namely *Salome Kancheli, Bukhuti Zakariadze, Mikheil Chubinidze, Elene Sakvarelidze, Marine Tbileli, Tinatin Bolkvadze, Flora Shedania, Giorgi Ratiani, Sergo Pachkoria, Leo Pilpani, Boris Topuridze, Boris Tsipuria, Victor Ninidze, Zurab Laperadze, Jemal Moniava, Omar Elerdashvili, Lorena Papuashvili, Dimitri Jaiani, Bakha Bekauri, Gizo Siradze, Lorena Mikashavidze, Valeri Arghvliani, Nana and Lily Khuriti, Nugzar Chikovani, Nugzar Kurashvili, Merab Brekashvili*, and others worked in the Sukhumi Theatre in the 1950s-1980s (**Argun, 1982: 6-12**).

In 1978, the Georgian troupe separated from the Samson Chanba Theatre and the *Konstantine Gamsakhurdia Sokhumi Drama Theatre* was established. However, the cooperation between the Georgian and Abkhazian troupes continued. The work of the People's Artist of Georgia *Gogi (Giorgi) Kavtaradze* (1940-2020) was especially remarkable in the theatrical life of Abkhazia of the corresponding epoch. The performances of "*The Merchant of Venice*," "*The Right Hand of the Grand Master*," "*The law of eternity*," "*Helados*," and others became the real jewels of the theatrical life of that period. The joint performances of the Georgian and Abkhazian troupes, namely *Nodar Dumbadze's "Don't Be Afraid, Mother!", Ivan Papaskiri's "Woman's Honour"*, and others were especially emotional for the Abkhazian society.

Famous Georgian singer and choirmaster *Dzuku Lolua* (1877-1924) was at the origins of musical art in Abkhazia. He is considered a pioneer of collecting and recording Abkhaz folklore. *Dzuku Lolua* formed a folklore choir and revived the Abkhaz folk songs on stage. His work in this direction was continued by *Konstantin Kovacs* (1899-1939) and the Abkhazian public teacher *Kondrat Dzidzaria* (1898-1943). In 1930, at the initiative of the famous Georgian composer *Dimitri Arakishvili* and *Konstantin Kovach*, a music school was established in Sokhumi. The teachers of the school were the following famous pianists, singers, and conductors: *Odyssey Dimitriadis, Augusta Kamenskaya, Maria Bubnova*, and others. The creation of the school contributed to the upbringing of professional musicians. Some of them became famous not only in Abkhazia, but also abroad. Sokhumi Music School (the part which is in Tbilisi) is still named after *Dimitri Arakishvili* and part of the

school in Sokhumi (since 2002) was given the name of *Alexey Chichba* (1925-1995), a graduate of Tbilisi Vano Sarajishvili State Conservatory, an artistic director and chief conductor of the Abkhazian State Capella.

The role of Georgian composers in the formation of the Abkhazian professional music school is very important. Abkhazian musical folklore was used by *Ivane and Zakaria Paliashvili, Andria Balanchivadze, Shalva Mshvelidze, Otar Taktakishvili, Sul Khan Tsintsadze*, and others. In 1971, at the request of the Georgian Composers' Union, the Abkhazian Composers' Union was established. It played a great role in the development of the Abkhazian Composers' School. From this period the works of Abkhazian and Georgian composers (*Alexey Chichba, Razhden Gumba, Konstantine Chengelia, Mamia Berikashvili*, and others) became more and more impressive. In 1967, an opera studio was established at Dimitri Arakishvili Sokhumi Musical School, which (first in Sokhumi, then in Tbilisi) performed Zakaria Paliashvili's opera "*Daisi*" ("Twilight") and Alexey Chichba's oratorio "*Hero Keraza*." The school's symphony orchestra and the choir continued to exist independently as new centres of Abkhazian musical culture since 1969.

In terms of the development of choral music, it was important to establish the *Abkhazian Youth Capella* in Sokhumi in 1981. Its founder and leader was the famous maestro *Guram Kurashvili*. The repertoire included works of world choral music, the diversity of which allowed them to present their creations in different parts of the world. The Capella had success not only in the former Soviet republics, but also in different European countries: Yugoslavia, Hungary, France, Italy, and England. Capella was distinguished at several international choral music competitions: *Béla Bartók* (Hungary), *Guido de Arezzo* (Italy), *Celje* (then Yugoslavia, present-day Slovenia).

The institutional development of fine arts in Abkhazia is related to the name of the Georgian painter *Nikoloz Tabukashvili* (1915-1981), who in 1952 was appointed as a director of the Sokhumi art salon. At the same time, with the help of the Ministry of Culture of the Abkhazian ASSR, he set up an art studio in the building of the Concert Hall. In 1955, Nikoloz Tabukashvili opened an art school on the basis of this studio. He was the permanent director of it until 1978. Nikoloz Tabukashvili's name is associated with the upbringing of a whole generation of Abkhaz and Georgian artists, among whom are many active prominent ones (**Shervashidze, 1987; Mgaloblishvili, 2015**). Also, the *Abkhazian branch of the Artists' Union of the Georgian SSR* (later the Abkhazian Artists' Union) was established at that time. It was headed (since 1953) by the famous artist *Chola Kukuladze* (**Shervashidze, 1961: 77-94**).

While talking about the fine arts of Abkhazia, it is impossible to ignore the works of *Alexandre Sharvashidze* (1867-1968). Although he was unable to return to his homeland and could not work in Abkhazia after the establishment of Soviet rule in Georgia. From 1921 he lived and worked in Europe as a theatre artist. (His scenography was used during the ballet performance of "*Shota Rustaveli*" in Monte Carlo.) As it was already mentioned,

A. Shervashidze donated about 500 samples of his work to the museums of Tbilisi and Sokhumi in 1958. Alexandre Sharvashidze's personal exhibition of works was for the first time held at the Georgian Art Museum in Tbilisi in 1985 (**Shervashidze, 2011**).

Olga Brendel, a student of *David Kakabadze* and *Sergo Kobuladze*, a graduate of the Tbilisi Academy of Arts, also worked in Abkhazia. Her paintings depict the landscapes of Kartli, Abkhazia, the sea, Lake Ritsa, and Crimea. She participated in national and international exhibitions. In 1958, after a 36-year stay in Japan, a talented Russian artist *Varvara Bubnova* returned to Abkhazia (at the age of 72). Her Exhibition was held with great success in Tbilisi in 1960 (**Shervashidze, 1961: 87**).

Among the artists of the 1950s the works of *Chola Kukuladze* are noteworthy. He was a painter, graphic artist, specialist of etching, sculptor, illustrator. Along with other paintings, he created portraits of the Georgian and Abkhaz poets and writers, designed books and performances at Sokhumi Theatre. He created extensive panels in Sokhumi, Moscow, and other cities. His paintings have been repeatedly exhibited in Tbilisi, Moscow, Kiev, Minsk, St. Petersburg, Prague. Some of them are preserved in private collections in Moscow, Minsk, St. Petersburg, Switzerland, and Germany (**Kukuladze, 2013: 4; Artists of Abkhazia, 2007: 34-35**).

Among the works of the Abkhaz artists are notable paintings of *Sergey Gabelia*, *Yuri Chkadua*, *Gennady Lakoba*, *Adgur Dzidzaria* (all of them were graduates of Tbilisi State Academy of Arts), and other artists. Especially successful is the painter *Adgur Dzidzaria*, who since 1995 is a member of the International Federation of Artists (IFA). In 1995-1999 he had personal exhibitions in Germany and Russia. No less successful were the Georgian artists from Abkhazia: *Ramin Apakidze* (his works are preserved in Tbilisi and Sukhumi, as well as in private collections in the USA, France, Germany, Sweden, Greece, Russia); *Nugzar Mgaloblishvili* (participated in exhibitions in Tbilisi, Sokhumi, Batumi, and Moscow in 1972-1989, including the *Bulldozer Exhibition* by avant-garde artists in 1975); *Zurab Chedia* (especially important is his participation in the *Gurzuf Plein Air* in Crimea in 1980 and in exhibitions in European countries), etc.

As we can see, the institutional development of education and science, and various fields of culture in Abkhazia was experiencing a real rise from the beginning to the 20th century. The national and cultural individuality of the Abkhaz people was established in close connection with the Georgian compatriots during the so-called "*Second Republic of Georgia*" (Georgian SSR) in 1921-1991. It is very sad that the contemporary Abkhaz scholars have completely neglected the contribution that the Georgians of Abkhazia have brought to the cultural life of Abkhazia and Georgia on the whole (**Papaskiri, 2016: 363-364**).

CHAPTER XIV. POST-CONFLICT ABKHAZIA

§1. Social and Political Situation in Abkhazia in 1994-2007

After the 1992-1993 war in Abkhazia, more than 300 000 people of different nationalities (Georgians, Abkhazs, Russians, Armenians, Estonians, Greeks, etc.) out of the half-million population of the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic were forced to leave their homes. Most of them sought refuge across the River Enguri in other parts of Georgia, while some of them moved abroad. The massive expulsion of the population from Abkhazia in 1993-1994 was assessed as ethnic cleansing, since 2/3 of the population of Abkhazia became either refugees or internally displaced persons. The international community has repeatedly recognized the fact of ethnic cleansing in Abkhazia (**Budapest Summit Declaration, 1994; Lisbon Document, 1996; Istanbul Document, 1999**).

The events of 27-30 September 1993 are assessed as a “historic victory” in the “Patriotic War of the people of Abkhazia” in “independent” Abkhazia. This claim cannot withstand even the slightest criticism, since “almost 2/3 of “the people of Abkhazia” were driven out from their houses and became IDPs in their homeland. By this logic it turns out that this 2/3 was not part of the “people of Abkhazia,” which is absurd and cannot fit into any legal norms” (**Papaskiri, 2013: 6; Papaskiri, 2016: 435**).

Against this background, the “independent” Abkhazian “statehood” began to “function.” Headed by an ethnocratic regime, it has already been exposed even in Russia where the “sovereign” Abkhazia is called “an ethnic-bandit state preserve” (**Epifantsev, 2012**).¹ The secession of Abkhazia from Georgia was not based on international legal mechanisms of self-determination or internal constitutional process of devolution, but on the separatists’ unconstitutional rebellion and military disobedience against the Georgian central government, specifically through direct participation in the Russian-Georgian war (**Jojua, 2011: 479**).

On 8 October 1993, Georgia was forced to make a decision to join the CIS. It should be emphasized that the Georgians perceived this commonwealth as a certain tool for the restoration of the Soviet Union. Consequently, a large part of the Georgian political elite did not aspire to join this organization. However, Russia’s active involvement in the ongoing military operations in Abkhazia, along with the constant military, political, and economic pressure from Russia in the early 1990s, led some Georgians to think about joining the CIS for the restoration of the territorial integrity of the country.

