**The Establishment of Soviet Power in Abkhazia: Ethnicity, Contestation and Clientalism in the Revolutionary Periphery**

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ABSTRACT: This article investigates the intersection of Soviet nationality policy, ethno-federal territorialism, clientalism and the creation of new administrative institutions and in the course of the establishment of Soviet power in Abkhazia, an ethnically diverse territory in the periphery of the former tsarist empire. Based on materials from the Georgian archives, as well as from the personal collections of Efrem Eshba and Nestor Lakoba, this article demonstrates the ways in which nationality policy played out at the local level and how the ‘indigenization’ of local titular elites intersected with contestations over power and the distribution of resources inherent to the construction of the new institutions of Soviet rule.

During the Russian Revolution and Civil War, the Bolsheviks attempted to extend and consolidate their control over the territories in the periphery of the former tsarist empire, many of which were populated by diverse ethnic groups. In order to gain support in these areas, the new Soviet leaders decided to make use of local sentiments by adopting a conciliatory policy towards such ethnic groups. This included extending cultural and political privileges to local ‘titular’ elites and efforts to foster the creation of new ‘national’ territorial entities, many of which had never experienced statehood in modern history. Taken together, these approaches came to form the basis of Soviet nationality policy, which involved the creation of what has recently been described as an ‘affirmative action empire.’[[1]](#endnote-1) At the centre of this conciliatory nation-building policy was the co-optation of titular elites into the administrative bureaucracy, industry and cultural and educational institutions, an ‘indigenization’ policy referred to as nationalization or *korenizatsiia.* This more broadly included official encouragement of the cultural elements of nationality among ethnic groups to speed up the ‘national development’ of these ethnic groups which would in turn solidify their loyalty to the regime and stimulate their participation in the building of a Soviet future.

Building ‘Soviet power’ more broadly entailed creating entirely new structures of state administration, which inherently involved the distribution of access to resources and opportunities.[[2]](#endnote-2) In the ethnically complex regions in the periphery, institution building took on particular characteristics, as Soviet nationality policy inevitably played a role in the contestation over power and access. One such peripheral and ethnically diverse region was Abkhazia, a territory that had previously existed under tsarist (and briefly Georgian) rule only as an administrative entity, as the Sukhumi district (*Sukhumskii otdel*) of the Kutaisi province. Thus the establishment of Soviet Abkhazia represented the first time in modern history that the yearnings of the ethnic Abkhaz[[3]](#endnote-3) intellectuals for some form of ethnic territoriality (or, indeed, of nationhood) were brought to life. Despite the fact that by the time of the Russian revolution the ethnic Abkhaz made up a minority within the newly created republic (the plurality of the population being ethnically Mingrelian/Georgian), as the titular ethnicity they would now be in the vanguard of the Soviet local leadership in the building of a Soviet nation.

Using the case of Abkhazia, this article will show how Soviet power was established, institutionalized and internalized at the local level, and how local elites were able to manipulate nationality policy and the structures of local institutions in order to influence decisions on ethno-territorial status and to gain control of patronage resources that in turn gave them substantial local autonomy and authority and in so doing it will contribute to our understanding of the consolidation of Soviet power in the periphery and the nature of early Soviet nationalities policy.

**Setting the Stage: The Bolsheviks’ First Attempts to Seize Power in Abkhazia**

Abkhazia is a subtropical strip of land on the Black Sea coast on the south slope of the western Caucasus range. The Abkhaz as an ethnic group are closely related to the Adigei and Abaza in the North Caucasus, with a language belonging to the Northwestern Caucasian family.[[4]](#endnote-4) They have a long historical association with the Georgians, whose language belongs to the entirely separate Kartvelian language family, but also of mutual antagonism with them, as the Georgians sided with the tsarist Russian government against the Abkhaz mountaineers in the Caucasus War of the mid-nineteenth century. Defeat in this war led to the out-migration to Ottoman Turkey of large numbers of Abkhaz in the 1860s and 1870s, leaving Abkhazia severely under-populated. Under tsarist rule, large numbers of Mingrelians, a Georgian ethnic subgroup speaking a Kartvelian language, resettled in Abkhazia from the neighbouring region of Mingrelia (*Samegrelo*), particularly in Abkhazia’s southernmost district, known as Samurzaqano or Gali. As malarial swamps began to be drained at the end of the century, Armenians, Greeks, Russians and other ethnic groups emigrated to the area, settling in the tobacco-growing areas and towns. Its administrative capital, Sukhumi, became a cosmopolitan port city. By the time of the Russian Revolution, the Abkhaz made up only about 26% of a total population of about 200,000, while Georgian/Mingrelians made up 32%, and Russians, Armenians and Greeks made up most of the rest.[[5]](#endnote-5)

The two initial attempts by the Bolsheviks to seize power in the spring of 1918 were led by Nestor Lakoba and Efrem Eshba, both ethnically Abkhaz but from very divergent backgrounds and with very differing outlooks, temperaments and bases of support. Lakoba was a seminarian-turned revolutionary from Gudauta district, the predominantly Abkhaz peasant population of which was hostile to the formal government institutions that emerged following the February Revolution. At a peasant meeting (*skhod*) in the traditional gathering place of Lykhny in April 1917, Lakoba appealed to the peasants’ dissatisfaction of land issues and taxation, and a soviet was elected that was predominantly Bolshevik. The Gudauta peasants also decided to invoke the traditional ‘Kiaraz’ peasant movement. The word Kiaraz (*K’araz*) originally meant common aid in farm work and mutual assistance and mutual defense in times of trouble, by the early twentieth century it had come to refer to a form of peasant organization. As Lakoba later described in his reminiscences of the revolution:

Such an organization was born in the olden days as a counter-organization against the aristocratic organizations of loafers (*shalopai*) and horse thieves. ‘Kiaraz’ prepared the conditions for the seizure of total power by the working peasantry in all villages of the Gudauta district. It was an armed organization against any who dared to oppose the power of the workers.[[6]](#endnote-6)

Central to Kiaraz was the tradition of loyalty oaths, taken in the traditional spot in the village of Achandara.[[7]](#endnote-7) As the Soviet Abkhazian historian Dzidzaria noted, ‘The leaders of “Kiaraz” here and in other cases made use of old traditions in order to accomplish revolutionary tasks.’[[8]](#endnote-8) The Abkhaz peasants of Kiaraz received weapons and assistance from the revolutionary soldiers of the Gudauta Garrison (part of the former tsarist border guard troops),[[9]](#endnote-9) and they were then joined by war veterans returning from the front. As Lakoba later wrote, ‘we then were receiving literature and also various instructions from the Central Committee of the RSDRP (then the RKP), and from that we drew out everything that we needed.’[[10]](#endnote-10)

 The first Bolshevik attempt to seize power took place in February 1918 and was led by Eshba, the son of an impoverished Abkhaz nobleman from a small highland village who was sent on state stipends to *gymnasia* in Sukhumi, Kutaisi and Tiflis, and eventually enrolled in the law faculty of Moscow University where he became involved with Marxist and Bolshevik circles. With support from ‘revolutionary minded’ Russian sailors from several visiting ships, Eshba and the Sukhumi Bolsheviks attempted to subordinate the local government organs to their authority, requisitioned several buildings and hotels, and demanded ‘contributions’ from the well off. After the departure of the Russian ships a few days later, however, they were forced to flee Abkhazia.[[11]](#endnote-11)

 The second attempt in April 1918 was more substantial. Coordinated by both Eshba’s underground network and Lakoba’s Gudauta-based peasant movement, a ‘Sukhumi Commune’ was established that lasted for forty-two days before being chased out of Sukhumi (and later from Abkhazia altogether) by troops of the newly-declared Georgian Democratic Republic. Following this defeat, Lakoba and some of the Kiaraz insurgents broke through Georgian lines and fled to Soviet Russia where they fought on the Bolshevik side in the Civil War as part of the Abkhazian Hundred. [[12]](#endnote-12) Eshba also made his way to Russia, where in the spring of 1919 he became Deputy Chairman of the Organization of the Peoples of the East of the Central Committee of the RKP(b). He was then sent to the North Caucasus, after allegedly receiving a personal briefing from V. I. Lenin, who gave him ‘detailed instructions about work in the Caucasus.’ Both Eshba and Lakoba attended the First Congress of Peoples of the East in Baku in September 1920, and both (together with Abkhazian Bolsheviks K. Inal-ipa and M. Tarnava) were apparently delegated personally by Lenin on a mission to Turkey from late 1920 until March 1921.[[13]](#endnote-13)

