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Status Shift and Ethnic Mobilisation in the March 1956 Events in Georgia

TIMOTHY BLAUVELT

Abstract

The large-scale demonstrations that took place in Georgia in early March 1956 following Khrushchev's criticism of Stalin at the 20th Party Congress were the first significant expressions of public protest and civil disobedience in the Soviet Union for decades, and they also bore a clearly nationalistic character. Based primarily on materials from the Georgian KGB and Party archives and interviews with former Party officials and participants of the events, this article examines potential interpretations of these events derived from elite incorporation and ethnic mobilisation theories.

IN THE BEGINNING OF MARCH 1956, EVENTS IN TBILISI, the capital of the Soviet Republic of Georgia, developed in a way that might earlier have been considered impossible. On 4 March, the day before the third anniversary of Stalin's death, people began assembling at the Stalin Monument near the embankment to participate in what they expected to be the same sort of memorial activities that had taken place in previous years. Over the next several days however, the crowds began to grow larger, and they evolved into two large and continuous demonstrations involving tens of thousands of people: one at the Stalin Monument, the other in Lenin Square (today's Freedom Square) in the centre of the city. Rumours began to circulate about a 'closed letter' that had been received by the republic leadership from Moscow criticising Stalin and accusing him of horrendous crimes.

While the speeches, songs and poetry were at first devoted to honouring Stalin, the demonstrations gradually began to take on more nationalistic overtones. Similar demonstrations began in other cities of Georgia, such as Gori, Kutaisi, Batumi and Sukhumi. Both the speakers' demands and the actions of the crowds grew more radical. People drove up and down the streets in cars sounding their horns and waving flags, and groups of students began commandeering large trucks. Classes ceased at schools and universities as the students joined the demonstrations, and work was stopped at many factories and government offices.

On 9 March events reached their apogee. Georgian Communist Party First Secretary Vasily Mzhavanadze addressed the crowd and agreed to some concessions, such as publishing memorial articles and newspapers, and holding official remembrance ceremonies in public offices, but these were not sufficient to appease

the demonstrators. Central Ministry of Defence troops were ordered into the city to protect government buildings. At around 10.30 pm the crowd surged towards the House of Communications (*Dom svyazi*) on Rustaveli Avenue, and the soldiers opened fire with automatic weapons. Dozens of people were killed and wounded, and the crowd was sent into a panic. Several hours later, on the early morning of 10 March, tanks and infantry moved to the embankment and violently broke up the second demonstration spot at the Stalin Monument.¹

The March 1956 incidents have come to be seen as a watershed event in modern Georgian history, although to this day many questions remain unanswered, such as the number of people killed and wounded, the level of organisation behind the demonstrations, and the role of the republic's leadership. Perhaps the most important questions concern the real goals of the thousands of people who took part in the demonstrations: were they motivated simply by love for Stalin, or was this a genuine expression of Georgian national indignation and aspiration?

This article will seek to examine the motivations and objectives behind the March 1956 events in the light of information from the Georgian KGB and Central Committee archives and from interviews with former Party officials and participants of the demonstrations, and to test several possible interpretations based on mid-range theories of 'elite incorporation' and 'ethnic mobilisation' about how and why these events took place and to see how well these arguments fit the available evidence. More specifically, the interpretation deriving from the theory of elite incorporation would suggest that Georgians' perceptions of a 'shift' in the status of their republic played a role in motivating the demonstrations; the interpretation that derives from elite mobilisation theory would suggest that the Georgian local leadership may have played a role in mobilising the demonstrations for political goals, particularly to prevent this shift in status or to alleviate its effects.

There is no question that Stalin meant a great deal to people in all corners of the Soviet Union in early 1956. The population had been subjugated to a quarter of a century of ideological indoctrination and unremitting propaganda about the 'Great Leader' and his virtues and accomplishments. The message of Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' at the 20th Party Congress was a tremendous blow to the mindset and worldview of people all over the Union. However, it may have had particular significance in Georgia. This was not necessarily simply because people there had a greater love for Stalin than Soviet citizens elsewhere in the country. Since Stalin himself was a Georgian, the fact of his being discredited at the hands of central politicians in Moscow seemed to have caused an elemental sense of nationalist indignation among many Georgians. For many more, especially among young elites, it is possible that this sense of indignation was more than just elemental: the status of Stalin reflected directly on the status of Georgians and the Georgian republic.