Despite the fact that Georgia’s joining to the CIS was assessed negatively by the substantial part of the Georgian population, Georgia still managed to get some profit from being its member. There were adopted several significant documents like the resolution of the CIS Summit of 19 January 1996. According to it, the member states of the

¹ It should be noted that the European Parliament referred to the Abkhaz separatist government as a “bandit-terrorist movement” back in November of 1993 (**Chirikba, 1998**).

CIS, including the Russian Federation, recognized the territorial integrity of the Georgian state and the inviolability of its frontiers. This document continues to be a valuable legal basis in a dispute with the Russian Federation over the recognition of the occupied territories. At the same time, along with other legal documents, it is one of the important levers in the policy of non-recognition of Abkhazia and the so-called "South Ossetia" from other member states of CIS.

The Abkhaz scholar A. Avidzba quite correctly believes that it was the defeat in Abkhazia that forced Tbilisi to choose a pro-Russian vector in its foreign policy (**Avidzba, 2018: 130**). The well-known Abkhaz historian Stanislav Lakoba is also correct when stating that "*Tbilisi did not receive clear guarantees on the Abkhazian problem*" despite joining this organization (**Lakoba S., 2001: 84**). It was understood perfectly well in Sokhumi that Moscow was not going to change the reality that had emerged at the end of September of 1993. Indeed, as S. Lakoba writes in another place of his book, "*Russia had achieved what it wanted*" (**Lakoba S., 2001: 86**), i.e. Georgia's joining to the CIS.

There has been expressed an opinion that a kind of Interregnum existed between the 2nd Republic of Z. Gamsakhurdia and the 3rd Republic of E. Shevardnadze in Georgia in 1992-1995. It was a "period of unrest" characterized by the existence of paramilitaries, ethno-political conflicts, and foreign intervention in the so-called "South Ossetia" and Abkhazia (**Jones, 2013: 75; Koiava, Bagaturia, 2017: 15**). Naturally, the decision to join the CIS was also contradictory at that time. Although E. Shevardnadze spoke more pragmatically of the need to normalize relations with Russia than his predecessor, he opposed joining the CIS and even put forward the proposal of withdrawing the Russian troops from Georgia (**Gvalia, 2013: 51**).

In November of 1993, following the end of hostilities, under the auspices of the United Nations, with the help of the Council for Security and Co-operation in Europe (renamed as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in 1995) and Russia, the Georgian-Abkhaz negotiation process was launched in Geneva. During the first round (30.11-01.12) both sides signed a memorandum of understanding. During the second round (11-13.01.1994) the parties discussed the deployment of peacekeeping forces in the conflict zone (**Avidzba, 2013a: 210**). Meanwhile, after the end of hostilities, the Supreme Council of the separatist regime adopted several legislative acts at its first session on 10 December 1993: "*On the Draft of the Constitution*," "*On the Citizenship of Republic of Abkhazia*," "*On Renaming the Supreme Council of Republic of Abkhazia*," "*On the Government of Republic of Abkhazia*," and so on (**Agumava, 2017: 24-25**).

On 4 April 1994, a quadripartite (UN, OSCE, Russia, Georgia) agreement was signed in Moscow on the voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons. The document actually marked the capitulation of the Georgian government because subparagraph "C" of paragraph 3 blocked the way for returning to the persons who participated in hostilities. Such concession by the Georgian authorities is considered to be detrimental to the national interests of the state (**Pipinashvili, 2008: 126**). The separatist government brutally

oppressed the Georgian population staying in Gali district. On 9 June 1994, Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed a decree on the participation of Russian armed forces in CIS peacekeeping operations and on 21 June the units of the CIS Collective Peacekeeping Forces, composed entirely of the Russian troops, were deployed to the conflict zone (**Pipinashvili, 2008: 127**).

In fact, this created a kind of the “border guard” for the separatist regime. Later it became evident that the “peacekeepers” did not actually serve to ensure peace. Thus, the Georgian society periodically raised the question of their withdrawal from the conflict zone. However, from time to time, the actions of the Russian “blue helmets” did not suit the Abkhaz side too. Moreover, there was a serious confrontation between the separatists and the Russian military on 25 August 1994 (**Avidzba, 2018: 131**). On 13 September 1994 the Abkhazs killed two Russian “peacekeepers” in Gali. This infuriated the Russians so much that they removed the existing checkpoints on the River Enguri (**Avidzba, 2018: 131**). The “peacekeepers” occupied the buildings of militia, communications, and other important objects in Gali on the following morning. General Georgy Kondratyev, Deputy Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation, supervised the processes. According to the commander of the “peacekeepers,” he had an order from President B. Yeltsin to bring IDPs back to Gali (**Avidzba, 2018: 131**). He himself confirmed it to the IDPs from Abkhazia (**Charkviani, 2016: 174**).¹

It is obvious that B. Yeltsin’s entourage believed that Georgia was now completely dependent on Russia because there were prominent pro-Kremlin figures in the Georgian government. They were holding key positions (for example, *Vardiko Nadibaidze* was the Defence Minister, *Igor Giorgadze* was the Head of the State Security Service). Therefore, he considered it possible to give Tbilisi bait and to return the internally displaced persons to Gali District. This is confirmed by Vladislav Ardzinba himself whom General G. Kondratyev informed that he had certain instructions from the Russian leadership in this regard (**Ardzinba, 2018: 325-326**). The prospect of IDPs returning home has sparked protests in Abkhazia. The situation was so difficult that the “Supreme Council” of the separatists even made statements against the Russian “peacekeepers” (**Ardzinba, 2018: 326**). The Russian Foreign Ministry immediately stated that the “peacekeepers” were not obliged to return the IDPs (**Charkviani, 2016: 174**). With the intervention of P. Grachev on 16 September the “peacekeepers” returned to the place of deployment and the meeting in New Athos between E. Shevardnadze and Ardzinba brought no results (**Avidzba, 2018: 131**).

¹ It is thought that G. Kondratyev’s move was not coordinated with the Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev, who openly patronaged Abkhaz separatists. There was also a confrontation between the Minister of Defence and his deputy minister over the “Chechen War” due to which G. Kondratyev was forced to resign (**Kondratyev, 2020**). It confirms that P. Grachev did not strive for helping to Georgia in these events as Vitaly Chamagua, an Abkhaz journalist, tries to portray (**Chamagua, 2017: 285-286**).

In early September of 1994, the separatist regime faced a rather deep political crisis. The population strongly criticized the de facto government. As a result, on 8 September V. Ardzinba resigned from the position of the Chairman of the Supreme Council. His deputies (*Gennady Alamia* and *Stanislav Lakoba*) also followed his example (**Ardzinba, 2018: 323-324**). However, due to the situation in Gali, the “Leader of the Nation” was asked to return (**Ardzinba, 2018: 324**). On 26 November 1994, the separatist government adopted the “Constitution” of Abkhazia (**Constitution of the Republic of Abkhazia, 1994**).¹ On its basis the “Supreme Council” elected V. Ardzinba as the “President” (**News of the People's Assembly, 2008: 46**).²

This was a gross violation of the “Constitution” because according to its Article 49 of Chapter 4, the President should be elected by direct and secret ballot (**Jojua, 2011: 481; Constitution of the Republic of Abkhazia, 1994: 159-160**). On 5 January 1995 *Valeri Arshba* was elected as “Vice President” (**Agumava, 2017: 33**), again in violation of the “Constitution,” since according to its Article 54, President and Vice President should be elected together (**Constitution of the Republic of Abkhazia, 1994: 162**). But the main violation was the existence of the “Constitution” itself because it had been adopted without taking into account the will of the majority of the population of Abkhazia and therefore it “did not correspond to the generally recognized norms of democracy and parliamentary government” (**Kvaratskhelia, 2012: 67**). The 1994 Budapest Summit of the Council for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) also criticized the Constitution (**Budapest Summit Declaration, 1994**).

The 1994 OSCE Budapest Summit expressed the deep concern over “*ethnic cleansing, mass evictions of the population, especially Georgians, and the deaths of large numbers of innocent civilians*” in Abkhazia (**Budapest Summit Declaration, 1994; Aleksidze, 2008: 34**). As we have already mentioned above, the 1996 Lisbon (**Lisbon Document, 1996**) and 1999 Istanbul Summits (**Istanbul Document, 1999**), with the participation and consent of Russia, reaffirmed the fact of ethnic cleansing of Georgians in Abkhazia.

On 19 December 1994, the Russian government imposed an economic, financial, and border blockade on Abkhazia. Of course, first and foremost, the Kremlin was acting according to its own interests, since a week earlier (11 December) the so-called “First Chechen War” had begun. Some Abkhaz volunteers wanted to help their Chechen “compatriots.” Moreover, the well-known Chechen field commander *Shamil Basayev* had lots

¹ Five years later, the “adopted constitution” was approved once again by the people’s “referendum” on 3 October 1999 (**Constitution of the Republic of Abkhazia, 1994: 152**).

² “Victory” in the so-called “Patriotic War of the People of Abkhazia” and gaining the “Independence” formed Ardzinba’s personality cult in Abkhazia (**Jojua, 2007: 215**). However, later, the members of Ardzinba’s team assessed the “Saviour of the Nation” negatively during his lifetime. For example, S. Lakoba referred to V. Ardzinba as a “Moscow’s man” (**Lakoba S., 2001: 18**) and angered the “First President” (**Ardzinba, 2018: 324**).

of supporters in Abkhazia. At some point, the sanctions did work to a greater or lesser extent, but Russia had never fulfilled completely its obligations regarding the blockade of separatist Abkhazia (**Jojua, 2007: 220**).

On 31 October 1995, UN Secretary General B. Boutros-Ghali arrived in Tbilisi. During a meeting President E. Shevardnadze expressed his negative attitude towards the UN-led peace process in Abkhazia (**Charkviani, 2016: 181**). Indeed, the UN had adopted 12 resolutions over the two years, although those decisions did not affect the process of conflict resolution. The UN limited itself to the confirmation of the facts of ethnic cleansing (**Saralidze, 2016: 456**). This was also natural, since the effectiveness of the UN in such situations is hindered by the position of permanent members of the Security Council. In this case, the negative role was played by the Russian Federation, which, as the legal successor of the USSR, took its place in the Security Council in 1992.