**The Establishment of Soviet Power in Abkhazia**

The experience of the spring 1918 uprisings seems to have clearly demonstrated to the Soviet leadership the potential of an Abkhaz insurgency as a means of destabilizing the Georgian government and for providing a pretext for intervention in Georgia. In their 2 January 1921 memorandum arguing for the immediate ‘Sovietization’ of Georgia, Grigol “Sergo” Orjonikidze and Sergei Kirov wrote that ‘[o]ne cannot hope for an internal explosion, without our help Georgia cannot be Sovietized . . .as a motive, one can raise an uprising in Abkhazia, Adjaria, etc.’[[14]](#endnote-14) As the Soviet 11th Red Army prepared to invade Georgia from the southeast, on 14 February 1921 Kavbiuro[[15]](#endnote-15) created an underground Abkhazian District Committee in Sukhumi, notable for its lack of Abkhaz: it included the Georgian (Mingrelian) Bolshevik Isak Zhvania as chairman, as well as the Russians E. Sverdlov and M. Karogodskaia. On 18 February a provisional Revolutionary Committee (Revkom)[[16]](#endnote-16) was formed, again with Zhvania as chairman, and including Sverdlov and one Abkhaz, M. Tsaguria that was tasked with organizing diversions behind the Georgian lines in support of the 9th Red Army that was advancing down into Abkhazia from the north.[[17]](#endnote-17)

On 16 February the 11th Red Army invaded Georgia from Azerbaijan and moved on Tiflis, which fell to the Bolsheviks on 25 February. The Georgian government fled west, first to Kutaisi and then to Batumi, which they finally abandoned on 19 March. Meanwhile, on 17 February the 9th Kuban Red Army invaded Abkhazia from the north, capturing Sukhumi on 4 March. The memoirs of the Bolshevik agitator M. Karogodskaia suggest that these hastily created temporary district and provisional Revolutionary Committees played a key role:

Both the district committee and the underground Abkhazian Revkom in the last days of February in essence became a military headquarters, directing the revolt of the toilers of Abkhazia against their oppressors. Elements of the 9th Red Army came to the insurgents’ aid. The defeat of the Menshevik forces at Novy Afon under pressure from the Red Army and the active measures of the partisan units in the rear decided the outcome of the struggle. The provisional underground Abkhazian Revkom on the night of 3-4 March 1921 gained control of the city. Freeing the political prisoners and seizing the printing press, it issued its Order No. 1 on the establishment of revolutionary order in the city. The Revkom with its armed detachments occupied the government buildings, and the Mensheviks and their patrons, the French and English, fled by land and sea.[[18]](#endnote-18)

Soon thereafter the Abkhaz leaders Eshba, Lakoba and N.N. Akirtava were summoned back to Abkhazia by March 6, 1921.[[19]](#endnote-19) The acting Abkhazian Revkom was immediately convened, with Eshba and Lakoba and 9th Red Army and Kavbiuro representatives present. The three points on the agenda were Eshba’s report on the creation of the permanent Revkom and reports on reorganizing the bureau of the Party and the publishing of a party newspaper. The new Revkom had three members: Eshba, Lakoba and Akirtava. It was decided as well that Eshba and Lakoba were simultaneously to be included in the Party organization, which would be called the Orgbiuro of the Russian Communist Party (RKP) in Abkhazia. Zhvania, the Georgian revolutionary who had been chairman of the acting Revkom, was made a permanent member of the Party Orgbiuro, and acting Revkom secretary Sverdlov retained his previous position.[[20]](#endnote-20) On the same day, the new Revkom addressed a missive to the peasants and workers of Georgia declaring the Soviet victory in Abkhazia and urging fighting on until final victory.[[21]](#endnote-21) The new Revkom immediately set to work organizing commissariats and other administrative bodies and appointing local Revkoms in the regions. On 10 March Eshba, Lakoba and Akirtava signed a telegram to the Georgian Revkom in Tiflis declaring final victory in all the regions of Abkhazia.

**Formal Status and Soviet Nation Building**

With the creation of a defined geographic entity of Abkhazia in 1921 for the first time in modern history and the appellation of titular status to ethnic Abkhaz, almost from the start the question arose of the status of this entity. In his later writings, Eshba emphasized heightened ethnic tensions and hostilities that he saw as fostered exclusively by the insensitive governance of the Georgian Mensheviks. While in his view the motivations of participants of the failed uprising of spring 1918 were based on class and revolutionary zeal instead of ethnic identity, the three years of Menshevik rule produced a backlash of ethnic sentiment that turned the revolutionary struggle for many of his fellow Abkhaz into a conflict with the ethnic Georgians.

In Abkhazia in these first months of 1918 there was a purely open social, class struggle of the entire peasantry (of all nationalities) under the leadership of the workers of Sukhum and the workers of the Black Sea railway, under the leadership of our Bolshevik organization, against the princes, the old administration and the merchants, for land and for power . . . Together we fought a shared enemy. On both sides were united various nationalities. I remember that during the 40-day existence of Soviet power in Abkhazia, power resting on the armed force of the entire multinational peasantry, nobody raised the question, it wasn’t relevant, nobody even had the thought to oppose Abkhazia to Georgia.[[22]](#endnote-22)

With the crushing of the uprising, the Georgian government dealt with the ethnic Abkhaz with particular harshness, giving rise to ethnic antagonism:

They showed special severity towards the Abkhaz. In the course of their three-year rule, the Mensheviks, as a nationalist, petty bourgeois party truly carried out a policy of repression of the Abkhaz (mainly against the peasants – with the princes they reached and understanding), and seriously poisoned the atmosphere. They burned some peasant houses, killed some peasant lads, put some innocents in prison, especially from the Abkhaz intelligentsia, and so forth. All of this gave an added charge to chauvinism against Georgia. This is what we met, entirely unexpectedly for us I must emphasize, in 1921, as personally I had been completely cut off from Abkhazia in the course of these three years.[[23]](#endnote-23)

In a public speech in 1926 to a group of Abkhazian students in Moscow, Eshba again emphasized the changes that he found upon returning to Abkhazia in 1921.

Three years passed, and in 1921 those comrades who had unwillingly been outside of the Transcaucasus and Abkhazia saw with surprise that in such a short period a colossal transformation had taken place in the situation in Abkhazia, in this interweaving of nationalities. We found a picture exactly the opposite of that in 1918 . . . We saw that the Abkhaz peasantry rejected everything ‘Georgian.’ The Mensheviks drilled into their heads the idea that to live politically together with Georgia meant to be oppressed by them. This was an enormous obstacle when it came time to begin constructing Soviet power in Abkhazia.[[24]](#endnote-24)

In order to overcome this obstacle, Eshba wrote, ‘armed with our nationality policy, Lenin’s tactics, and the letter of Lenin to the Caucasian Communists, we decided conclusively to purge this poison that the Mensheviks had administered to the Abkhazian population, for this we had let the Abkhazian peasantry be convinced that Soviet power meant “liberation of the peoples.”’ Therefore, he concluded, ‘no matter how small the people, it will get independence,’[[25]](#endnote-25) which in turn would allow the leadership ‘to free ourselves from nationalism in the interests of the people, to not allow our princes and landowners the possibility of playing on national feelings.’[[26]](#endnote-26) Thus for the Abkhazian leadership (or for Eshba, at least), resolution of the ‘nationality question’ in Abkhazia was directly tied to the issue of the republic’s formal status.

Eshba convinced the Revkom of the necessity of a form of independence for the new Abkhazian republic, so together they appealed to Orjonikidze and Kavbiuro. At two sessions of the Revkom in the first half of March 1921, it was decided to declare Abkhazia a self-standing (*samostoiatel’naia*)[[27]](#endnote-27) republic, and to call the party organization ‘the Communist Party of Abkhazia,’ although preserving the existing name (Orgbiuro of RKP(b) in Abkhazia) until the issue would be clarified ‘at the centre.’[[28]](#endnote-28) In a telephone conversation between Eshba and Orjonikidze on 26 March Eshba argued that although they had not yet officially declared Abkhazia a Soviet Socialist Republic, they had prepared letterhead and stamps, and ‘our speeches at meetings and sessions demonstrate that the time has come to make the declaration.’ Orjonikidze informed the Abkhazians that the ‘opinion of Moscow’ held that Abkhazia should enter Georgia as an autonomous republic, and that any other decision would be seen as annexation by Russia. Eshba disagreed, and argued that at recent meetings in the regions ‘the peasants specifically expressed their joy at the liberation of Abkhazia from the ethnic repression of Georgia.’ The current situation, he repeated, ‘demands the declaration of a self-standing republic and only in the worst case an autonomous republic, entering directly into the Russian federation, and under no circumstances into Soviet Georgia.’ Orjonikidze seemed hesitant, but he suggested that the Abkhazian leaders join him for a meeting the next day in Batumi, in the neighbouring Georgian district of Adjara, where he was on business as ‘in person it will be easier to get our bearings and immediately make one decision or another and communicate it in person, how to fully formulate your opinion.’[[29]](#endnote-29)