According to the compromise arrangement that resulted during the course of the formation of the Soviet Union, ethnic nationalities were organised on a territorial basis with units of various sizes, status and privileges created for and assigned to the 'titular' nationalities. As Rogers Brubaker wrote (1994, p. 49), the Soviet state 'actively

¹For comprehensive narrative accounts of the March 1956 events see Nozadze (1992) and Kozlov (1999).

institutionalised the existence of multiple nations and nationalities as constitutive elements of the state and its citizenry', both in the form of territorial organisation and in the form of personal classification. The Soviet approach to the issue of nationalities resulted in a hierarchy of territorial units, referred to by Terry Martin (2001, p. 73) as a '[g]randiose pyramid of national soviets consisting of thousands of national territories of varying size'. By the end of the Stalin period, the status and privileges of these territories were determined first of all by size and type: union republics (and the titular elites within them) were at the top of the hierarchy, while autonomous republics, autonomous regions, and districts, respectively, had fewer privileges. Because the national-territorial units were vastly different and unequal in terms of size, resources, and levels of development and education, hierarchies emerged even within territorial categories, culminating with the federal hierarchy of union republics, with the Russian republic clearly at the top and the others vying for position below.

As Martin has pointed out, in practice the Soviet principle of federation did not involve delegation of real political or economic authority. Rather, Stalin's mantra of 'nationalist in form, socialist in content' meant that those aspects of nationality that were not seen as contrary to the unitary central state, such as territorial names, culture, language, and appointments and promotions of local elites, were the prerogative of national-territorial units, while actual power remained in the hands of the centre. 'National identity [was] depoliticized through an ostentatious show of respect for the national identities of the non-Russians', as symbolic 'national forms' in the spheres of territory, culture, language and cadres (Martin 2001, p. 75). Therefore such aspects of 'form' became not only symbols of nations and ethnic groups—what Martin refers to as 'symbolic ethnicity'—but became also indicators of these nations' relative status within the Soviet ethnic hierarchy in their competition for resources and privileges. The inverse of this was that symbolic aspects, such as the ethnic backgrounds of important elites, also became politicised indicators of ethnic standing. As Yuri Slezkine pointed out (1996, p. 237), 'the national form seemed to have become the content', and 'nationalism did not seem to have any content other than the cult of form'.

Because of this institutional character of the Soviet state with regard to its national-territorial units, and despite the fact that Stalin himself was a Great Russian chauvinist rather than a Georgian nationalist, and that Georgians suffered just as much as if not more than other republics in the mass purges during Stalin's rule, the fact that Stalin was a Georgian had particular implication for the standing of Georgians and the Georgian republic in the Soviet ethnic hierarchy.

David Laitin (1998), based in part on an earlier schema by John Armstrong (1992), delineated a 'macro-theory' of inter-group relations within multi-ethnic empires that he refers to as an 'elite-incorporation model of state expansion' in which categories of constituent nationalities within the system are determined primarily by the degree to which opportunities in the metropolitan centre and elsewhere in the empire are offered to those nationalities' elites. Elites from minority ethnic groups in Laitin's 'most-favoured lord' category have nearly the same privileges and opportunities for advancement as elites from the ethnic majority, while elites from regions in Laitin's 'colonial' category are blocked from advancement in the centre, and are only offered limited opportunities within their own regions.

During the Stalin era it was understood in Georgia and elsewhere in the union that Georgia and Georgians had a special status. Besides the fact of the 'Great Leader' being Georgian, this was reflected by the high standing of elite members such as Sergo Orjonikidze and Lavrenty Beria; by the fact that the territory of the Georgian SSR physically expanded during the Stalin period; by the fact that Stalin in his last years spent many of his vacations in Black Sea resorts, thus giving the Georgian republican leadership the tremendous advantage of direct access to him; by the apparent tolerance of the regime for corruption and political nepotism within Georgia (despite several attempted crackdowns) that caused resentment elsewhere in the union; and most importantly the advancement of Georgians to high positions in the union-level *nomenklatura* and especially in the security services (primarily members of Beria's patronage network).² Thus in the Stalin period, a strong case can be made that Georgians met the requirements for Laitin's 'most-favoured lord' category.³