On 19 January 1996, it was decided at the CIS Moscow Summit that member states would not have trade, economic, financial, transport and other relations with the de facto regime of Abkhazia (**Charkviani, 2016: 252**). It seemed that there was hope that the CIS would have the power to tame the separatist regime. However, this turned out to be an illusion (**Charkviani, 2016: 253**). On 7 August 1996, the separatists adopted a “constitutional” law on the Cabinet of Ministers of Republic of Abkhazia (**Collection, 1996: 88**). According to it only the President could approve the candidacy of the Prime Minister (**Agu-mava, 2017: 34**). On 23 October 1997 Sokhumi passed legislation regulating local administrations, which created a strong governmental vertical headed by the “President” (**Agu-mava, 2017: 34-35**).

In 1997, the Russian government launched a new initiative for the peaceful settlement of the conflict. Its author was *Yevgeny Primakov*, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. He put forward the idea of a “common state” that the separatists seemed to agree with. Meanwhile, it was categorically unacceptable for the Georgian side that the members of the “common state” would have separate constitutions. The separatists had already written in their “basic law” that Abkhazia was an independent state (**Constitution of the Republic of Abkhazia, 1994: 152; Charkviani, 2016: 346-347**). Contrary to the Russian plan, the Western powers, under the auspices of the United Nations, offered Tbilisi to resume the Geneva talks. The “Group of Friends of Georgia” would also participate in the talk. The first meeting was held on 24 July 1997 (**Charkviani, 2016: 347**).

On 14 August 1997 Y. Primakov brought *Vladislav Ardzinba* to Tbilisi on a spontaneous “visit.” There also were *Anri Jergenia*, “Deputy Prime Minister and Prosecutor General,” and *Sergei Shamba*, “Minister of Foreign Affairs” in the separatist delegation. From the Georgian side, along with *Eduard Shevardnadze*, the Speaker of the Parliament *Zurab Zhvania*, State Minister *Vazha Lordkipanidze*, Foreign Minister *Irakli Menagarishvili*, and *Levan Aleksidze* were also present at the negotiations. The meeting did not bring real results. This was perceived as an attempt by Moscow to somehow suppress official Tbilisi’s anti-Russian rhetoric. (There were frequent voices in Georgian parliament calling for the

withdrawal of “peacekeepers” from the conflict zone at that time.¹) This fact has caused different opinions in the Georgian political spectrum, while the population was positive and considered this meeting as the beginning of the reconciliation process (**Papaskiri, 1998: 236-242; Charkviani, 2016: 355**).²

On 19-25 May 1998, the hostilities had resumed in Gali district.³ This administrative-territorial unit was the “breadbasket” of occupied Abkhazia and everyone, from government to ordinary terrorists, tried to control it (or at least, a certain segment). The social and economic situation was catastrophic in Abkhazia due to the rising unemployment, crime, and marginalization of large parts of the population (**Jojuia, 2007: 224**). Because of this, the criminal bands were attracted to Gali District. About 400 armed bandits (under the command of General Merab Kishmaria) raided the peaceful and vulnerable Georgian population. The separatist regime’s pressure, terror, and looting in Gali soon provoked a backlash involving informal Georgian militant groups – “the Forest Brothers”, “the White Legion” (**Jojuia, 2007: 230, 236**). Those paramilitary units were the voluntary formations of IDPs who had lost hope of a peaceful settlement of the conflict and thus sought to protect both their own homes and the right to return to their land (**Jojuia, 2007: 230**). The Georgian resistance was so fierce that Sokhumi had to bring an additional 1000 men and armoured vehicles to the region (**Kvaratskhelia, 2012: 76**). The balance of power was in favour of the Abkhazs and because of that part of the population of Gali district had to leave their native lands for the second time and seek refuge across the River Enguri. In connection with these events, the European Parliament adopted the special resolution on 17 July 1998, condemning the crimes committed against the Georgian population (**Kvaratskhelia, 2012: 765**). The separatist regime killed more than 1500 Georgians and ransacked more than 1000 houses in Gali district only in 1994-1998 (**Tragedy of Abkhazia, 2016: 418-483**).

It should be noted that the separatists artificially lessened the territory of Gali district and transferred its part (the so-called “Upper zone”) to Tkvarcheli district.⁴ The rea-

¹ This position was also expressed by President of Georgia at the CIS summit in Chişinău in October of 1997, where he formally accused Russia of inaction and, in fact, of supporting the separatists. On E. Primakov’s reply: “*We have brought Ardzinba to Tbilisi, we are trying...*”, E. Shevardnadze gave a rather harsh answer: “*You are only wasting time. You cannot solve this problem and you are not trying to solve it!*” (**Budakov, 1997**).

² Meanwhile, the opposite sentiment was observed in Abkhazia, where the Abkhazs were irritated with the fact that Tbilisi meeting was held on 14 August, the day when the hostilities began in Abkhazia (**Lakoba S., 2001: 97-98**).

³ In separatist historiography the events of 1998 were called “*the Six-Day War*” (**Avidzba, 2018: 134**), which is an inaccurate allusion of 1967 war between the Arab countries and Israel.

⁴ Created by the separatist regime. It did not exist in the Soviet period and it is not recognized in the territorial-administrative division of Georgia.

son was simple: artificially reducing the number of Georgians (whom they openly perceive as a pro-Tbilisi force) returning to Gali district (**Kvashilava, 2011: 9-10**). There was neither an economic nor a historical-ethnological reason for this change.

Back in 1995, in an interview with one of the magazines, V. Ardzinba loudly declared that Abkhazia would become a prosperous country (**Ardzinba L., 2011: 169-179**). This statement of the “first president” remained only on paper. On 12 January 1999, V. Ardzinba made a populist statement that from March 1 of the same year, Abkhazia would accept all IDPs who recognized Abkhazia’s independence, received its citizenship, and did not take part in the 1992-1993 hostilities. This populism had two main reasons: 1) *The creation of an image of the separatist regime as “democratic and open” in front of the international community;* 2) *the planned “presidential elections” and the votes of Gali residents.*

On 4 March 1999, the separatist “Parliament” passed a law on presidential elections. On 30 July, the UN Security Council condemned the upcoming “presidential” elections and declared them illegitimate. On 25 August the “Central Election Commission” of Abkhazia registered V. Ardzinba as a candidate (**Avidzba, 2013a: 217**). On 30 August, V. Ardzinba stated that the day of the “presidential” elections would coincide with a referendum on the “independence of Abkhazia” (**Avidzba, 2013a: 217**). “Presidential Elections” and “referendum” of 3 October 1999 were declared illegitimate by the OSCE (**Kvatskhelia, 2012: 86**). On the basis of the “referendum,” the separatist “parliament” adopted the “Act of State Independence of the Republic of Abkhazia.”

Since the second half of 1999, the “Hawks,” led by Vladimir Putin, who was appointed as the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation by President B. Yeltsin, were gaining power in Russia. V. Putin’s aims were to restore Russia’s military-political and economic dominance in the post-Soviet space. In this regard, he sought to establish control over disobedient Georgia. On 9 September 1999, the Russian government lifted all restrictions on Abkhazia. On 5 December 2000, the Russian Federation started to require entry visas from the Georgian citizens, but this measure did not apply to the residents of the breakaway regions. Moreover, the population of these regions started to receive the Russian citizenship in a simplified manner from 2002 (**Avidzba, 2018: 136**). This was a gross violation of all international norms and Georgian legislation and it was the precondition for the Kremlin’s future “state” recognition of Abkhazia and the so-called “South Ossetia.”

Nevertheless, the Georgian government, together with the international community, had been trying to find ways to resolve the Abkhazian crisis. Dieter Boden, the Special Representative for Georgia of the UN Secretary-General, in collaboration with other stakeholders, developed the basic principles for the power-sharing between Tbilisi and Sokhumi in 2003 (**Boden’s Document, 2003**). Although this document was not welcomed in Georgia especially by the IDPs from Abkhazia, beyond the River Enguri, the de facto representatives of Sokhumi, at the urging of Russia, immediately refused to discuss the Boden plan.

The next year (2004) proved to be one of the critical years for the separatist region. The Georgian “Revolution of Roses” of 23 November 2003, the state-building reforms conducted by the strong support of the West, the initiatives of Mikheil Saakashvili’s government towards Sokhumi, aroused some interest in the separatist region. In 2004, the new “presidential” elections were held in Abkhazia. The situation was aggravated by the fact that V. Ardzinba could no longer participate. However, due to the progressive disease, he decided to leave politics altogether. All this intensified the struggle for the second “presidency” of “independent” Abkhazia. The main opponents were *Raul Khajimba*, the “Prime Minister” of Abkhazia (KGB’s officer in the Soviet times) and the protégé of V. Ardzinba, and Sergei Bagapsh, a former Communist executive and later the “Prime Minister” in Ardzinba’s government. The former was openly supported by Moscow, while the latter was blamed for pro-Georgian sentiments because of his mixed Georgian-Abkhaz family. Despite Moscow’s lobbying, S. Bagapsh won the elections, but R. Khajimba refused to concede. This led to an extremely heated confrontation. Abkhazia found itself on the verge of a civil war. Supporters of S. Bagapsh attacked the “Presidential Residence.” Both sides used arms and *Tamar Shakril*, a well-known leader of the so-called Abkhaz “national liberation” movement of the 1960s and R. Khajimba’s supporter, was shot dead by a blind bullet. The Russian authorities started to fear that they would lose control over Abkhazia. Thus, the Kremlin decided to recognize S. Bagapsh as “the first man” in Abkhazia, while the defeated R. Khajimba would become the “Vice President.” They would run on the “unified ticket” in the elections scheduled for 12 January 2005 (**Perevozkina, 2004; Solyanskaya, 2004; Papaskiri, 2012b**).

In May 2006, Sokhumi offered Tbilisi a proposal for the settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. It was called “*the Key to the Future*” and required the recognition of Abkhazia’s independence from the Georgian authorities, which made the discussion a hopeless issue (**Kvaratskhelia, 2012: 106**). In response, Tbilisi offered “*the Road Map*” to the de facto government of Sokhumi. It provided the broad autonomy to Abkhazia in a federal state; the representation of Abkhazia in the central government of Georgia; the means for the preservation of the Abkhaz language, culture and historical heritage; returning of the IDPs to their homes; resolution of the conflict in Abkhazia in an atmosphere of dialogue and trust; participation of International organizations in the peaceful settlement of the conflict; implementation of mutually agreed economic projects for the economic development of Abkhazia (**Kvaratskhelia, 2012: 106-107**).