Thus a conference took place on 28-29 March 1921 in Batumi ‘On the structure of Soviet power and of the Communist Party in Abkhazia’ chaired by Orjonikidze, representing Kavbiuro, and attended by Eshba and Lakoba and also by leading Georgian officials Shalva Eliava, S. Kavtaradze and M. Toroshelidze. At this conference it was resolved unanimously that Abkhazia would be declared a Soviet Socialist Republic until the convening of the 1st Congress of Soviets of Abkhazia (which took place nearly a year later):[[30]](#endnote-30) ‘given the situation then unfolding in Abkhazia, the question of federative state inter-relations of Abkhazia and Georgia was left open until the meetings of the Congresses of Soviets of Georgia and of Abkhazia.’[[31]](#endnote-31) The other key decision taken at the Batumi conference was that the party organ, instead of being a district committee (Obkom) of the Georgian branch of the Communist Party, was allowed for the time being to keep the title of Orgbiuro of the Russian Communist Party (RKP(b)) in Abkhazia, and crucially it was subordinated directly to Kavbiuro rather than to the Georgian Party. The Abkhazian Revkom was ordered, however, to use the decrees of the Georgian Revkom for the basis of its own ‘in order to avoid contradictions in the activities of both Revkoms.’[[32]](#endnote-32)

The Abkhazian Revkom made the official announcement of the formation of Abkhazia as an ‘independent’ Soviet Socialist Republic in a radiogram on 31 March 1921, signed by Eshba, Lakoba and Akirtava and addressed to Lenin, Josef Stalin and Georgii Chicherin in Moscow, to the Georgian Revkom in Tiflis and ‘To all the Soviet Republics!’:

By the will of the toilers a new Socialist Soviet Republic has been born – Abkhazia. The first Congress of Soviets of peasants and workers deputies of Abkhazia will conclusively decide the fate of the people. This Soviet Republic of a small people serves as a visible example of the great liberating role of the Red Army and is a black eye inflicted by the Great October Revolution upon the imperialists of all countries and their lackeys, the social traitors.[[33]](#endnote-33)

Thus from the start, despite its obviously provisional nature, the decision was framed as an anti-imperialist (or post-colonial) accomplishment of Soviet power and as an example to small peoples elsewhere. Even Eshba, however, apparently the most enthusiastic supporter of the idea of independence among the Abkhaz leaders, understood the interim nature of the decision.

After the Soviet forces entered Sukhumi, at the session of official Party workerswe unanimously focused on the fact that to root out ethnic hostility it was essential, even if only temporarily until the Congress of Soviets, to declare the independence of Abkhazia. Nobody protested against this, although it was rather unexpected. Even we, upon coming down from the North, thought that Abkhazia should be part of Soviet Georgia. But when we came here and understood the situation we found ourselves in, we were obliged to take such a form of independence of Abkhazia.[[34]](#endnote-34)

Yet Eshba, it seems, began to see this independent status as a major accomplishment, perhaps the culmination of the revolutionary movement for Abkhazia. As he stated on 28 May 1921, under the Georgian Democratic Republic the Abkhazian National Council had ‘for months begged in Tiflis for even fictive autonomy, and they couldn’t even get that . . . The Bolsheviks came, and little Abkhazia has unrestricted, actual independence.’[[35]](#endnote-35) In his later, unpublished, writings, Eshba recalled how upon leaving the conference with the still-secret protocol in his hand, he encountered Varlaam Shervashidze, an Abkhaz nobleman and former chairman of the Abkhazian National Council:

And so, walking past him with this fresh protocol of the purely Bolshevik resolution of the question of Abkhazia, about which these spineless intellectuals had pottered about and nitpicked, sending various parliamentary commissions to Tiflis to beg from [former Georgian Prime Minister] Noe Ramishvili some crumbs of autonomy, I had the tempting thought of showing the protocol, of ‘giving away’ this party secret, but to see what impression it would make on this petty bourgeois, this intellectual, who thought he was ‘defending’ the interests of the people. I admit to giving in to this crime: I showed Dr. Shervashidze the resolution of the meeting. One would have to see for oneself how wide his eyes opened, the sense of paralysis of his whole figure; he seemed unable to answer my question of what he thought about ‘our’ approach to resolving the nationality question. But I could not have hoped for a better response than the view of this shocked and defeated man when he read the terse lines of our resolution! And I thought to myself: here is the weapon with which we will rapidly dispatch all the inciters of ethnic conflict, here is the resource with which we will soon restore the brotherly trust between the Abkhaz peasantry and the Georgians![[36]](#endnote-36)

In his address to the Abkhazian students in Moscow in 1926, Eshba emphasized the emotional impact of the decision:

And so, comrades, it was moving to observe when, several months after the decision on the independence of the Soviet Republic of Abkhazia was taken, at the first Congress of Toilers of Abkhazia when Comrade Kavtaradze, the chairman of the government of Soviet Georgia, read out the declaration of how Soviet Georgia had nothing against the independence of Abkhazia, did not intend to oppose it and, to the contrary, welcomed it, one had to see the faces of the delegates who were present there to understand that we had taken a correct political step of colossal importance.[[37]](#endnote-37)

Apparently, however, the leadership in Moscow remained sceptical of Abkhazia’s new status, and the Georgian authorities in Tiflis reluctant. Far from favouring the idea of independence, at this very time, in the spring of 1921, Kavbiuro was preparing for the merging of all of the Transcaucasian republics into a unified federation.[[38]](#endnote-38) A week after the declaration of the decision of the Batumi conference, on 6 April the Georgian Revkom sent a welcoming telegram to the Abkhazian Revkom on the victory of Soviet power but that made no mention of the status issue. It was only nearly two months later, on 21 May that the Georgian Revkom issued a declaration welcoming Abkhazian independence, a delay that was much commented upon in later Abkhazian historiography. A resolution taken by the Bureau of the Georgian Central Committee on 14 May after hearing a report from Eshba on the situation in Abkhazia confirmed the decision of the Batumi conference, but noted specifically that ‘Abkhazia will remain self-standing up until the calling of the Congress of Soviets of Abkhazia.’[[39]](#endnote-39) On 28 May speaking at the 1st Congress of Toilers of Abkhazia in Sukhumi, Orjonikidze pointedly emphasized that ‘the Abkhazian people in their Congress [of Soviets] will decide to be together with Soviet Georgia.’[[40]](#endnote-40)

**Federation and Unification in the South Caucasus**

By the summer and fall of 1921 conflict was beginning to break out in Tiflis within the Georgian Central Committee between the supporters of the idea of subordinating the Georgian SSR into a Transcaucasian federation propagated by Stalin, Orjonikidze and the Kavbiuro, and opponents of that idea centring around the Georgian Bolshevik leader Budu Mdivani.[[41]](#endnote-41) This plan for federation would have crucial significance for the status of Abkhazia, as it entailed a move towards unification in the region. At a Kavbiuro session on 2-3 July attended by Stalin, Orjonikidze gave a report on the necessity of closer cooperation among the Transcaucasian republics,[[42]](#endnote-42) and on 5 July, after hearing a report from Eshba on the situation in Abkhazia, Kavbiuro resolved that the Abkhazian party organization should hasten the calling of the 1st Congress of Soviets of Abkhazia and that party work there should be directed towards ‘unifying Abkhazia and Georgia in the form of an autonomous republic and entry into the Georgian SSR.’[[43]](#endnote-43) Under pressure from Kavbiuro, on 22-23 July 1921 a joint session of the Abkhazian Orgbiuro and Revkom took place in the presence of Kavbiuro Secretary A. Nazaretian to discuss the issue ‘On interrelations of the SSR Abkhazia and the SSR Georgia,’ at which the idea of giving Abkhazia autonomous status within Georgia was brought up for the first time, and a resolution was taken obliging the Abkhazian Revkom to base all legislation on that of the Georgian SSR, which was a step beyond what had been included in the Batumi conference resolution.[[44]](#endnote-44) A statement was included in the resolution that the Georgian Revkom’s 21 May declaration recognizing Abkhazia’s independent status would ‘put an end to political persecution and oppression practiced by [the Georgian] government in Abkhazia,’ and that the it ‘guarantees the maximum of autonomous rights to the Abkhazian people, the economic fates of whom are linked with those of Georgia’s,’ but also that this ‘full independence of the Abkhazian people declared by the Georgian Revkom is practically impossible to implement, as no small Soviet republic can exist independently.’[[45]](#endnote-45) A series of articles appeared in the Tiflis newspaper *Sotsialist-federalisti* criticizing ‘Abkhaz separatists’ and their declaration of ‘so-called independence.’[[46]](#endnote-46) In response to complaints from Georgian ‘nationalist-deviationists’ in Tiflis who complained about Abkhazia’s special status, in August 1921 Orjonikidze responded glibly: ‘Let Abkhazia be independent, let her heal the wounds she received from the Mensheviks, but in the longer term the Abkhaz themselves will be convinced of the necessity of joining closely with the Soviet neighbor, Georgia.’[[47]](#endnote-47)

On 16 November 1921 Eshba, who had been appointed to the Georgian Party Central Committee earlier in July, was summoned to Tiflis to attend a meeting of the Presidium of Kavbiuro, attended by Orjonikidze, Nazaretian, Eliava, Mdivani and others, that included on the agenda a discussion of ‘the interrelations between Abkhazia and Georgia.’ The session decreed to ‘1). Consider the existence of independent Abkhazia to be economically and politically unfeasible; and 2). To order Comrade Eshba to present a final report on the entry of Abkhazia into a federation with Georgia on the basis of a treaty, or to become an autonomous *oblast’* in the RSFSR.’[[48]](#endnote-48) Eshba was tasked to work together with Shalva Eliava and Mamia Orekhelashvili from the Georgian Central Committee, and their proposal for the Abkhazian SSR to join the Georgian SSR as ‘equal republics’ on the basis of a ‘Union Treaty’ was confirmed on 1 December by the Presidium of the Georgian Central Committee.[[49]](#endnote-49) Meanwhile, on 3 November, Kavbiuro had already resolved unanimously to unify the South Caucasus republics into a Transcaucasian federation.[[50]](#endnote-50) Abkhazia was to join this federation ‘through the Georgian SSR,’ and the Union Treaty with Georgia was to be approved by the upcoming 1st Congress of Soviets of Abkhazia February 1922. The Union Treaty was signed on 16 December 1921, by Arkitava and S.A. Kartozia representing the Abkhazian SSR (and not by Eshba).