Therefore for many Georgians, and especially the young and ambitious elite members, Khrushchev's policy of criticising Stalin's 'cult of personality' and the official denunciation of Stalin—coming only two and a half years after the denunciation of Beria and the removal of the higher levels of the latter's patronage network—may have had a tremendously important symbolic significance: it meant an unambiguous end to Georgia's special status, and a demotion from 'most-favoured lord' status to some other, lesser, category. Georgian elites at a number of different levels understood that their privileges were directly threatened, and they would never again have the opportunities for advancement outside their republic, in Moscow and throughout the Union, that they had previously enjoyed. Denouncing Stalin meant revoking Georgia's favoured place in the hierarchy of Soviet nationalities, a significant shift in status from that of a 'most-favoured lord' republic to something lesser, possibly to that of a 'colonial' type republic.

It is difficult, of course, to make such generalisations about the motivations of tens of thousands of individuals more than 50 years after the fact. Certainly simple outrage over the rumoured insult to Stalin in and of itself was motivation enough for some people, and not everybody agreed with the more radical and nationalistic demands that began to be voiced as the demonstrations progressed. The majority of individuals most likely acted out of a mix of emotions and motivations, not all of which were necessarily entirely conscious or articulated. Ultimately, the amount of nationalistic sentiment that was actually present among participants of the March 1956 events is perhaps less significant than the nationalist mythology that the events took on over the

²In a meeting of the Presidium in Moscow following the March events to which the Georgian leadership was summoned on 23 May 1956, Khrushchev emphasised these privileges, saying that 'under Beria Georgia fell out from under the supervision of the Central Committee', and 'it was an incorrect policy—more was given to Georgia', so therefore 'nationalism became developed'. Russian State Archive of Modern History (RGANI), fond 2, opis 12, delo 1004, pp. 46–47.

³John Armstrong (1992, p. 244) wrote that '[t]he extraordinarily high sense of Georgian national identification probably rests more firmly on the unusual role of the Georgians under Stalin, when they shared the role of dominant Soviet ethnic group with the Russians'.

course of succeeding decades among Georgians as a result of the crackdown and the civilian casualties.⁴

Yet this sense that de-Stalinisation represented a challenge to the position of Georgians seems clearly to have been present to at least some degree among some of the Georgian participants of the events. As Kozlov wrote (1999, p. 156), ‘in March 1956 the residents of Tbilisi were not just protesting simply against yet another incomprehensible political decision by the higher leadership, but rather against a national insult inflicted by “Moscow”’. As one such participant wrote many years later (Notadze 2001, p. 100):

New complications were added to the situation that was settled for in 1955: there was more and more criticism and more and more official condemnation of Stalin (at the 20th Party Conference). In Russians’ eyes this official position was understood as a final and unalterable verdict of history against Georgians that, in their understanding, had no justification for the ‘good’ of life or for life in general, and was based on nothing more than the fact that Stalin was [the Georgians’] fellow countryman. But in the eyes of Georgians, this was understood as a decisive attack against Georgians.

That the central government in Moscow perceived a nationalist element in the demonstrations is clear from the language of the 10 July 1956 decree of the Presidium of the Union-level Central Committee in Moscow ‘On mistakes and deficiencies in the work of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia’, which held that the Georgian Central Committee ‘underestimated that fact that the harm of Stalin’s cult of personality was deeply rooted in the consciousness of the population in Georgia and took on an exaggerated scale and a nationalist complexion’.⁵

The more moderate demands that were enunciated at the demonstrations clearly reflect a sense of injury to national pride and involve symbols of ethnic standing: that official memorial ceremonies for Stalin should be held; that Stalin’s name be kept in the name of the Union constitution and the Stalin Prize; that articles about Stalin be published in newspapers and journals, and that films be shown about Stalin; that representatives from Moscow should come to Tbilisi and explain in person the new

⁴Stephen Jones (2006, p. 255) makes this point. With regard to the question of numbers of civilian casualties, internal KGB communications during the months after the March 1956 events consistently report the figures of 21 killed and 54 wounded (Georgian Interior Ministry Archive (sakartvelos sakhelmtsipo ushishroebis saministros arkivi—ssusa), f. 6, d. 159, pp. 19–26). Interestingly, in his report to the Central Committee of 22 March, KGB Chairman I. Serov significantly underreported the casualty number, indicating only four deaths on 9 March (ssusa, f. 6, d. 159, p. 29). This file, entitled ‘1956 tslis 9 martis movlenebtan dapavshirebuli masalebis prebuli’, contains copies of correspondence between the Georgian Party Bureau and the Central Committee and KGB in Moscow regarding the March events, and was delivered to the Archival Division of the Georgian Interior Ministry at their request from the Archival Administration of the Russian Federal Security Service in Moscow in September 2000. For more information about holdings in the Georgian KGB and Central Committee archives regarding the March 1956 events see Blauvelt (2008a).