On 24 May 2006 *Irakli Alasania*, the Adviser to the President of Georgia on the settlement of the conflict, visited Sokhumi and held the talks with *Sergei Shamba*, the de facto Minister of Foreign Affairs of Abkhazia. The latter presented counter-proposals that were essentially unsuitable for the discussion of the document.¹

¹ Recently, the rector of the Sokhumi State University, Professor *Zurab Khonelidze* proposed the “*modern paradigm of Peace*,” in which the author considers “*the university diplomacy*” as a unique means of transforming a conflict and move from confrontation and deadlock to a peaceful course (**Khonelidze, 2019: 580-598**).

The economy of “independent” Abkhazia is in an extremely difficult and deplorable state. Even the agriculture products that can be produced locally are entirely imported from Russia (Tumakova, 2021: 11). Financially, the occupied region is completely tied to Moscow. The currency is the Russian ruble, the exchange rate of which complies with the current conditions in Russia (Shengelia and others, 2020: 39). According to experts, the region has favourable conditions for uncontrolled cash flow, money laundering and terrorist financing (Shengelia et al., 2020: 201).

Since 1994, there has been some de-urbanization in Abkhazia. The Abkhazs occupy the property belonging to the Georgians. It is interesting that the number of Abkhazs living in the city has grown in comparison with the pre-war situation. There is a significant increase in the Armenian population, which is especially noticeable in Gagra and Gulripshi districts. In 2004 Russia began the restoration of Abkhazian Railway and soon Moscow-Sokhumi train started to operate (Shengelia et al., 2020: 57).

Abkhaz economists hope that Abkhazia will become an economically attractive state (Feyzba, 2002: 22-24). However, their hope is devoid of any rational basis. No state or corporation will invest capital and start a business in such an amorphous “state” as is the Russian-occupied and annexed Abkhazia. Moreover, the vast majority of the world community supports the territorial integrity of Georgia.

In conclusion we could say that from 1993 to March 2008, the UN Security Council adopted 38 resolutions on the issue of Abkhazia and more than 70 reports were made by the UN Secretary-General regarding Georgia. All of them directly spoke about the violation of the territorial integrity of Georgia, the necessity of returning the IDPs to their homes and restoring their property rights. Nevertheless, with the support and encouragement of Russia, Sokhumi ignores the efforts of international institutions, including the UN, for a peaceful settlement of the conflict. Thus, when the international partners and Russia are asking themselves why little Georgia cannot settle relations with Russia, of course, there is only one answer: Ethno-political conflicts in Georgia, namely in Abkhazia and the so-called “South Ossetia” are of decisive importance in Georgian-Russian relations. Russia is a side in these conflicts, and this situation will always play a key role in relations between the two countries, since the imperial power seeks to annex the homeland of not only Georgians, but also of Abkhazs.

§2. Collisions in Russian-Abkhaz Relations

After crushing the Abkhaz resistance by the 1870s, when a part of the local population was evicted as Muhajirs, and the rest were “labelled” as the “guilty population,” the Abkhazs did not cause any problems for the Russian empire. Moreover, starting from 1906, when the government of Nicholas II abolished the status of “guilty population” of the Abkhazs, they became the faithful servants to the empire throughout the whole 20th century. They loyally stood as guards over the state interests of Russia (both Tsarist and Bol-

shevik). The first serious rift in Russian-Abkhazian harmonious relations, no matter how unexpected, arose after Moscow's notorious "recognition" of Abkhazia as an "independent state" in 2008 (although there had been no complete accordance before it either).

Although the separatist government and Abkhazia generally praised "Mother Russia" – the main "creator" of their "triumphant victory" in the "Patriotic War of the people of Abkhazia" in 1992-1993, from time to time they still showed some resentment. In particular, they could not forgive Boris Yeltsin's government for signing the 19 January 1996 resolution of Council of Heads of CIS "On measures to Resolve the Conflict in Abkhazia (Georgia)," according to which embargo was officially imposed on Abkhazia (**Regional Conflicts, 2005**: 233-234). The separatists claimed that the Abkhaz people were doomed to a humanitarian catastrophe. It is true that this decision was never fulfilled by the Kremlin and the embargo was not actually implemented, but it still hurt the Abkhazs. Over the time, the official Moscow had managed to "rehabilitate" themselves with the Abkhazs. A serious "breakthrough" in this direction was granting the Russian citizenship to the majority of the population of Abkhazia. It was giving them certain social privileges, like Russian pensions (for details, see: **Kirova, 2012**: 17; **Kalichava, 2015**: 225). But then the so-called "presidential" elections followed in 2004 and, as it was already mentioned, the Russian involvement, which irritated a significant part of the Abkhaz society. It is true that at that time Moscow failed to promote its favoured candidate Raul Khajimba and was forced to admit the victory of Sergei Bagapsh, but then the Kremlin still managed to sort out the situation (for more on this issue: **Perevozkina, 2004**; **Solyanskaya, 2004**) and to turn the president into a vassal. This became clear after the August 2008 Russian aggression against Georgia and Moscow's recognition of Georgia's breakaway regions as "independent" states, when "grateful" S. Bagapsh often eagerly voiced the Kremlin's imperial foreign-policy "doctrines." And here, against the background of this illusory harmony, the first contradictions emerged, which reached a critical level in 2011 (**Papaskiri, 2012b**).

The first serious discord happened because of the property issues. As it is known, after the fratricidal war of 1992-1993, the "victorious" separatists took over real estate, completely illegally, not only of the expelled Georgians, but also of the Russians, Armenians, etc. For 15 years after the end of the military conflict, the victims did not dare to go to Abkhazia (due to the unrest there) and return their property, but after Moscow "recognized" Abkhazia as a "sovereign" state in 2008, these people came to Abkhazia and demanded their apartments and houses. All this was followed by critical publications in leading Russian periodicals (**Perevozkina, 2010a**; **Perevozkina, 2010b**; **Perevozkina, 2010c**; **Perevozkina, 2012**; **Perevozkina, 2013**; **Krivenyuk, 2013**; **Kubatyan, 2013**; **Vorsobin, 2010**; **Vorsobin, 2011**; **Vorsobin, 2013**; etc.). Thus began a fierce controversy. There were fruitless court proceedings.¹

¹ The situation around the "housing conflict" became so tense that it even took the life of an employee of the "embassy" in Russia. The High-ranking Russian diplomat and his wife were brutally killed in Sukhumi on 9 September 2013 (**Tishchenko, 2013**).

In this situation, some Russian “experts” (including those ones who are hostile to Georgia) went further and published new “disclosing materials” on the situation in Abkhazia (Epifantsev, 2010; Epifantsev, 2012a; Epifantsev, 2012b; Epifantsev, 2012c; Privalov, 2010; Rodionov, 2010; Roslyakov, 2012). They openly accused the separatist regime and the Abkhaz society of establishing an ethnocracy and abusing the Russians and the Russian state. The most critical of them were the assessments of Andrey Epifantsev,¹ a well-known Russian expert-analyst on the Caucasus. According to this famous mouthpiece of Russian imperial policy, *“Present day Abkhazia is a medieval gangster-ethnic project that cannot exist for a long time in the conditions of modern society ... This is an “ethnic-gangster preserve,” the existence of which cannot be covered up with rituals about independence and some “special project” ... “This is a dead end”* (Epifantsev, 2012. Emphasis added – Z.P., K.K.).

The harsh assessments were contained in the publications of other well-known analysts. Moreover, some of the authors openly talk about the collapse of the Kremlin’s Caucasus policy (Markedonov, 2010; Steshin, Alekhina, 2011; Glebov, 2011-2012; Epishev, 2012). Here is the conclusion of one of them, namely Andrei Epishev: *“What do we have? Only military bases. But why do we need them against the Georgians? We fought with Georgia because of the Abkhazs and Ossetians. Maybe we were wrong? It would be cheaper to be friends with Georgia and have the whole Caucasus as allies”* (Epishev, 2012. Emphasis added – Z.P., K.K.).

The “battles” over real estate continued throughout 2011. These “battles” have clearly shown that the Abkhaz society is not ready to live by the principles of justice and the rule of law, which seems to have prompted Arthur Mikvabia, one of the dignified Abkhazs (the main ideologue of Sergei Bagapsh’s “presidential” campaign in 2004), to confess that *“the marauding psychology of booty seekers has been established in the mass consciousness of the Abkhazian society, the concentrated continuation of which is government’s parasitical policy”* (Pegov, 2011. Emphasis added – Z.P., K.K.).

Another issue which also played a serious role in the discord, was the problem of the so-called “governmental recreational facilities of the Union subordination.” As early as 24 September 2010, the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin issued an order instructing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Federal Service for State Protection to conclude an agreement with the Abkhaz authorities on the transfer to the ownership of the Russian Federation of three facilities (the so-called “Joseph Stalin’s Dacha,” “Mikhail Gorbachev’s Dacha,” and the so-called “Kremlyovka” – the former “Rest House of the 4th Division of the Ministry of Health of the USSR”) located in the Miussera

¹ For years, A. Epifantsev was known for his anti-Georgian publications (Epifantsev, 2009; Epifantsev, 2009a; Epifantsev, 2010a), but later started to criticize the Abkhazs too and zealously began to expose their nationalist-chauvinist nature. Because of it he was declared as *Persona non grata* by the Abkhazs.

preserve (Gudauta district), the resort complex “Bichvinta” (the so-called “Nikita Khrushchev’s Dacha”), and the so-called “Lavrenti Beria’s summer residence complex.” This fact provoked a strong reaction not only from nationalist politicians and experts, but also from people close to the “governmental” circles. Then a real “revolt” was caused by the conflict around the military sanatorium of the Russian Ministry of Defence in Sokhumi, when in April of 2011 the Russian side decided to sell the facility completely ignoring the local government. The sanatorium was “closed for repairs” to hoodwink the Abkhazs. The service staff responded with protests. The issue of the property was raised again, which turned the problem into a political one. In order to resolve the crisis, it was even necessary for Russian Defence Minister Anatoly Serdyukov to pay a special visit to Sokhumi. It is true that the situation has calmed down a bit, but the property problem has not been completely resolved yet (see: **Statement, 2011; Ischenko, 2011; Sanatorium “Sukhum”, 2011; Kotova, 2011; Argun, 2010**).