The 1st Congress of Soviets of Abkhazia duly took place on 11-16 February 1922, and approved the Union Treaty with Georgia, and also a reformation of the government institutions, as the Revkom was disbanded and replaced, as elsewhere in Soviet Russia by this time, by a Central Executive Committee (TsIK) elected by the local soviets, and which in turn appointed a Councils of People’s Deputies (Sovnarkom). Eshba was ‘elected’ as chairman of the TsIK, and Lakoba became chairman of the Sovnarkom. While the reports, speeches and resolutions from this Congress are available in published form, the discussions (*preniia*) appear not to have been preserved.[[51]](#endnote-51) Soviet-era Akbhazian historians mention that the issue of the Union Treaty of Georgia and the change in status for Abkhazia provoked protest, with the dissenters being labelled ‘nationalists,’ none of which appears in the published record.[[52]](#endnote-52)

**Contestation and Clientalism among the Abkhazian Leadership**

The archival sources demonstrate the ways in which the Abkhaz elites sought to gain control over party and state institutions by supporting their own client network against those of potential rival elites who arrived from outside and by asserting the right of the titular elites to make exclusive use of their privileges within the republic The discussions that have been preserved in the transcripts of the 2nd Party Conference of the Abkhazian District Committee (*Obkom*) on 15 April 1922 in the Georgian Party Archive, suggest that patronage and local control within the republic lay at the root of conflict during the 1st Congress of Soviets of Abkhazia, rather than the issue of the republic’s formal status. The 1st Abkhazian Obkom Party Conference took place in the end of January 1922 and elected a fourteen-man Orgbiuro, with Eshba as secretary, in order to ensure the successful conducting of the 1st Congress of Soviets in February 1922. During that Congress, however, the proceedings apparently nearly broke down because of a vitriolic confrontation over the issue of distribution of appointments and resources. Two ‘groups’ (‘*gruppirovki*’) within the Party leadership, the ‘minority’ group of ‘locals’ (including three members of the Obkom), centred around the ethnically Abkhaz leaders Lakoba and Akirtava, and also Eshba, entered into a noisy quarrel with the ‘majority’ group (with eleven Obkom members) of ‘arrivals,’ (‘*prishlye*’) which included Russian and Georgian officials assigned (*komandirovannye*) to Abkhazia from Moscow and Tiflis, and also some of the ethnically Georgian local officials. Things seem to have gotten so far out of hand that Eshba telegrammed to the Georgian TsK in Tiflis, reporting that ‘the Congress was on the verge of collapse.’ Tiflisordered the formation of a troika of Eshba, Atarbekov and Gubeli (the Party nickname of S.A. Medzmariashvili), all three members of the Georgian TsK working in Abkhazia, in order to complete the Congress, and if it was not possible to obtain the necessary resolutions because of the conflict between the two groups, then the Obkom was to dissolve the Congress and call a new one.[[53]](#endnote-53)

The clash had first became apparent within weeks of the establishment of Soviet power in Abkhazia in the spring of 1921, as Lakoba moved to install his own clients – people from his Gudauta network and Kiaraz and from his own extended family – into positions both in Sukhumi and his native Gudauta district. A report (*svodka*) on the activities of the Party in Abkhazia from March to December 1921 addressed to the Georgian TsK on 3 January 1922 stated that ‘up to September [1921] party work was very weak, for the reason that Abkhazia was experiencing a wave of conflict . . . that resulted in stalling of the work,’ and emphasized that Lakoba was the main figurant in these conflicts.[[54]](#endnote-54) Another report by an inspector from the newly-created Transcaucasian District Committee (*Zakkraikom*) was deeply critical of the perceived abuses of the ‘local’ group:

The Sukhumi organization is experiencing a painful period. An internal struggle is taking place on two lines: the ‘local’ group and the group of ‘arrivals.’ The latter group is fighting to improve the organization. The local comrades hold to the principle of not washing dirty linen in public, covering up all possible abuses, embezzlement, appropriation exceeding all limits, using official positions for personal gain, providing all possible material resources to their relatives, and the attempts of each responsible official to surround himself in the district with his relatives. Kinship ties in the centre give *carte blanche* for all possible lawlessness in the regions to go unpunished. Cases brought in the course of criminal investigation, if they accuse somebody of crimes in office or embezzlement, are annulled by the party committees and the decision of the Revolutionary Tribunal judge is personally overturned by the Chairman of the Revkom [i.e. Eshba], despite the fact that decisions of the Revolutionary Tribunal can only be appealed through the KASTRIB [Appellation Tribunal] and the Revkom Chairman has no right to do this.[[55]](#endnote-55)

The report went on to detail Lakoba’s efforts in clientalism:

Comrade LAKOBA is placing his relatives or supporters in all institutions in the centre and in the regions, regardless of their qualifications or capacity for the work, and makes appointments not according to the needs of the job (*ne po delovomu printsipu*), but in order to create a base for himself, gathering people who are beneficial for him. This experiment will conclusively lead to disintegration of the entire party apparatus.[[56]](#endnote-56)

The situation in the Party Obkom was mirrored in the Abkhazian Komsomol:

The KOMSOMOL is the base of the party organizations in Abkhazia, the foundation for party work, but at the same time these organizations have all been hijacked, both in the centre and in the regions. The only activities of Komsomol members in Abkhazia are licentiousness, drunkenness, and debauchery. Nobody in the Oblast committee is overseeing the work of the Komsomol, and just like in the party there is a schism along the same lines.[[57]](#endnote-57)

The report also touches on an important theme, that given the tenants of Soviet nationality policy and the shortage of titular cadres, despite abuses, it would be impossible to remove the local Abkhaz leadership:

All of this lowers the party and discredits Soviet power in the eyes of the masses. If for political reasons it is not possible (with the exceptions of certain individuals) to disband the Abkhazian party organization, then it is essential to send strong party workers to Abkhazia.[[58]](#endnote-58)

A separate report to Kavbiuro on the protocols of the Abkhazian party organization for the period of April-June 1921 similarly criticized the infighting of the local Abkhaz group and the new arrivals, and detailed how the Abkhaz leadership attempted to manipulate the emerging institutional structure of party (Orgbiuro) and state (Revkom) organizations:

Both the Orgbiuro and the Revkom are very small. The Revkom has three members, all of whom are also in the Orgbiuro, which has only 5 members, so the Orgbiuro swallows the entire Revkom. Revkom meetings are considered ‘joint’ sessions of the Orgbiuro and Revkom. Kavbiuro has never received a protocol of a Revkom meeting, and it seems there have never been any. If a member of the Orgbiuro turns up at a Revkom session, it’s called a unified session, and if somebody from the Revkom doesn’t show up then they declare it an Orgbiuro session. . . Many issues in the Orgbiuro protocols should be handled by the Revkom . . .Any comrades who attempt to ‘rock the boat’ are quickly recalled (through *otkomandirovanie*) or reminded of party discipline and threatened with exclusion. In this regard, Comrades Larionov and Lakoba are particularly active.[[59]](#endnote-59)

The central leadership was well aware of the behaviour of Lakoba and the Abkhazian group. At a Kabviuro session of 7 July 1921 in Stalin’s presence, upon hearing Eshba’s report on the situation in Abkhazia it was resolved to take into consideration ‘1) the unacceptability of Lakoba’s behaviour; and 2) Kavburo must respond with a letter to the Abkhazian organization on the necessity of supporting party discipline among responsible and professional workers in the most decisive struggle with any attempts to introduce disorganization among members of the party.’[[60]](#endnote-60) The situation was reported to have improved somewhat in September 1921, after Lakoba had been removed from Abkhazia and sent for party work in the nearby Georgian district of Adjara.[[61]](#endnote-61) Yet by 24 November, the Presidium of Kavbiuro met with only Orjonikidze, Eliava and Nazaretian, and with only two points on the agenda: 1) interrelations of the Abkhazian Orgbiuro with the Georgian TsK, and 2) Comrade Lakoba. Here they resolved to subordinate the Abkhazian party organization directly to the Georgian Central Committee, while preserving the previous title (which had been Orgbiuro of the Russian Communist Party in Abkhazia). And they resolved ‘on the necessity of recalling Comrade Lakoba from Adjara for work in Abkhazia.’ One might surmise from this, taking place as it did at the same time that Eshba was in Tiflis working on the Union Treaty proposal, that Orjonikidze was doubtful about the long term suitability of Eshba as Abkhazian leader, and viewed Lakoba, despite (or perhaps because of) his blatant use of patronage resources, as a more dependable local client for them than Eshba as he was more amenable to the position of Kavbiuro.