⁵Party Archive of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party—also referred to as the Presidential Archive of Georgia (Partarkhiv TsK KPG), f. 14, o. 31, d. 208, ‘Informatsii obkomov GK, RK KP Gruzii ob itogakh obsuzhdeniya postanovleniya Prezidiuma TsK KPSS ot 10 iyulya 1956 g. “Ob oshibkakh i nedostatkh v rabote TsK KP Gruzii na oblastnykh, gorodskikh i raionnykh sobraniyakh partiinogo aktiva”’, p. 69.

Party line; and that the 'secret letter' containing the instructions to denounce Stalin be returned to Moscow.⁶

The more radical statements at the demonstrations, such as those ascribed in police reports to a speech by Party member Ruben Kipiani on 9 March, included demands that the top Party leadership resign (first of all Khrushchev and Bulganin), and that ethnic Georgian elite members such as Georgian First Secretary V. Mzhavanadze, former First Secretary A. Mgeladze and Stalin's son Vasily be appointed to high positions in the central Party leadership. They also demanded that Beria and his clients be rehabilitated, and those who were still alive (such as former Azerbaijani First Secretary Bagirov) be returned to their leadership positions.⁷

A young woman named Makvala Okroperidze, who was later arrested by the KGB as one of the organisers of the demonstrations in the city of Gori, was reported to have stated to the crowd that 'Khrushchev, Bulganin and Molotov want to confuse the Georgian people, but Georgians should not be afraid of this—they should make their demands and get their just rewards'.⁸ According to I. Serov's report to the Central Committee of 22 March 1956, 'these sallies of bourgeois nationalism not only did not meet with objection on the part of those present, but many people supported them with applause and approving shouts'.⁹

Questions that were asked at closed party organisation meetings held throughout the republic in the weeks and months after the March events also reflected this sense of injury to national honour and standing. (It was at these meetings throughout March and April that Khrushchev's 'Cult of Personality' report was read out for the first time to most Party members in Georgia.) Typical examples come from the anonymous questions submitted after the reading of Khrushchev's report in the party organisations of the Stalin Region of Tbilisi on 3 April 1956. The party members present wanted to know if the killing of people on 9 March was 'an indication, or a warning' ('*Skazhite, ukazanie eto bylo ili preduprezhdenie?*'); 'what interest or goal was being served by investigating cases relating to Stalin'; and 'who does this letter of Comrade Khrushchev serve'.¹⁰

The standard line at these closed Party organisation meetings was that the youth had been misled by provocateurs and hooligans, and it was typified by the statement of the chairman at a closed session of the Party organisation of the Georgian Polytechnic University, who said that the 'political-educational work among students was insufficient, which was indicated by the shameful events of 9 March, when dishonest provocateurs took advantage of the mournful feelings of our youth'.¹¹ In some cases,

⁶ssusa, f. 6, d. 159, Telegram of Georgian KGB head A. Inauri to KGB Chairman I. Serov, 17 March 1956, p. 5.

⁷ssusa, f. 6, d. 406–56, Criminal case file on Ruben Baakovich Kipiani. The conclusion of the Military Prosecutor's investigation mentioned that crowds of people shouted 'Long live our dear Beria!' ssusa, f. 6, d. 416–56, p. 7. In a telegram to KGB Chairman I. Serov in Moscow of 26 March it was reported that crowds attacked and beat Army Major Kuliev, shouting: 'Why don't you, an Azerbaijani, go to Baku and defend Bagirov? Why do you obstruct us from defending Beria?', ssusa, f. 6, d. 159, p. 16.

⁸ssusa, f. 6, d. 375–56, p. 110.

⁹ssusa, f. 6, d. 159, p. 32.

¹⁰Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, o. 31, d. 212, pp. 55–56.