Serious political complications followed Moscow’s attempt to control the funds allocated to Abkhazia, in particular the voyage of Sergei Stepashin, Head of the Audit Chamber of the Russian Federation and former Prime Minister, to Abkhazia. His group officially recorded the embezzlement of funds allocated by the Russian government to Abkhazia (347 million rubles). Although Stepashin criticized the government of Abkhazia, but he avoided raising the issue of responsibility. He covered up S. Bagapsh and his government, blamed everything on faulty accounting, and called on the relevant Abkhazian structures to correct it (**Indulgences of Stepashin, 2011**). At the same time, he inveighed in a brazen and provocative manner against the opposition. This caused quite a fair amount of resentment in the Abkhazian society. According to the commentators, Stepashin’s “indulgences” intensified the anti-Russian sentiment in Abkhazia. Some politicians disapproved of his political correctness and accused him of gross interference in the internal political life of Abkhazia (**Khajimba, 2011**). Moreover, a high-ranking Russian official, former Prime Minister, was even labelled with insulting epithets. He was openly called a “political intriguer” and “blackmailer” (**Lakoba Y., 2011**). The author of these assessments, the leader of one of the nationalist parties, lawyer Yakub Lakoba, generally said that all these “*Epifantsevs, Kuraevs, ... Stepashins ... are playing a dangerous, subversive game*” for Abkhazia. Due to this statement, the “General Prosecutor’s Office” of Abkhazia initiated a criminal case against Y. Lakoba and even arrested him (**Perevozkina, 2011**), but the growing popular protest forced the government to step back and release Y. Lakoba (**Freedom to Yakub, 2011**).

At first glance, another front of controversy in Russian-Abkhazian relations in the years of “independence” appeared suddenly. This time it was in the ecclesiastical sphere. As it is known, the Georgian clerics, led by Bishop Daniel, the then head of the Tskhumi-Abkhazeti Eparchy, were forced to leave Abkhazia, and find themselves in exile in September of 1993. Since then, the reins of the Tskhumi-Abkhazeti Eparchy have come to the hands of the Abkhazian priest Besarion Philia (Aplia) who was ordained as a deacon by His

Holiness and Beatitude Ilia II, the Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgian Apostolic Church, and later as a priest by David, the then Metropolitan of Tskhumi-Abkhazeti Eparchy. After betraying his mother church, B. Aplia declared himself the head of the “Independent Abkhazian Church” in 2009. This illegal act, of course, was not recognized by any of the Orthodox Churches, although the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church recognized the “de facto” authority of Father Besarion and even officially received him in the Moscow Patriarchate. Moreover, Father Besarion, an apostate from the Mother Church, by the order of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, was awarded the orders of the Russian Orthodox Church (the Venerable Sergius of Radonezh and the Venerable Seraphim of Sarov) in 2002 and 2009 respectively (**Aplia, 2002**).

The first suspicions about Moscow’s treacherous plans against the Abkhazian Church arose back in 2008, when the well-known theologian, Archdeacon Andrei Kuraev (then consultant of Alexey II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia) proposed to the Georgian Orthodox Church to hand over temporarily (until the conflict in Abkhazia is settled and the Georgian Patriarchate is unable to worship there) the governance of the Abkhazian church to Russia (**Kuraev, 2008a**). This offer was not taken seriously by the Georgian Patriarchate, and it was met with irritation in Abkhazia. After this proposal the Abkhazs started to dislike the Russian theologian who was so “in love” with Abkhazia that had been elected as a Professor of Abkhazian State University. Y. Lakoba called him an “Epifantsev in cassock” and a “political provocateur from the ecclesiastical mafia” (**Kuraev, 2008b**). Most importantly, this fact added to the anti-Russian sentiment in Abkhaz society.

In 2011 the conflict started in the church life of Abkhazia and it added a fresh impetus to the Russian-Abkhaz confrontation in this area. Signs of the crisis were evident as early as 2005-2006, when *Dorotheos Dbar* and *Andrey Ampar*, young priest and monk from the Russian Orthodox Church, stood up against Besarion Aplia. But then the leaders of the Russian Church managed to defuse the situation. In the spring of 2011, the conflict erupted with renewed vigour, when the Moscow Patriarchate appointed Efrem Vinogradov to the position of the Archpriest of the Monastery in Akhali Atoni (New Athos). The “rebel” Andria Ampar and his team resisted this appointment and the deeds of Efrem Vinogradov who brought Russian monks to the Monastery and started to engrain the Russian rules there. They considered this to be a violation of traditional “Abkhaz” rules and alleging the “patriotic” motives began to speak openly about the imperial intentions of the Russian Orthodox Church. The crisis reached its peak after the arrival of Dorotheos Dbar from Greece to Abkhazia. The latter had been ordained as an Archimandrite in Greece. From now on, as the holder of the highest clerical rank among Abkhazians, he declared himself a candidate for Bishopric and became the leader of the so-called “Autocephalous Movement” in Abkhazia.

On 15 May 2011 under the leadership of Dorotheos, the so-called “Ecclesiastical-Laymen Assembly” was convened in Akhali Atoni. The assembly officially declared the

“foundation of Holy Metropolis of Abkhazia” with its official residence in Anakopia-New Athos. (Besarion Apla’s so-called “Independent Abkhazian Church” chose the Sokhumi Cathedral as its residence.) The “Abkhazian Metropolitan Council” was elected, which included not only clergymen, but also secular figures, including such odious leaders of the Abkhaz separatist movement as historian Stanislav Lakoba and writer Denis Chachkhalia.

It should be noted that prominent members of the nationalist Abkhazian political spectrum, both the supporters of government regime (then Parliament Vice-Speaker Irina Agrba, Batal Kobakhia, etc.) and opposition (Raul Khajimba, Yakub Lakoba, etc.), took an active part in the work of the “Ecclesiastical-Laymen Assembly.” Along with this, the confrontation continued with Moscow Patriarchate and its puppet in Abkhazia, the so-called “Independent Abkhazian Church” headed by Besarion Apla. Pro-Russian forces led by Besarion Apla applied to the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church. As a result, Tikhon, Bishop of Maykop and Adygea (it was in this Eparchy that Dorotheos Dbar and Andrey Ampar were ordained) issued an edict banning Dbar and Ampar from church services for a year. Tikhon also referred to the “Ecclesiastical-Laymen Assembly” as “*assemblage*.”

Outraged by this, the priests and monks sent a letter of protest to Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, and the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Moscow Patriarchate categorically condemned the ecclesiastical schism in Abkhazia and considered it to be the greatest sin. They blamed the “rebellious” priests and monks for inspiring the schism. Such a position of the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church obviously caused dissatisfaction among the “apostate” Abkhazian clergy. Dorotheos Dbar did not even rule out the possibility that if the Moscow Patriarchate cut them off and stripped them of their clerical rank, he and his teammates would cut ties with the Russian Orthodox Church altogether. The death of Sergei Bagapsh and the election campaign temporarily pushed the church issues to the side, and the conflict had been somewhat subsided after Alexander Ankvab became the leader of the separatist regime.

At the end of 2011, Besarion Apla allegedly managed to strike a blow at the “apostate” group. He was personally visited by Procopius, the representative of the Synod of the “Orthodox Church of Greece.” The visit was seen as a retaliatory move by Besarion Apla, head of the self-proclaimed Abkhazian Eparchy, and pro-Russian Abkhazian politicians (Sergei Shamba) and it aimed the disrupt of relations between Dorotheos Dbar and Greek church circles. It seems, the Moscow Patriarchate stood behind all this as the guest from Greece received theological education in Russia and knew Russian well.

The Dbar-Ampar group quickly answered this attack and retaliated through the newly elected “president” *Alexander Ankvab*. The latter openly patronized the “Holy Metropolis of Abkhazia.” Ankvab brought *Nikolai Patrushev*, the Secretary of the Security Council of Russia and then the closest confidant of the Russian president, to Akhali Atoni and organized the meeting with Ampar. It is quite clear that what happened in the ecclesiastical sphere seriously irritated the Abkhaz society and further aggravated the anti-

Moscow sentiments in Abkhazia (for more details see: **Dbar, 2011; Dbar, 2012; Allenova, 2011; Sharia, 2012; Sharia, 2013; Sharia, 2013a; Martynov, 2013; Papaskiri, 2011**).

Early “presidential elections” of 2011, which did not go according to the Russian scenario, also caused some dissonance in Russian-Abkhazian relations. It is difficult to say how unexpected the sudden death of Sergei Bagapsh was for the Kremlin. There was (and is) a reasonable suspicion in the Abkhaz society that S. Bagapsh’s death was not accidental and that certain forces in Moscow “took care” of him. Despite promises by the Russian officials that Moscow would not interfere in the election, the Kremlin unanimously placed a “bet” on Sergei Shamba. This was clearly seen during the meeting of V. Putin and S. Shamba on the day of Bagapsh’s funeral. S. Shamba “revealed” to one of the Russian TV channels that the Russian “national leader” “raised” the topic of the “presidential” elections during the conversation and asked if he would be able to “reconcile” with A. Ankvab. (It is interesting that V. Putin during the meeting with A. Ankvab did not ask him this question.) S. Shamba “calmed him down” and confidently declared that A. Ankvab was his friend and that any confrontation between them was out of the question. However, he soon forgot this statement and, despite the “gentlemen” agreement reached between the “presidential” candidates, undoubtedly with Moscow’s “informational support,” he launched a dirty PR campaign against his “old friend” A. Ankvab and accused him of collaborating with the Georgian special services during the 1992-1993 military confrontation. It backfired on him. The Abkhazs saw Moscow’s hand in S. Shamba’s this unworthy act, and this was considered as another gross interference of Moscow in the domestic affairs of Abkhazia. It was this fact that undermined the Russian “project” and all of a sudden, S. Shamba suffered a crushing defeat in the first round. This time the Russian government (unlike 2004) was smart enough to recognize A. Ankvab’s victory from the very beginning.

In 2011, Russian-Abkhaz relations were strained by a border scandal over the ownership of the village of Aibga on the Abkhazian section of the Georgian-Russian state border. This historic Abkhazian village, located on both banks of the River Psou, has long been under Russian administration, but the issue was formally unresolved. The Russian authorities tried to legally appropriate the village, which is currently inhabited by Russians. This also caused a great deal of consternation in Abkhazia. Even the politicians close to the government had made some critical remarks. Fearing the impending complications, the Russian side refrained from forcing a solution to the problem at that stage and shifted the negotiations to a “long dialogue” mode (**Sharia, 2011; Gogoryan, 2011; Perevozkina, 2011a; Solovyov V., 2011; Testing by Land, 2011; Tucha, 2011; Serenko, 2011; Ryabtsev, 2011; Temin, 2011**, etc.). Recently, the Russian authorities declared Aibga a part of the Krasnodar Krai.