 With regard to the on-going conflict in Abkhazia itself, however, Eshba and Lakoba continued working in the same direction. Addressing the 1st Congress of the Georgian Party in Tiflis in January 1922, Eshba hinted at the on-going conflict by complaining about the transfer into the region of outsiders with little understanding of local conditions, which ‘creates an atmosphere of dissatisfaction’, presumably because such people were less supportive of local interests.[[62]](#endnote-62) Eshba continued to be advanced outside of Abkhazia, and in addition to joining the Georgian Central Committee in July 1921, in December 1921 he was sent as a delegate to the 9th All Russian Congress of Soviets in Moscow and elected as a member of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (VTsIK).[[63]](#endnote-63) Although still serving as the chairman of the out-going Revkom at the 1st Congress of Soviets of Abkhazia in February 1922 (where he gave the final report on the achievements of the Abkhazian Revkom), he addressed the opening of that Congress in the name of VTsIK, presenting his promotion there as evidence of the new opportunities now available to small peoples like the Abkhaz: ‘And what happiness it is not only for me, having the honour of welcoming the representatives of a small nation, but for the small nation and its representatives as well . . . This small word from the central organs of a colossal country, this word of welcome to the representatives of a small nation is a truly historical moment.’[[64]](#endnote-64)

Thus in February 1922 Eshba and the hastily created ‘troika’ were able to get through the 1st Congress of Soviets of Abkhazia successfully without a total collapse, and on the final day, 16 February, to gain the necessary approval for the Treaty Union with the Georgian SSR and the re-organization of the government apparatus from the central and regional Revolutionary Committees to the (supposedly) elected Central Executive Committee and regional soviets. Lakoba gave the closing speech, devoted to the creation of the Transcaucasian Federation.[[65]](#endnote-65) The bitter confrontation within the Abkhazian party organization continued unabated, however. Several days later, at a Obkom session on 18 February, Akirtava, a member of the Lakoba-Eshba group, complained that the party newspaper, *Golos trudovoi Abkhazii,* ‘was being used as the resource of one group against another, it’s not a party paper but a group one,’ and that it had abbreviated the speeches of Lakoba and Akirtava himself, but published in full the speeches of ‘the other group.’[[66]](#endnote-66) At an Obkom session just before the Congress, on 10 February, the ethnic Georgian head of the Abkhazian Cheka, N.I. Bakhtadze, complained that work in Abkhazia was becoming impossible for him, and that there had even been an attempt on his life. Eshba responded by stating that this was a fabrication and that Bakhtadze had arranged the supposed assassination attempt himself. N.S. Svanidze, an ethnic Georgian and secretary of the Abkhazian Obkom, said that ‘Eshba suffers from a disease that is rotting the party, and he is constantly trying to put pressure on the committee.’[[67]](#endnote-67) At an 11 February session of the Obkom, Eshba attempted to have Bakhtadze removed from the list of delegates to the Congress, arguing that his participation there would contribute to a public exposure of the rift in the Party. Svanidze forced him to back down, as the list had been compiled by the Obkom, and party discipline prevented voting against the Party list, thus ‘putting Eshba up against the wall.’[[68]](#endnote-68) Eshba then accused Svanidze of having been a ‘deserter’ from the underground Bolshevik cause in 1918, a claim that was then backed up by Eshba’s ally S.I. Kukhaleishvili.[[69]](#endnote-69)

At a session of 10 March 1922 Svanidze announced that he had received a telegram from the Georgian Central Committee in Tiflis ‘recalling’ a group of members from the Abkhazian Obkom, including himself. Eshba stated that the decree of the TsK on the recall resulted from a letter that he had ‘sent privately to a Tiflis comrade, who was not himself in the TsK, and this letter was then read out at a session of the TsK plenum.’ He went on to state that ‘for the effectiveness of the work it is essential to recall this group of comrades, although even among them there are some veteran Russian (*rossiiskie*) comrades with a great deal of experience and who are much stronger than local officials, and these must be left here, as they will be responsible for the political line carried out in Abkhazia.’[[70]](#endnote-70) The first point on the agenda of the next Obkom session, on 24 March, was the removal of these officials and nominations for their replacements, the protocol for which indicates that all of the members of the ‘arrivals’ group opposing Lakoba and Eshba, most of them ethnic Georgians or Russians, were removed and many of them ‘recalled’ out of Abkhazia: Svanidze, I. Genkin, S. Sergeev and Bakhtadze.[[71]](#endnote-71)

As a direct result of the recall of the opposing group, a new Party conference was called on 15 April (some of the participants refer in the transcript to the conference as ‘extraordinary,’ although technically it was the 2nd Party Conference of the Abkhazian Okbom, held only three months after the 1st Party Conference), in order to ratify a new Orgbiuro (now referred to as the Presidium). From the start this conference nearly broke down into an angry shouting match between the supporters of Lakoba and of Svanidze over the list of candidates for the new Presidium, with each accusing the other of complicity during the underground period and, according to the transcript, both sides being drowned out by shouting.[[72]](#endnote-72) In his report on the work of the previous Orgbiuro, Arkitava accused the ‘arrivals’ group of causing a schism at the Congress by exposing the split in the Obkom in front of the Congress delegates, and by ‘uniting around the slogan of “without certain comrades”’ they ‘forgot about their responsibilities before the party and our revolutionary past, and the links that “those comrades” have and their trust of the peasantry.’[[73]](#endnote-73)

The statements of Bakhtadze, who had been removed from his position as head of the Abkhazian Cheka but remained for the time being a candidate member of the Orgbiuro, shed light on the underlying ethnic component of the intra-party conflict. An ethnic Georgian, who (like Svanidze) had extensive background in working in Abkhazia that predated the Revolution, Bakhtadze resented being excluded by the group of ‘locals’ among the Abkhaz leadership. He understood full well, though he seemed reluctant to state it directly, that belonging to the titular ethnicity was the key criteria for receiving support from the centre. Eshba and his primarily ethnically Abkhaz allies had ‘framed the issue to the centre in terms of work cannot be successful unless one group is removed from Abkhazia’, and that the group to go would not be the Abkhaz one (or, as Bakhtadze phrased it, ‘those less linked with Abkhazia’):

Of course, we had to sacrifice those who in the eyes of the Central Committee were less linked with Abkhazia, and if our group raises this question before the Central Committee we will lose, because we cannot remove from here those comrades [i.e. the Abkhaz ones] and leave those less linked with Abkhazia, so the question is fully decided.[[74]](#endnote-74)

Conflict at the 1st Party Conference had begun over the appointment of Akirtava as Obkom secretary, as he was also a member of the Revkom and therefore ‘it should not have been politically feasible to elect him as secretary of the political organ that should lead both soviet and party work in the oblast.’ But Eshba threatened to resign and go to Tiflis if he did not get his way, and this attitude then extended to all political decisions of the Obkom, as Eshba wanted to decide everything without discussion:

If Eshba or some comrade is going to decide things individually, then it won’t be the Communist [i.e. proper] resolution of the issue. Let’s discuss it as the Obkom, then Comrade Eshba you can explain to us why it’s the right decision, we’ll agree and we’ll share responsibility. But then again we hear: if this question will not be decided in such and such a way, I’ll resign and go to Tiflis. We were always being threatened like this.

But ultimately, the titular ethnicity must get its way and power would remain in their hands:

The majority of the Obkom understood this perfectly, that the government of Abkhazia and TsIK should be headed by local workers and not arrivals, and not ‘scoundrels’ [‘*prokhodimtsy’*], as certain members of the Obkom from the minority [i.e. the Abkhaz local group] put it. So undoubtedly we could not orientate around the idea that Eshba, Lakoba or Akirtava could be sent anywhere.

Bakhtadze accused Akirtava of stating the issue in a conversation in the Obkom ‘in terms that exclusively local [i.e. Abkhaz] Communists should work in Abkhazia’, which he found to be both unfair and not the proper ‘Communist’ thing to do: ‘A Communist should not reason as such, that if some comrade is, say, a Georgian, if his surname ends in ‘dze,’ then he can’t work in Abkhazia. A Communist should not say this.’[[75]](#endnote-75) What this all came down to was that the Abkhaz group of Eshba, Lakoba and Akirtava was attempting to govern Abkhazia in its own way by controlling both the state and party institutions, and thus to soften central policies or prevent the implementation of those that could upset this group’s ethnically Abkhaz constituency. Bakhtadze gave an example demonstrating this from an Obkom session at which he, Svanidze and Genkin came into conflict with Eshba:

After this session, Comrade Eshba said ‘Let’s speak openly’ [‘*po dusham*’]. This is when everybody had left, Pevtsov was there and Svanidze, if I’m not mistaken.