¹¹Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, o. 31, d. 212, p. 63.

speakers hinted at the genuineness of nationalist sentiment among the participants, as in the address of the writer Konstantine Gamsakhurdia at a closed meeting of the Writers' Union the day after the shootings, on 10 March: 'The genuine feelings of the youth were vulgarly taken advantage of by provocateurs, who organised a confrontation for their deceitful goals, which resulted in casualties'.¹² In other cases speakers at these meetings began by stating agreement with the official line, but continued on to voice the same demands that speakers at the demonstrations had made.¹³

Much of the anger and frustration in Georgia during the demonstrations and in the months afterwards was directed towards ethnic Russians and Armenians. These sentiments certainly may have become intensified as a result of the March events, but there is significant evidence that they were present during the course of the demonstrations as well. There were numerous reports of demonstrators attacking individual Russian servicemen and civilians.¹⁴ A KGB telegram to Moscow reports that from 5 March papers were appearing in Kutaisi and then in Tbilisi 'slandering the Russian people and calling for the Georgian people to express their outrage'.¹⁵ Particular ire was directed towards Mikoyan: calls were made for his removal, and his portraits were publicly defaced.¹⁶

In a top-secret report from the Transcaucasian Military District KGB to Georgian First Secretary Mzhavanadze about informer reports on statements by students in Batumi for the months after the March events, the hostile attitude towards Russians is patently clear (although again, such sentiments could just as easily be a result of the March events as a cause of them). In the Faculty of Physical Culture at Batumi State University, for example, the students demonstratively refused to participate in discussions in political economy class about the 'cult of personality', and when a female Russian student attempted to answer she was 'shouted down by profanity'. A Georgian student then said 'don't worry, we'll show you Russians. If a war starts we'll cut all your throats, and we'll leave a bullet each for your Government . . .'. A fourth year student in the Faculty of Geography reacted to a lecturer's statement that Soviet power was established under the leadership of the great Russian people by stating 'we're sick of this Russian leadership; we can get along just fine without them'. Upon

¹²Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, o. 31, d. 197, p. 14.

¹³Comrade T. Kalidze, for example, an instructor at a fabric workshop in Tbilisi, concluded her remarks at a closed Party organisation meeting in April 1956 by saying that the events of 9 March could have been prevented 'if the people had not found out about the actions of Comrade Khrushchev after the 20th Party Congress. Usually it is not acceptable to work a person over after he is dead, but [Khrushchev] stomped on the immortal name of Stalin. I accuse the delegates of the 20th Party Congress elected by the Georgian Party organisation who did not reject Comrade Khrushchev's report. We know that some sort of secret letter exists. I demand that this letter be immediately sent back!' The workers Kadzhaya and Chanadiri are recorded as saying the same things. Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, o. 31, d. 197, pp. 15–16.

¹⁴ssusa, f. 6, d. 416–56, p. 3. On 8 March a group of officers was reportedly set upon by a crowd on Rustaveli Avenue that was shouting 'They are Russian officers—we must destroy them!' (ssusa, f. 6, d. 416–56, p. 16).

¹⁵ssusa, f. 6, d. 159, p. 4.

¹⁶ssusa, f. 6, d. 159, p. 4. The same file mentions that during the protests the crowds called Soviet soldiers 'fascists' and 'servants of Mikoyan'.

reading that the USSR Supreme Soviet intended to rename the ‘Stalin Prize’ as the ‘Lenin Prize’, one female fourth year student said ‘They’re calling it the Lenin prize, next they’ll call it the Ivan prize’.¹⁷

A top secret KGB ‘*spravka*’ from 20 March 1956, based on informant reports, concerning statements made by officers and soldiers of the Transcaucasian Military District about the March events, gives a view on the situation in Georgia both from the point of view of the grievances of Georgian personnel, and from an outside perspective of non-Georgian personnel. On 15 March Soldier Efrimidze categorically refused the order of a superior to go to dig a trench, stating ‘you’re not in Moscow giving commands’. Later Efrimidze refused to stand in formation, and when Junior Sergeant Chernobyl’ tried to lead him into the formation by force, Efrimidze struck him twice and broke two of his teeth. When inside the headquarters, Efrimidze refused to salute officers, saying ‘let Russians salute Russian officers’.¹⁸ On 16 March Senior Lieutenant Uchenishvili expressed dismay that troops had fired on demonstrators, and said that among the civilians there was talk of the possibility of attacking soldiers who were caught on their own.¹⁹