After Moscow declared Abkhazia an “independent state” in August 2008, the Russian-Abkhaz historiographic unity deteriorated and turned into a politically motivated confrontation. Its first manifestation was in 2010, when *Konstantin Zatulin*, the sepa-

ratists' "great friend" and protector, suddenly accused Stanislav Lakoba, the well-known Abkhazian historian and politician, one of the leaders and ideologists of the separatist movement, of blaming the Russian Empire for its colonial policy towards Abkhazia in the textbook *"History of Abkhazia"* (Sharia, 2010). In this "textbook" it was openly stated that the act of 1810 was not the so-called "voluntary union with Russia" but the "conquest of Abkhazia" and that the Russian Empire had been "at war with the Abkhaz people" for almost half a century (Bgazhba O., Lakoba S., 2006: 220). The controversy then shifted to the press. There were times when K. Zatulin criticized the Abkhaz historian for misjudging events (Zatulin, 2010), followed by S. Lakoba's publication with the most provocative title: "Zatulinism" (Lakoba S., 2010). For his part, K. Zatulin published an article summarizing his views (Zatulin, 2011). S. Lakoba immediately responded to it (Lakoba S., 2011). Felix Stanevsky, one of the active members of Zatulin's team and a former Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Georgia, also participated in this polemics (Stanevsky, 2011a).

Finally, the most pressing issue that brought Russian-Abkhazian relations to the brink of collapse was the deal reached between official Tbilisi and Moscow in 2011 over Russia's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO). In order to obtain the consent of the Georgian side and thus overcome the last obstacle to WTO accession, the Russian authorities had to make decisions that undermined the "sovereignty" of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which it "recognized" as "independent" states. In particular, first time after 26 August 2008 (the day when Russia recognized Abkhazia and "South Ossetia" as "independent" states) in an official document signed between Kremlin and Tbilisi, the Georgian-Russian state border were marked at the River Psou and Roki, and the so-called "sovereign states" of Abkhazia and "South Ossetia" were declared to be merely "trade corridors."

This caused extreme irritation of the patriotic part of Abkhaz society. For example, The Forum for the National Unity of Abkhazia, the then-main opposition force, openly stated that ***"any attempt to undermine Abkhazia's independent status and sovereignty, no matter where it comes from, should be considered a serious crime against the entire multinational people of Abkhazia"*** (Statement, 2011a. Emphasis added – Z.P., K.K.). The Abkhaz experts have openly stated that ***"the Russian-Georgian bilateral agreement is a precedent when, for the first time since 2008, Russia has confirmed Georgia's right to monitor our borders, and therefore, jurisdiction over the entire territory of Abkhazia ... first time after the recognition, Russia is in fact depriving the jurisdiction of Abkhazia of its borders, territory and its sovereignty"*** (Abkhaz experts, 2011). Abkhazs were particularly irritated by the fact that the Georgian-Russian agreement referred to Abkhazia as a "trade corridor" and openly threatened that they would not allow any corridors (Abkhaz experts, 2011). Inal Khashig, the well-known Abkhaz journalist, summing up the reaction of the Abkhazian society to the Russian-Georgian agreement on Russia's accession to the WTO, said: *"The government is cursing silently, and the public is extremely outraged. How Russia did not even warn us, even out of politeness, decided in her agreement with Georgia ... to turn Abkhazia, which it recognizes, into an insulting term "Trade Corridor №1"*

(Khashig, 2011). The Russian experts were also harsh in their assessments. They openly condemned official Moscow's decision on the acceptance of the terms of accession to the World Trade Organization and the questioning of the independent status of Abkhazia and the so-called "South Ossetia" from the Russian authorities (Epifantsev, 2011; Epifantsev, 2011a; Epishev, 2011; Markedonov, 2011; Stanevsky, 2011b, etc.).

Another reason for the deterioration of the Russian-Abkhazian relations was the Kremlin's attempt to test the readiness of the Abkhaz society for a deeper union with the Russian Federation. In the summer of 2014, Moscow proposed to the separatist regime in Sokhumi an "Agreement Between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Abkhazia on Alliance and Integration" (Agreement, 2014a. See the Russian interpretation of the project: Krylov, Areshev, 2014; Epifantsev, 2014), which caused the extreme irritation of analysts in Abkhaz political circles, especially the opposition (Roundtable, 2014; Krivenyuk, 2014). The edited version¹ was signed on 24 November 2014 (Agreement, 2014b. For an evaluation of the document, see: Skakov, 2014; Kmuzov, 2014).

This is only a part of the difficulties that exist in the Russian-Abkhazian relations from the beginning of the 21st century. It is quite obvious that Moscow will not tolerate such "caprices" from the "ungrateful Abkhazs" for a long time and will really try to solve the problem radically – to put an end to the "independent" Abkhaz "state." The above-mentioned A. Epifantsev directly called on the government in one of his publications that if the Abkhazs continued their disobedience and it would be necessary for the protection of the Russian population in Abkhazia "to end the statehood of Abkhazia," the Russians "would have to do it" (see: Epifantsev, 2010). This clearly shows what were (and are) the real Russian intentions towards Abkhazia throughout all the time after the break-up of the Soviet Union.

¹ "Agreement of Alliance and Strategic Partnership Between Abkhazia and Russia." The most striking detail was the removal of the word "integration," which was so annoying for the Abkhazs, from the title of the document (Zavodskaya, 2014).

KEY FINDINGS

The results of the conducted research can be summarized as follows:

- It is completely groundless for the Abkhaz separatist historiography to claim that the Abkhazs are the only aborigines of present-day Abkhazia and they “have been living here from the Ancient times and **do not share their aboriginality with anyone else.**” In fact, approximately from the middle of the 1st Millennium BC, when the ancient Greek written historical sources start to provide the specific information about the ethno-tribal situation in the North-Western Colchis, **the territory of present-day Abkhazia was settled only by the Colchian-Kartvelian (Megrelian-Chan, Svan) tribes: *Coli, Coraxi, the Colchians themselves, Heniochi*, maybe “*Moskh*”-*Meskhs*.** At the same time, the Colchians was an umbrella name and it is possible that along with the Kartvelian tribes it unified some non-Georgian, Abkhaz-Adyghe tribes too. From the 1st-2nd centuries BC new tribes appear on the territory of present-day Abkhazia: Sanigs (1st c. BC), Apsilae and Abazgoi (1st-2nd cc. AD). Later there appear also *Misimiani*. From those tribes, the Kartvelian origin of the *Sanigs, Misiamians, and Lazs* (who also lived in southern and, probably, in northern parts of present-day Abkhazia at those times) is evident. As for the *Abazgoi-Apsilae*, most of the scholars consider them to be the ancestors of the present-day Abkhaz-Apsua. At the same time, at first (in the 1st-2nd cc. AD) the ***Abazgoi-Apsilae*** were settled only in small part of the present-day Abkhazia (from the River Ghalidzga to the River Kelasuri). The main population of the region at that time were the Kartvelian (Megrelian-Chan, Svan) tribes: *The Lazs, the Sanigs, and the Misimians*. Regardless of the ethnic belongingness of the *Abazgoi-Apsilae*, whether they were the ancestors of the present-day Abkhazs or not and whether the territory of Abkhazia was the original area of their settlement, one thing is evident: **The present-day Abkhazs were formed as an ethnos on the territory of Georgia, in Abkhazia. Moreover, they represent some kind of ethnical mix of Adyghe-Circassian Apsuas and Kartvelians** (mainly, Megrelian-Chans).
- Furthermore, **the present-day Abkhazs, along with the Georgians, are identified as the aborigine population of Georgia (Abkhazia). This viewpoint is firm and it is officially recognized by the Georgian state. According to the Georgian Constitution, the Abkhazian language, along with the Georgian language, is the state language of Georgia (on the territory of Abkhazia).**
- It is also completely unfounded to claim that Abkhazia and the Abkhazs had their own identity in Ancient times and were not a part of the Georgian political and state universe. The contemporaneous Greek and Latin sources unequivocally confirm that **North-Western Colchis (the territory of present-day Abkhazia) from the Ancient times until the 8th century AD** (except for small periods) be-

longed to the Georgian (Colchian-Laz) – political and state universe. Most of the territory of present-day Abkhazia was occupied by the Laz and Sanig state formations, whose Kartvelian (Megrelian-Chan, Svan) ethnic origin is not doubted. Later, by the 6th century AD, another Georgian (Svan) formation of *Misimiania* emerged (it occupied the northern sector of the Kodori Gorge). Only the “kingdoms” of Apsilae and Abazgoi can be possibly considered as Abkhaz ethnopolitical units.

- The false postulate of the Abkhaz historical narrative about the conception of the “Abkhazs” kingdom which was created at the end of the 8th century, as an Abkhaz national state is based on complete misunderstanding and unprofessional perception of the historical sources. It can be said with conviction that not only absolutely all the representatives of the Georgian historical school (including, most importantly, the eminent Abkhaz historian, Zurab Anchabadze, who was the first to scholarly study the history of Ancient and Medieval Abkhazia), but also virtually all highly respected foreign Caucasiologists (Vladimir Minorsky, Anatoly Novoseltsev, Vladimir Kuznetsov, Sergei Arutyunov, etc.), without any doubt, unanimously considered the “Abkhazs” kingdom to be the Georgian national state formation. A political entity known as the “Abkhazs” kingdom, which covered all of Western Georgia, was in all aspects the Georgian state formation and the legal successor of the Ancient Colchian and Lazika states. **Moreover, the foundation of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom was the new stage in the history of Georgian statehood. By its character, the “Abkhazs” Kingdom was the first Georgian national state in Western Georgia with Georgian national Christian ideology and Georgian as its state language. The political aspirations were also Georgian. The “Abkhazs” Kingdom was guarding the all-Georgian political and state interests. Whoever the founder of the “Abkhazs” Kingdom Leon II and his successors were ethnically, by their political, state, cultural, and ideological mentality they were only Georgians. They were building not the Abkhaz-Apsua national state of “Apsny” but the unified Georgian state (not only in Western Georgia) of “Sakartvelo.”**
- Also false and unprofessional is the thesis that the so-called Catholicosate of “Abkhazia” was an “Abkhaz national” church organization and it represented the cultural and ideological basis of the “Abkhazs” kingdom. It is solely based on the speculations regarding the name. **The Catholicosate of “Abkhazia” was a Georgian (and not an Apsua-Abkhaz) church organization exclusively.** This is confirmed not only by the fact that all the known Catholicoses of “Abkhazia” were Georgians, but by the narrative sources and, most importantly, documentary materials. First of all, these are the monuments reflecting the activities of the Catholicosate of “Abkhazia”: The so-called “Great Iadgar of the Catholicos of Abkhazia” (or “Bichvinta Iadgar”) and “The Great Iadgar of the

Peasants of the Catholicos of Abkhazia.” The only thing that connects the Ap-sua-Abkhaz world with the Catholicosate of “Abkhazia” is that the residence of the Catholicoses, for a long time, was located in Bichvinta, on the territory of Apkhazeti Saeristavo, where at that time the Abkhaz tribes mainly lived.