‘Alright, let’s talk’, I said. ‘What is our disagreement about?’

‘You took a course that was too far left’, Eshba told us.

‘And how are we too far left’, we asked?

‘You want to resolve the land question in Abkhazia’, said Eshba.

In Abkhazia Bakhtadze and Svanidze want to resolve the land question, that’s the problem. Those were his exact words. Apparently the land question in Abkhazia should not be resolved. In Eshba’s opinion, Abkhazia is such a country that if we resolve the land question this would cause counter-revolution, and since counter-revolution is not in his interests, the land question is off the agenda.[[76]](#endnote-76)

As a result of this Party Conference, Bakhtadze, Svanidze, and the other Georgian and Russian opponents of the Abkhaz group were removed from the list of presidium candidates and eventually transferred out of Abkhazia for work elsewhere. The next several Obkom sessions in the weeks following the Conference were devoted to appointing or reinstating clients of Lakoba, such as V. Agrba, D. Agrba, M. Lakoba, V. Lakoba, S. Chamba, and D. Alania.[[77]](#endnote-77) Arkitava took over the editorship of the party newspaper, *Golos trudovoi Akbhazii.[[78]](#endnote-78)* With the removal of Svanidze, Lakoba’s associate Kartozia was appointed as Secretary of the Abkhazian Obkom.[[79]](#endnote-79) By November 1922, all of the Obkom leadership and all of the delegates from Abkhazia to the 1st Transcaucasian Congress of Soviets were Lakoba’s allies and clients.[[80]](#endnote-80) A report to Zakkraikom on the work of the Obkom for June 1922 stated that ‘for the past month a certain improvement in the work of the organization is observed, which is explained by the departure from the organization of a number of comrades who earlier supported groups and conflicts (*gruppirovki i skloki*), and from the day of their departure the organization began to strengthen.’ A scathing report to Zakkraikom three years later, in the summer of 1925, would repeat exactly the same accusations of cronyism, corruption and ethnic discrimination contained in the spring 1921 report described above, indicated that Lakoba had firmly established his Abkhaz-based patronage network in Abkhazia, and that for the time being the centre was prepared to tolerate such abuses as long as the titular minority was running the show.[[81]](#endnote-81) Lakoba became a key member of Orjonikidze’s extended, Caucasus-based patronage network.[[82]](#endnote-82) As S. Danilov later wrote about the Abkhazian SSR in the 1920s, ‘[i]n this period Abkhazia truly was a small flowering oasis among this enormous country of experiments, violence and poverty. It was not for nothing that Abkhazia was referred to as a “happy Arkadia.”’[[83]](#endnote-83)

Eshba, meanwhile, had departed for Tiflis already in March, before the start of this conference, having been elected to the Presidium of the Georgian Central Committee on 6 March. On 21 April the Abkhazian Obkom resolved in his absence to fill his position as Chairman of TsIK temporarily with Kukhaleishvili, another Lakoba ally. Eshba was subsequently made 3rd Secretary of the Georgian Central Committee and a member of the Presidium of the Georgian TsIK. At the end of March he attended the 11th Party Conference in Moscow, and in April he was sent for party work to Adjara. Thus Eshba was removed as an obstacle to Lakoba’s control in Abkhazia by being promoted within the Georgian party hierarchy. On 14 October 1922, Eshba was appointed Commissar of Justice of the Georgian SSR, and he was among the members of the Georgian Central Committee who resigned *en masse* in protest against Stalin and Orjonikidze’s plans for subordination of Georgia to the Transcaucasian Federation on 22 October 1922.[[84]](#endnote-84) Thus Eshba had become a full-fledged member of the group of Georgian ‘national-deviationists’ of Mdivani, and like some of them, having lost the conflict with Orjonikidze, in December 1922 he was sent to Moscow to study in the Institute of Red Professors,[[85]](#endnote-85) although as it was late in the year he enrolled instead in the Marxism Courses of the Communist Academy until 1924. From 1924-26 he was assigned to the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Trade, where he represented the USSR for several years in Great Britain, and then in 1926-27 served in the Obkom of the Chechen ASSR.[[86]](#endnote-86) In 1927 Eshba became an ardent supporter of the ‘Trotsky Opposition’ and was physically assaulted at the XV Party Conference and expelled from the party.[[87]](#endnote-87) (Lakoba addressed the same Conference as a model head of an exemplary Soviet autonomous republic).[[88]](#endnote-88) Eshba subsequently recanted and was reinstated in the party, and he worked for the Amtorg Trading Company in the United States in 1929-30 and in Moscow in 1930-31, before being arrested and executed during the Great Terror of the late 1930s.[[89]](#endnote-89)

Although allies in the factional struggle against the ‘arrivals’ group, Eshba and Lakoba seemed ultimately to have broken over their divergent views about formal status, and in this way they are perhaps representative of two different visions of the promise of Soviet nationality policy. Despite the fact that he had actively worked and propagated the Union Treaty and Abkhazia’s subordination to the Georgian SSR and entry into the Transcaucasian Federation through Georgia, Eshba truly seems to have believed that that Abkhazia’s brief status as an ‘independent’ Soviet Socialist Republic was of great significance for the Abkhaz people. Lakoba seems to have understood that the ‘affirmative action’ benefits for a titular ethnicity in resources, privileges and opportunities were a far greater prize than formal status. Although a committed Bolshevik and Leninist, Eshba was not troubled by Lakoba’s opportunistic manipulation of patronage, as titular control of local resources seemed to him an essential element of Soviet nationality policy. In his writings from 1925-26, Eshba seemed quite bitter about what he viewed as Lakoba’s facile dismissal of the status question and his siding with Orjonikidze. Arguing that his own support for Georgian status in 1922 was consistent with his previous support for Abkhazian status and with the principles of Leninist nationality policy, Eshba held that ‘Orjonikidze should acknowledge that he has everything backwards and that like his new acolyte who flatters him, Lakoba, admit that his theory is gibberish.’[[90]](#endnote-90) Eshba admitted that he and Lakoba had been doubtful about Abkhazian independence in March 1921, and was aggrieved that Lakoba had later referred to this status as ‘window dressing’ (*vyveska*), and stated that ‘if this were true, then it would be a tragedy.’[[91]](#endnote-91) The Chechen official Kh.D. Oshaev later wrote in his memoirs that ‘despite the fact that Efrem loved Abkhazia very much and could not stay there because of Lakoba, I never heard a harsh word from him about Nestor. He was offended by Nestor, but his still respected him, and sometimes would chuckle to himself pleasantly about Lakoba’s eccentricities.’[[92]](#endnote-92)

**Conclusion**

The failure of the Bolsheviks’ first attempt to gain power in Abkhazia in the spring of 1918 resulted in part from unfavourable geopolitical factors, including the concurrent consolidation of Georgian statehood and contours of the Civil War then unfolding in Russia. Yet the experience demonstrated to the Bolshevik leadership the potential of national sentiment both for tactical mobilization in winning the battle for power in the periphery, and also for legitimizing their authority once it was established. They viewed the absence of an ethnic element as one of the reasons for the failure of the Sukhumi Commune, especially given the scarcity of the working class element in the region. These factors thus came to play a central role in their approach to seizing control of the region once the geopolitical situation had decisively changed in the spring of 1921. By that time the Bolsheviks were beginning to approach the nationality question more comprehensively (especially at the 10th Party Congress in March 1921) and to shift their overall approach to governance in a more concessionary manner (especially with the abandonment of ‘War Communism’ that resulted from the same Congress). The concessions in Abkhazia in March 1921, in terms of establishing Abkhazia as an ethno-territorial entity with the Abkhaz as the titular nationality (despite their minority status in the republic) and the granting of formal ‘independence,’ were a reflection of the Bolsheviks’ recognition of the role of the Abkhaz in the Soviet victory in the region and of their politically reliability in relation to the other local nationalities. These concessions thus simultaneously gave legitimacy to Soviet power in general and to the titular elites in particular among the key local ethnic group.