- There is another myth of the Abkhaz historians that lacks any common sense. According to it, in the 11th-12th centuries the kingdom of “Abkhazs” was a “multi-national Abkhaz state” ruled by “Abkhaz Bagratids” and its “Golden Age” was the period of the famous “Abkhaz” king Tamar. This false thesis is based on the sole “argument,” namely, the speculations about the title of “King of the Abkhazs.” That title was held by Leon II and his successor “Leonid” kings, and from 978 by the legitimate representative of the same “Leonid” dynasty (on the maternal side) Bagrat III Bagrationi, who brought the territories of Eastern and Southern Georgia under the rule of the king of “Abkhazs” and laid the foundation to the unified Georgian state. **Abkhazia (in the current sense) itself had no statehood** (even in the form of the so-called “autonomous principedom”). Moreover, **during the existence of the unified Georgian State (11th-15th centuries), the region did not even represent a single unit administratively.** Beginning from the times of Leon II (9th c.), the founder of the “Abkhazs” kingdom, the region was divided into three saeristavos, namely *Apkhazeti*, *Tskhumi*, and *Bedia (Odishi)*. Only Apkhazeti Saeristavo (hence the name of this Saeristavo) must have been inhabited mainly by the ethnic Abkhazs. **The Apkhazeti Saeristavo**, not to mention Tskhumi and Bedia Saeristavos (both of them must have been mainly Megrel-Chan, partly Svan ethnically), **was an ordinary administrative unit of the Georgian state in the 11th-12th centuries. This Saeristavo**, along with the other Saeristavos in the territory of present-day Abkhazia, **was one of the main strongholds of the Georgian kings in the fight against the feudal opposition. And the ethnic Abkhazs were the most loyal subjects of the Tbilisi throne.** In the 11th-12th centuries the role of the Saeristavos (especially the Tskhumi Saeristavo) located on the territory of present-day Abkhazia significantly increased. **The city of Tskhumi (Sokhumi) became one of the summer residences of Georgian kings.**
- The attempts of Abkhaz scholars to understand in the current sense the words “Abkhazs” and “Abkhazia” referred in various foreign sources covering the events of the 11th-12th centuries, cannot withstand even slight criticism. The data from the relevant Byzantine, Arabic, Persian, Armenian, Old Russian written sources completely refutes this thesis and unequivocally confirms that “Abkhazia” and “Abkhazs” mean only the unified Kingdom of Georgia and the population of this country, of course, first of all, the Georgians. We can confirm that to this date the scholarly community does not know of any foreign written source depicting the events of the 11th-12th centuries, in which these terms have a dif-

ferent meaning. In the 13th-15th centuries, despite the extremely difficult domestic and foreign political situation in the country, which led to the weakening of the united Georgian state, and then its disintegration into separate kingdoms-princelands, **present-day Abkhazia remained an organic part of Georgian statehood. Most of the territory of present-day Abkhazia, the former Tskhumi and Bedia saeristavos (up to Anakopia-New Athos) was entirely under the administrative control of the Dadianis, the rulers of Samegrelo-Odishi, while Tskhumi-Sokhumi was a Georgian city.** Here was the residence of the Principal of Samegrelo-Odishi, where the latter minted his own coin. **The Apkhazeti Saeristavo itself, headed by the Sharvashidze family, was also an organic part of the all-Georgian state.** Throughout the 13th-15th centuries, the Sharvashidzes maintained loyalty to the central government of Georgia. Moreover, in some cases, they showed more loyalty to the throne of Tbilisi than other leaders of Western Georgia and were its stronghold in the country.

- Far from the historical reality are also the claims of Abkhaz historians that a military expansion to the East (in which the Jiks, relatives of the Apsua-Abkhazs were actively involved) organized by the representatives of the house of Sharvashidze and the seizure of the territory (up to the River Enguri) belonging to the Dadianis – principals of the Samegrelo-Odishi, in the 16th-17th centuries, was a national-liberation war of the Abkhaz people to restore the “historical borders of the Abkhaz state.” Based on the relevant historical sources, the falseness of the separatist vision of this process is clearly shown. In fact, the invasion of Jik-Abkhazs organized by the Sharvashidzes and their seizure of the territories of historical Odishi, despite some peculiarities, entirely fit within the frames of feudal strife and confrontation. The representatives of the Sharvashidzes, who were expanding their dominions at the expense of the territories of Samegrelo-Odishi, had no thought about creating an Apsua-Abkhaz national-state formation detached from the all-Georgian state and political system. **Their main goal (similar to the Dadianis of Odishi and the Gurielis of Guria) was to take the leading positions in the all-Georgian state and political world, i.e. the Sharvashidzes could not imagine themselves separated from the Georgian state, cultural, and political universe.** On the contrary, the Sharvashidzes tried their best to use the first opportunity to occupy both the Dadiani’s place and the royal throne of Imereti, which is evident from Sorekh Sharvashidze’s attempt to seize the throne of Odishi Principal at the end of the 17th century, and from the actions of his successor Kvapu Sharvashidze who took Rukhi and turned it into his own residence.
- These expansionist aspirations of the Sharvashidzes, the Eristavis of Apkhazeti, were the result of the processes developed in Georgia. From the 16th century, when the unified state no longer existed and the country was divided into sev-

eral kingdoms and princedoms, Abkhazia was legally subordinated to the royal throne of Imereti, although in reality the region was controlled by the Dadiani House. From this time on, the Eristavis of Apkhazeti began a permanent struggle, first and foremost, to get out of the control of Odishi Princedom and gain more sovereignty from the central government (in this case, the throne of Kutaisi). The Sharvashidzes actively involved in this struggle a new wave of Jik-Abkhazs from the North Caucasus, who gradually settled first within the lands of the Apkhazeti Saeristavo, and then spread to the rest of present-day Abkhazia. These Jik-Abkhazs, by their level of the social and economic development, significantly differed from the indigenous population of the Apkhazeti Saeristavo. **While the local “Abkhazs” were part of a highly developed Georgian feudal society with Georgian Christian ideology and literary culture, the newcomers, with a “barbaric” mentality emerging from the primitive communal system, were a destructive force, which destroyed the material and spiritual values of the developed feudal society.** As a result, in the 16th-17th centuries, Abkhazia, a highly developed feudal region, where Georgian Christian culture and literacy flourished, suddenly became a backward province, with a primitive patriarchal set-up and revived pagan beliefs. At the same time, along with the intensification of the Ottoman expansion, Islam also spread in Abkhazia.

- Despite these changes, Abkhazia, even in this period, in general remained a part of the all-Georgian cultural and political organism. The idea of historical and cultural unity with the Georgian world was still alive among the Abkhazs. Georgian language continued to function as a state language. It was the language of the record-keeping and church liturgy. This is confirmed by a number of official documents issued by the Chancellery of such aggressive (towards the neighbouring Odishi Princedom) representatives of the Sharvashidze family as Kvapu Sharvashidze and Kelesh-Bey Sharvashidze. The principals of Abkhazia still considered the Catholicoses of “Abkhazia” (whose residence had moved from Bichvinta to Gelati in the middle of the 16th century) as their spiritual fathers. **The principals of Abkhazia, representatives of the house of the Sharvashidzes (both Samurzakano branch and the Sharvashidzes of Likhni), were not excluded from the contemporaneous political processes in Western Georgia during this period and were the bearers of all-Georgian political and state mentality.** They have been actively involved in the ongoing political battles in Western Georgia.
- Another misconception of the separatist historiography that the Sharvashidzes’ Abkhazian Princedom was a “sovereign state” that “joined Russia” independently from the rest of the Georgian political units, is also false. The reality is completely different. The entering of the Princedom of Abkhazia into the protectorate of the Russian Empire was entirely based on the conjuncture in Russian-

Georgian relations at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries. This became evident during the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774, when the Sharvashidzes of Samurzakano unequivocally supported the pro-Russian course of the Georgian kings Erekle II and Solomon I. Later, Kelesh-Bey Sharvashidze, the Principal of Abkhazia, who was considered a “true Moslem” and who came to power with the direct support of the Ottomans, reconsidered his attitude to the Sublime Porte and tried to get closer to Russia. In 1810, his successor Giorgi (Sefer-Bey) Sharvashidze officially swore allegiance to the Russian Emperor. It is well known this act was inspired by the house of the Dadianis, namely the de facto ruler of Odishi Principedom Nino Bagrationi-Dadiani, the widow of Grigol Dadiani and the daughter of Giorgi XII, the last king of Kartli-Kakheti.

- Of the utmost importance is the fact that the leaders of Abkhazia of those times made it clear that Abkhazia was indeed a part of the all-Georgian cultural and political world. A clear proof of this is the fact that the correspondence and negotiations between the leaders of Abkhazia and the Russian authorities were conducted only in Georgian. In this regard, it is especially noteworthy, that **the authentic version of the “Pleading Points”** (on putting the Principedom of Abkhazia under the protectorate of the Russian Empire), **addressed by Giorgi Sharvashidze to the Russian Emperor and signed by other Abkhaz landlords, is written in Georgian.** It is justly noted in historiography that there was definitely a political idea in the procedure of the preparation and presentation of the “Pleading Points.” In signing the document which was composed in Georgian, the Principal of Abkhazia clearly demonstrated to the Russian counterpart (and the whole world) that at the beginning of the 19th century in foreign relations the Principedom of Abkhazia represented the Georgian national, state, and cultural world.
- The Abkhazs, and above all the Abkhaz noble elite, considered themselves as a part of the all-Georgian political, state, and cultural space in the final stages of the Abkhazian Principedom, during the rule of Mikheil Sharvashidze (1822-1864). It is not accidental that the majority of the Sharvashidze family, including those converted into Islam by force (e.g. Rostom, Manuchar, and Zurab Sharvashidze, second half of the 18th century), had traditional Georgian names. Moreover, Georgian names are found in the Ubykh tribes related to Abkhazs. For instance, in the first half of the 19th century the leaders of the Ubykhs were **Levan Tsanubaia** (the Georgian-Megrelian form of the Tsanba family name) and **Zurab Khamish**. And finally, the most important argument that the representatives of the Princely family of Abkhazia identified themselves as an integral part of Georgian Orthodox Christian world is that the last leader of Abkhazia Mikheil Sharvashidze and his son Giorgi Sharvashidze were buried in the Mokvi

Temple and the epitaph on their grave is carved in old Georgian script Asomtavruli.

- After the abolition of the Abkhazian Principedom, and especially after the expulsion of the native Abkhazian population and their resettlement in the Ottoman Empire (Muhajirism), the Russian authorities took steps to dismantle the centuries-old Georgian-Abkhaz historical and cultural unity and to exclude Abkhazs from the all-Georgian cultural and political world. The creation of the Abkhazian alphabet based on Cyrillic script, according to General Peter von Uslar, the creator of this alphabet, was aimed at removing the Abkhazs from the Georgian cultural world and their integration with Russian literacy.
- The policy of the Russian government in the ecclesiastical sphere served to the realization of the imperial motto of “divide et impera.” In particular, there was a serious attempt to separate the Sokhumi Eparchy from the Georgian Exarchate and subordinate it to the Kuban Church. But the treacherous attempt of the Russian authorities to somehow uproot the Georgian Church and Georgian literacy in Abkhazia and thus to split the Georgian-Abkhazian historical and cultural unity was thwarted by the most respected representatives of the Abkhazian society. A clear proof of this is the arrival of the so-called “Abkhaz deputation” in Tbilisi and their meeting with the Viceroy of the Caucasus (26 April /9 May/ 1916). During this meeting they categorically demanded from the government not to separate Abkhazia from the rest of the Georgian church. Nevertheless, despite the great efforts of the leading Abkhaz public figures (the contribution of Giorgi Sharvashidze, the son of the last prince of Abkhazia Mikheil Sharvashidze, a prominent representative of Georgian literature, publicist, and public figure, has to be singled out in this respect), the Russian authorities were able to break the Georgian-Abkhaz historical unity and mobilize a large part of Abkhazs against their historical brothers – the Georgians.
- One of the key points in the anti-Georgian narrative of the history of Abkhazia is the political accusation about the occupation of Abkhazia by the Georgian army in 1918-1921 and its incorporation into the Georgian Democratic Republic against the will of the Abkhaz people. It is noteworthy that this shameless lie is still being spread not only by the ideologues of Abkhaz separatism, but also by the top officials of the Russian state. In fact, no “conquest” took place and could not have taken place for two simple reasons: 1) Abkhazia, then “Sokhumi Okrug,” which administratively was a part of the Kutaisi Governorate, was not an independent state formation separated from the rest of Georgia; 2) **The entry of the armed forces of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federal Republic into Abkhazia (the spring of 1918) took place at the official request of the “Abkhaz People’s Council”** (elected only by the Abkhazs in Sokhumi in No-

- ember of 1917). Later (in June of 1918) the **same “People’s Council of Abkhazia”** appealed to the authorities of the newly formed **Georgian Democratic Republic** to leave the units of the **Georgian Guard** under its subordination in **Abkhazia** in order to assist the **“People’s Council”** in suppression of the **Bolshevik anarchy** and in ensuring a **revolutionary order** in the region. At the same time, the **“People’s Council of Abkhazia”** considered it expedient to sign an agreement with official Tbilisi (11 June 1918), which granted Abkhazia autonomy within the **Georgian Democratic Republic**. **This decision was officially legalized (20 March 1919) by the People’s Council of Abkhazia, the highest legitimate governing body of Abkhazia, which was elected in February of 1919 after universal democratic elections.**
- Although not all the then Abkhaz leaders (1918-1921) really supported Abkhazia’s being within a unified Georgian state space, **there was not a single figure who would openly oppose Abkhazia’s becoming an autonomy in Georgian Democratic Republic. Moreover, it was the Abkhaz side that hastened the Georgian deputies to immediately approve the draft of the “Constitution of Autonomous Abkhazia” adopted by the People’s Council of Abkhazia on 16 October 1920, and thus complete the formalization of the state-legal relations between the centre and autonomy.** This process was finished by adoption of the Constitution of Georgian Democratic Republic (the representatives of the Abkhazs also took part in its drafting) on 21 February 1921. Thus, the autonomous status of Abkhazia within a unified Georgian state was officially legalized.
 - It is also a myth that the so-called the **“Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia”** was an **“independent Abkhaz state,”** the status of which was lowered from an **“independent”** Soviet republic to an **“autonomous republic”** in 1931 by the mighty Georgians – Joseph Stalin and Lavrenti Beria. It is true that the Russian Bolsheviks and the Abkhaz communists encouraged by them tried to separate Abkhazia from the rest of Georgia (under the disguise of the false slogan of **“self-determination of nations”**). With this purpose they speculated about the status of the so-called **“Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia”** (proclaimed on 4 March 1921, under the conditions of the occupation of Abkhazia by the Red Army), but their attempt was thwarted. The absurdity of the separate existence of the so-called **“Abkhazian SSR”** soon became apparent, and the highest party officials raised the issue of the unification of the Abkhazian SSR with the Georgian SSR. On 16 December 1921, the **“Union Treaty between the Georgian SSR and the Abkhazian SSR”** was signed in Tbilisi. Under this treaty, Abkhazia, formally seemed to be considered a **“Soviet Socialist Republic”** (as was Georgia itself), but in reality, from the very beginning (even before the signing of the **“Union Treaty”** on 16 December 1921) was an autonomous republic. The join-

ing of Abkhazia to the Georgian SSR (and not the unification of two equal entities, the Georgian SSR and the Abkhazian SSR, into a single federal state) was confirmed by the constitutions of the Abkhazian SSR (1927) and the Georgian SSR (1922). **In the Treaty establishing the USSR Abkhazia is mentioned among the autonomous republics and not as an independent entity of this new union** (even the Georgian SSR was not such an entity, as it was a member of Transcaucasian SFSR). The status of Abkhazia as an autonomous republic is officially proscribed in the 1924 Constitution of the USSR. The fact that the Abkhazian SSR (from the very beginning) was an autonomous unit within the Georgian SSR can be seen from the fact that its budget was a part of the Georgian budget, and the government agencies and party bodies of Abkhazia were accountable before the legislative and executive bodies of Georgia and the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party. Thus, the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia in 1921-1931, which was formally referred to as the so-called "Treaty Republic" («Договорная республика»), during this whole period, in fact, was officially a part of the Georgian SSR and "de facto" (to some extent "de jure") was already its autonomous unit.

- This is also completely wrong for separatist historiography to claim that the government of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia from the 1930s to the early 1950s pursued a deliberate discriminatory national policy (transitioning the Abkhazian alphabet to Georgian script; the "liquidation" of Abkhaz national schools and their transition to the Georgian-language education; organized settlement of the Georgian population in Abkhazia) of erasing the "ethnic individuality" of the Abkhaz people. Relevant documentary materials unequivocally prove that all those measures were carried out throughout the whole Soviet Union directly at the initiative of the highest authorities of the USSR, and they fully served the Russian-Soviet imperial interests.
- Another notorious topic deliberately used by Abkhaz separatist ideologues in their anti-Georgian propaganda campaign is the issue of the repressions carried out by the Communist regime in the 1930s. According to the separatists, these repressions were carried out with special cruelty in Abkhazia and the main culprits were the Georgian Communist government and the "mighty Georgians," Joseph Stalin and Lavrenti Beria. It is well known that the Soviet totalitarian regime indeed turned millions of people of different nationalities across the USSR into the victims of the bloody terror in the 1930s. It is true that the repressions started still in the life of Vladimir Lenin, when the Soviet regime killed millions of completely innocent people, but they reached their apogee in the second half of the 1930s. The totalitarian regime believed that it was at this time that extreme class antagonism escalated and the hostile elements unleashed a fierce struggle to seize power. Repressions swept across the whole

country. Naturally, Georgia was not an exception. The repressions of the 1920s-1930s were too painful to Georgia. The best representatives of the Georgian people were the victims of the terror. And the attempts of separatist historiography to seek evil in Georgia and Georgians are in vain. This evil was spawned by the Soviet totalitarian system, the destruction of which is still mourned by the ideologues of Abkhaz separatism.

- Abkhaz historians also distort the processes that took place in the 1950s and 1980s. They try in every way to accuse the Georgian central government of gross interference in the “internal affairs” of Abkhazia. As a result of this interference, the “right” of the Abkhaz people to be the “sole owner” of their “homeland” was limited, which provoked the outrage of the Abkhazs, expressed in fierce protests. Those allegations are completely baseless. The Abkhaz people had all the conditions for the full realization of their political-state and socio-cultural potential within the Georgian SSR. In this regard, the fact that **the Abkhazian language** (along with Georgian and Russian) **was declared the state language of the Autonomous Republic in the Constitution of the Abkhazian ASSR (Such an entry was not in the constitutions of any of the Autonomous Republics of the USSR) is invaluable**. Sokhumi was the second educational centre of Georgia. The Abkhazian State University was the second university in Georgia and fourth in the South Caucasus. It had the Abkhazian sector, which was an unprecedented event for the Soviet Union.
- Finally, the separatist vision of the armed conflict in Abkhazia in 1992-1993 is completely devoid of reality. First and foremost, it refers to the assertion that this conflict was not a fratricidal confrontation, but a “Patriotic War of the people of Abkhazia” («Отечественная война народа Абхазии»), which was waged in response to the “aggression” carried out by Georgia against the “independent (Abkhazian) state.” The saddest thing is that the separatist regime is still trying to convince its own population and the world community that in September 1993 the **“people of Abkhazia”** (yes, not the Abkhaz people, but the “people of Abkhazia”) won a historic victory in this “patriotic war” of the “People of Abkhazia.” This wording is not only fundamentally wrong, it is also simply blasphemous as this “great victory” in the **“Patriotic War of the people of Abkhazia” resulted in the eviction of almost 2/3 of these “people of Abkhazia” from their homeland and their becoming the IDPs**. It turns out that this 2/3 was not a part of the “people of Abkhazia,” which is completely absurd and cannot fit into any legal norms. Is it still possible after that to ask a question who is the main culprit in the tragedy in Abkhazia? Is not this racist approach a recognition of the fact that the civil rights of the indigenous Georgian population of Abkhazia mean nothing to the separatists?

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The Bedia Chalice – Unique monument of Georgian goldsmithing of 10th-11th centuries, donation to the *Bedia Temple* from its builder – first King of the unified Georgia **Bagrat III Bagrationi** (978-1014) and his mother Queen **Gurandukht**, with inscription in old Georgian script *Asomtavruli*: *ჰიგოჲ რჳცი რინცჳი ძინს ყინისს ყტღიტჲ ტფჲტხტ* *ჰიფონს ოს ორდსსს ჰტტსსს რღჰტრდოჲჲ ორდოტხსსს ტძინს ყტჰტინტინსსს* *ყრჰრჰტინტინტ* *ტძინჩ* /“*Holy Mother of God, intercede before your son for Bagrat, king of the Abkhazs, and his mother, the queen Gurandukht, the commissioners of this vessel, the decorators of this altar, and the builders of this holy church. Amen.*”/