Thus in a region like Abkhazia, the establishment of Soviet power meant at the same time working out new institutional structures and distributing authority and access, implementing nationality policy and delimitating ethno-territorial status, and above all attempting to gain political legitimacy for the new arrangements. For both elites and the local populations, these factors were closely linked, or even inseparable. The issue of formal status and ethnic territoriality meant different things for different people, and the divergence between Eshba and Lakoba in this regard perhaps illustrate a range of opinions among titular elites. The issue is, of course, complicated by the difficulty of truly understanding the intensity of ethnic identity at the time. From our current perspective it is tempting to project a later and more fixed understanding back on the actors of this period, especially in the wake of the violent separatist conflict and its aftermath during and following the breakup of the USSR. During the revolutionary period, it seems likely that these ethnic categories and associated identities were perhaps more in flux and in a state of construction. Eshba, for one, seems to have understood local nationalism in Bolshevik terms, as an unfortunate legacy of a particular stage of historical development that had to be taken into consideration. For him, class identity and revolutionary dedication were the more salient categories. Yet he seems to have taken the concessions of formal status for Abkhazia very seriously, and saw this as both his own personal accomplishment and legacy and as a positive achievement of the Revolution (and hence validation of his life’s work as an underground revolutionary). Lakoba was much more hesitant about formal status, and probably understood it as more of a tactical concession. Eshba seems to have been a more intellectual and idealistic outsider in Abkhazia, lacking a regional patronage base, while Lakoba even before the revolution had a well-developed regional and familial network of contacts. Thus once the contest over formal status had been settled, the political conflict shifted to control over patronage resources. As Eshba was less interested in this, the initiatve now shifted to Lakoba and his client network. Lakoba seems to have comprehended that the benefits of the affirmative action elements of Soviet nationality policy were a far greater prize, providing opportunities for patronage and access that were tied to ethnic identity, than the more abstract benefits of formal status, although this status provided powerful advantages for the Abkhaz elites as the established representatives of the titular nationality. Lakoba may have viewed Abkhaz ethnic identity and national sentiment as a useful means for establishing trust networks, and his client base in Abkhazia did centre heavily on ethnic Abkhaz clients. Yet Lakoba was able to establish such relationships as well with Georgian, Russian and Armenian clients within the republic and with patrons outside of it, and he also made use of regional and familial ties (especially in the Gudauta district and among Kiaraz veterans), which tended to overlap ethnic ones. These in turn overlapped class ties, as the vast majority of the ethnic Abkhaz came from the peasantry, and many of the peasants were ethnically Abkhaz.

Ultimately, the case of Abkhazia perhaps sheds light on the processes of how Soviet power was established, institutionalized and internalized at the local level in the non-Russian periphery and of the intersection of ethnicity and clientalism in the new national republics. Although it is difficult to state conclusively from the available sources, the Bolsheviks did seem to enjoy a degree of popular support in Abkhazia, especially among the ethnic Abkhaz, who in turn valued and made use of the privileges that they acquired as the titular ethnicity under Soviet nationality policy (which in turn inevitably strengthened Abkhaz ethnic identity association). Yet unlike in the Baku Commune in 1917-18, the Bolshevik seizures of power in Abkhazia in both 1918 and 1921 were exactly that, violent military takeovers. Certainly not even all of the ethnic Abkhaz welcomed Soviet power, especially those whose previous class or political associations (aristocrats, merchants, former Mensheviks or members of other parties) made it difficult or impossible for them to flourish in the new conditions. Yet despite the degree to which elements of the Soviet regime were imposed in Abkhazia from the outside, how exactly the new structures and institutions were implemented seem to have left significant room from negotiation on the part of the local elites and population. Even if it was only a temporary, tactical and formal concession, the extension of ‘independent’ Soviet Republic status for Abkhazia was something that the central was highly reluctant to do at all, and resulted only from the agitation of the titular elites, and it would become a central element in the discourse of Abkhaz nation-building for decades to follow. What was more, the titular elites were able to manipulate nationality policy and the structures of local institutions (e.g. dominating both the party Obkom and the government Revkom) in order to gain control of patronage resources that in the end (until the late1930s) allowed them a substantial degree of informal but very real autonomy in running the region and decided how resources were allocated. Despite personal differences and disagreements over policy, the titular elites maintained a kind of ethnic solidarity that prevented the emergence of a rival titular counter elite. The continual shortage of minimally qualified titular cadres meant that, given the requirements of Soviet nationality policy, the local titular elites were able to ensure that they (and their associated client networks) were difficult to replace. As long as they were able to maintain the loyalty (and to a lesser degree, the effectiveness) of their clients in the local party and state institutions and to demonstrate their own reliability to their patrons above them and in the centre, local titular elites had significant autonomy in the running of their own affairs.

1. Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. On the creation of new state and party administrative institutions in the early Soviet period and the confusing relations among them, see Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 88-9; and Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923, Vol. 1*, 217-19. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Here and elsewhere I use ‘Abkhaz’ as an ethnic category (*abkhaz*, *abkhazy* in Russian), and ‘Abkhazian’ and ‘Abkhazians’ as a category of citizenship (*abkhazets*, *abkhaztsy*) that can include non-ethnically Abkhaz residents of Abkhazia as well or things that are not specifically ethnically defined (that is, an Abkhaz village, but the Abkhazian government). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Ethnic categories in this region at the time of the Russian Revolution were in reality probably somewhat flexible, as peasants could sometimes adapt surnames to make themselves either Mingrelian/Georgian or Abkhaz (for example, Lakerbaia/Lakerba) depending on which category happened to be perceived as more advantageous, and data about actual language usage among the peasantry for this period are sparse. For further discussions of Abkhaz identity, see Muller, ‘Demography’; and Welt, ‘A Fateful Moment’... [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. From the 1926 census, cited in Shariia, *Abkhazskaia Tragediia,* 12. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. G.A. Dzidzariia, *Kiaraz*, p. 24. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. This would also be the site of an Abkhaz peasant uprising against collectivization in February 1931. See Blauvelt, ‘Resistance and Accommodation in the Stalinist Periphery’, 78-108. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Dzidzariia, *Kiaraz*, 25. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid., 24. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Lakoba, ‘Iskry Otiaber’skoi revoliutsii,’ 21-2. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Anchabadze, et al., eds., *Istoriia Abkhazskoi ASSR (1917-1937),* 30-1. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. At some point in 1919 Lakoba returned to Abkhazia and served the Georgian government as the Commissar of the Militia in his native Gudauta district, although he apparently did so with the permission of the Bolshevik leadership. Section II of the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia (sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), formerly known as the Party Archive of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, or Partarkhiv TsK KPG), f. 14 (Central Committee), o. 1, d. 249, l. 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. See ‘V rossiiskom Gosarkhive sotsial’no politicheskoi istorii naideny otchety abkhazskikh gosudarstvennykh i politicheskikh deiatelei Nestora Lakoba i Efrema Eshba’. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Cited in Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, 163-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. The Caucasus Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party, set up in April 1920 under the leadership of Orjonikidze and Kirov. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Based on the *comités révolutionnaires* of the French Revolution and the Bolshevik-led Military-Revolutionary Committees active during the October Revolution. Revolutionary Committees (*Revkomy*) were Bolshevik provisional governments set up to administer areas held by the Red Army during the Civil War or to assist in organizing insurgencies behind the lines in anticipation of Red Army advances. In central Russia most Revolutionary Committees were replaced by more permanent Soviet organizations by 1920-21, although the same model was used during the establishment of Soviet power in the periphery, including the South Caucasus, where Revolutionary Committees were created at the central and local levels and functioned up until 1922. See ‘Revoliutsionnye komitety,’ *Bol’shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Zhvania, ‘Iz vospominanii o rabote v Abkhazii,’ 368-70. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Karogodskaia, ‘O partiinoi rabote v bol’shevistskom podpol’e men’shevistskoi Gruzii,’372. According to Zhvania’s memoir (‘Iz vospominanii o rabote v Abkhazii,’),] the Bolsheviks ultimately seized Sukhumi on 4 March with only a handful of party activists and 45 armed peasants. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Marykhyba, ed., *Efrem Eshba* ,. 22. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. ‘Iz protokola ob’edinennogo zasedaniia Revkoma Abkhazii,’ in Akhalaia, ed. *Revoliutsionnye komitety Abkhazii,* . p. 32. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Eshba, ‘My trebovali i poluchili nastoiashchuiu nezavisimuiu Sovetskuiu Abkhaziiu,’ from the personal archive of Eshba, published posthumously in Marykhyba, ed., *Efrem Eshba*, 296. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid., 297. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid., ‘My trebovali,’ 312. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid., ‘My trebovali,’ 313. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Sagariia, *Obrazovanie i ukreplenie sovetskoi natsional’noi gosudarstvennosti v Abkhazii*, 58. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. The actors seem to use the adjectives ‘*samostoiatel’nyi’* and ‘*nezavisimyi’* interchangeably, but I will attempt to use ‘self-sufficient’ or ‘self-standing’ for the former and ‘independent’ for the latter. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Sagariia, *Obrazovanie i ukreplenie,* ., 41. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), f. 85, o. 13, d. 310, ll. 5-11, reprinted in full in Sagariia, *O ‘chernykh i ‘belykh’piatnakh v istorii Abkhazii*, 39-42. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. *Revoliutsionnye komitety Abkhazii,* 52-3. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Sagariia, *Obrazovanie i ukreplenie,* .42. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. *Revoliutsionnye komitety Abkhazii,* 52; Sagariia, *Obrazovanie i ukreplenie,*42. As Batumi had been handed back to the Soviet Union by Turkey under the Treaty of Moscow on 16 March, the Abkhaz historian Stanislav Lakoba viewed this conference on Abkhazia’s status taking place in Batumi as confirmation of his speculation that Eshba and Lakoba had been promised Abkhazian independence as a result of the success of their mission to Turkey in the preceding months by Moscow (or by Lenin himself). The transcript of the telephone conversation between Eshba and Ojronikidze cited above on 26 March would seem more to suggest that the location of the meeting was incidental, as Orjonikidze happened to be there on other business. See Lakoba, *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii Abkhazii,* 83. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. *Revoliutsionnye komitety Abkhazii,* 26-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Sagariia, *Obrazovanie i ukreplenie,* 44. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Sagariia, *Obrazovanie i ukreplenie*, 46. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Marykhyba, ed., *Efrem Eshba*, 298-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Eshba, ‘Malen’kaia strana Abkhaziia,’ transcript of public address for Abkhaz students in Moscow on 4 March1926 in Marykhyba, ed., *Efrem Eshba,* 313. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Pipes, ‘The Establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,’ 58. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, p. 1, d. 11, l. 26. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Dzidzaria, *Ocherki istorii Abkhazii. 1910-1921*, 380. Although a policy of unification of Abkhazia with Georgia seems to have been the line pursued by Orjonikidze and Kavbiuro (and presumably backed by Stalin), some Russian officials opposed this. On 22 April 1991, P.P. Sytin, the Military Representative of the RFSFR in Georgia, addressed a report to the Soviet government on ‘Measures to localize the danger of Georgian chauvinism’ in which he argued that maintaining separation of Abkhazia from Georgia would be an effective means of ‘weakening Georgian chauvinism both territorially and materially,’ and given ‘the particular pull of the Abkhaz to Soviet power . . . If the Abkhaz people were to be given about a plebiscite about their preferred form of statehood, there is no doubt that they would choose full unification with the RSFSR,’ which in turn, he argued, was in a much better position to exploit to the fullest the rich natural resources of the region. See Shamba and Neproshin, *Abkhaziia: Pravovye osnovy gosudarstvennosti i suvereniteta*, ch. 4, section 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. See Pipes, ‘The Establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,’ 57-71; Carr, *The Interregnum*. 1923-1924, 269-72; Jones, ‘The Establishment of Soviet Power in Transcaucasia’ 616-39. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 12 (Kavbiuro), o. 1, d. 1, ll. 1-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 12, o. 1, d. 1, l. 12. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. *Abkhazskie pis’ma (1947-1989).* 392. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Sagariia, *Obrazovanie i ukreplenie,* , p. 48. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. ‘apkhazetis sakitkhi,’ ‘apkhazeti da sakartvelo,’ and ‘apkhazetis ‘damoukideblobis’ gamo,’ *sotsialist-pederalisti,* No. 119, 24 July 1921. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. *sotsialist-pederalisti,* No. 119, 24 July 1921. 49. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 12, o.1, d. 7, ‘Kserokopii protokolov zasedanii Kavbiuro TsK RKP(b),’ ll. 8-10. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d. 1, ‘Protokoly zasedanii Prezidiuma TsK KPG,’ l. 37. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 12, o. 1, d. 1, l. 18. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Tulumdzhian, ed. *S”ezdy Sovetov Abkhazii*. The author was unable to locate a stenogram of the congress in the archives and libraries of Georgia, and the copy held in the archives in Sukhumi appears to have been destroyed. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. See Sagaria, *Obrazovanie i ukreplenie,* , 56; Shamba and Neproshin, *Abkhaziia: Pravovye osnovy,* ; Lakoba, *Ocherki politicheskoi istorii Abkhazii,* , p. 289. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d. 249, ll. 41. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d. 253, l. 31. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d. 253, ‘Doklad instruktora Orgodela Zakkraikoma RKP V. Adamskoi po poezdke v Abkhaziiu s tsel’iu obsledovaniia partraboty,’ l. 14. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d.253, l. 15. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d.253, l. 18. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d. 253, ll. 14-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d. 251, l. 73. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 12, p. 1, d. 1, l. 14. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d.253, ll. 14. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. Dzidzaria, *Efrem Eshba*, 61. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. Dzidzaria, *Efrem Eshba* 58 [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Tulumdzhian, ed. *S”ezdy sovetov Abkhazii,* , 65. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. . Tulumdzhian, ed. *S”ezdy sovetov Abkhazii,* 98-103. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d. 251, l. 10. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d. 251, l. 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d. 251, l. 8. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d. 251, l. 8. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d. 251, l. 36. This translation preserves the grammatical ambiguity of the original text: it is not clear whether ‘and *these* [people] must be left here, as *they* will be responsible for the political line carried out in Abkhazia’ refers to the ‘veteran Russian comrades’ or the ‘local officials.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d. 251, l. 41. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d. 249, ll. 1-3. [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
73. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d. 249, ll. 21. [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
74. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d. 249, l. 27. [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
75. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d. 249, l. 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
76. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d. 249, l. 29. [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
77. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d. 251, ll. 46-50. [↑](#endnote-ref-77)
78. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d. 251, l. 12. [↑](#endnote-ref-78)
79. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d. 251, l. 45. [↑](#endnote-ref-79)
80. Orjonikidze, Atarbekov, Akirtava, Kartozia, Kukhaleishvili, V. Agirba, Zhvania and Ubiria. sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d. 251, l. 16. [↑](#endnote-ref-80)
81. See Blauvelt, ‘From Words to Action!’ [↑](#endnote-ref-81)
82. For illustration of this, see the 1926 draft letter from Lakoba to Orjonikidze in the former’s personal archive: Hoover Institution Archives (HIA), N.A. Lakoba Papers, Box 1, Folder 25. See also Blauvelt, ‘Abkhazia: Patronage and Power in the Stalin Era,’ 203-32. [↑](#endnote-ref-82)
83. Danilov, *Tragediia Abkhazskogo naroda,* 10. [↑](#endnote-ref-83)
84. Pipes, ‘The Establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,’ 64; Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question,*, 189-92; see also ‘Zaiavlenie ob otstavke sostava TsK KPG,’ f. 13 (Zakkraikom), op. 1, d. 66, l. 4.In the course of this confrontation, Orjonikidze sneeringly called Eshba a ‘Georgian Patriot.’ (See Eshba, ‘My trebovali i poluchili nastoiashchuiu nezavisimuiu,’ 294). Given that one of the things that Mdivani and the Georgian ‘deviationist’ group were accused of at the XII Party Congress in April 1923 was abusing local minorities such as the Abkhaz, Orjonikidze must have found Eshba’s support of that cause to be particularly irksome. See *Dvenadtsatyi s”ezd RKP(b)*, 487-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-84)
85. In his last official appearance in Abkhazia, at an Obkom session on 1 December 1922, Eshba requested a stipend from the Abkhazian organization for material assistance for his study in Moscow. The Obkom resolved to provide both Eshba and his wife fifty gold rubles each through the Sovnarkom for the entire academic year. See sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 1, d. 251, l. 69. [↑](#endnote-ref-85)
86. Dzidzariia, *Efrem Eshba,* , 62. [↑](#endnote-ref-86)
87. Avtorkhanov, *Memuary*, 58. Avtorkhanov wrote: ‘Efrem Eshba, an Abkhaz by nationality, was a person of a warm soul and great personal charm. He was one of a very few European-educated Caucasians, who brought the ideals of humanism into the ranks of the revolutionaries . . .Eshba graduated from Moscow University in 1914 and entered the Bolshevik Party the same year. During the years of the revolution he was a member of the Caucasus Committee of the RSDRP(b) and headed the regional committee of the party . . .Eshba also headed the Abkhazian ‘autonomous’ government, although soon Stalin replaced him with his own man, Lakoba . . . Stalin constantly persecuted Eshba, even before he joined the [Trotskyite] opposition, and only for one reason: fanatically loyal to Lenin, Eshba saw in Stalin simply an unexposed criminal, Avtorkhanov, *Memuary*, 58 See also the documents on Eshba’s expulsion, restitution, and ultimate ‘rehabilitation’ in 1956 in Achugba, ed. *E.A. Eshba,*  [↑](#endnote-ref-87)
88. Lakoba, *Stat’i i rechi*, 262-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-88)
89. While in the United States Eshba apparently crashed a car near Houston, Texas in September 1929. See the documents in Achugba, ed., *E.A. Eshba*, esp. 47-50.. For the ultimate fate of Lakoba and his client network, see Blauvelt, ‘Abkhazia: Patronage and Power,’, 213-6. [↑](#endnote-ref-89)
90. Eshba, ‘My trebovali i poluchili,’ , 295. [↑](#endnote-ref-90)
91. Ibid., 314. [↑](#endnote-ref-91)
92. Quoted in Marykhyba, ed., *Efrem Eshba*, 32.

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