Some of the soldiers’ comments related directly to the issue of the place of Georgians in the top leadership. On 11 March, in a conversation with an informant, a print shop operator called Berikatsishvili said that it is wrong that there is not a single Georgian in the government in Moscow, that the government is chauvinist (‘*velikoderzhavnoe*’), and therefore ‘it is no coincidence that things reached the point where here in Georgia in the last few days people were killed and wounded’.²⁰

The non-Georgian officers whose statements were reported, most of them ethnic Russians who are indicated in the reports to have participated in crushing the uprisings on 9–10 March, expressed a point of view that was the direct opposite of the views of their Georgian colleagues. A Lieutenant Colonel Apkin said ‘it’s particularly important to strike at the *intelligentsia* and the students, since the majority of the students were present and spoke out at the demonstrations with nationalist views’.²¹ Lieutenant Colonel Rozhkov said ‘in Georgia, as in no other republic, nationalism particularly shows itself; bribery and disorder are flowering, and nobody has or is waging a struggle against this’.²²

¹⁷Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, o. 31, d. 297, pp. 49–53.

¹⁸Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, o. 31, d. 297, ‘SPRAVKA (Po reagirovaniyu lichnogo sostava chastei Zakavkazskogo Voennogo Okruga na sobytiya v svyazi s godovshchinoi smerti tovarishcha STALINA)’, pp. 34–35.

¹⁹Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, o. 31, d. 297, ‘SPRAVKA (Po reagirovaniyu lichnogo sostava chastei Zakavkazskogo Voennogo Okruga na sobytiya v svyazi s godovshchinoi smerti tovarishcha STALINA)’, p. 35.

²⁰Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, o. 31, d. 297, ‘SPRAVKA (Po reagirovaniyu lichnogo sostava chastei Zakavkazskogo Voennogo Okruga na sobytiya v svyazi s godovshchinoi smerti tovarishcha STALINA)’, p. 36.

²¹Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, o. 31, d. 297, ‘SPRAVKA (Po reagirovaniyu lichnogo sostava chastei Zakavkazskogo Voennogo Okruga na sobytiya v svyazi s godovshchinoi smerti tovarishcha STALINA)’, p. 28.

²²Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, o. 31, d. 297, ‘SPRAVKA (Po reagirovaniyu lichnogo sostava chastei Zakavkazskogo Voennogo Okruga na sobytiya v svyazi s godovshchinoi smerti tovarishcha STALINA)’, p. 29.

Some evidence in support of the argument that the perception of a change in the republic's status played a role in provoking the March demonstrations in Georgia comes from the social makeup of the participants in the demonstrations. All accounts of the events emphasise that the main participants were young people, and many of them were probably 'marginalised' youth—young people without promising educational or employment opportunities, or who had finished their education but did not want to do their mandatory post-graduation service (*'poekhat' po raspredeleniyu*) in the rural regions.²³ However, a large contingent of the young people who took part in the demonstrations comprised the upwardly mobile: students of elite universities, many of whom were Party and *Komsomol* members. Some were the children of elite members, the so-called 'golden youth' (*'zolitaya molodezh'*) and many were career-minded mid-level Party members from the *nomenklatura* and the official *intelligentsia*.²⁴ The 22 March report by KGB Chairman I. Serov to the Central Committee refers repeatedly to the primary makeup of the demonstrators as students and the urban intelligentsia (*gorodskaya intelligentsia*), a 'significant part of which is comprised of Party and *Komsomol* members'.²⁵ There was a perception at the time among such young Georgian elites that after Stalin's death in 1953 Georgian students were losing their spots in top universities in Moscow, Georgian officers were being drummed out of the service, and opportunities for advancement outside of the republic were drying up.²⁶

Particular attention in the KGB investigation was given to the case of Varlam Kuchava, a mathematics teacher and Party member who held up his Party card while addressing the demonstration on 8 March, causing many in the crowd to hold up their own Party cards.²⁷ Hearings were conducted during the rest of 1956 in Party organisations throughout the republic condemning dozens of mid-ranking Party members for their participation in and acts during the March demonstrations. Many

²³According to the KGB report, a part of those arrested on the night of 9–10 March were people 'without defined occupation', ssusa, f. 6, d. 159, p. 19. A number of the self-criticisms at closed Party organisation meetings focused on this point as one of the causes of the disturbances. At a closed session of the Writers' Union, for example, G. Bukhnikashvili emphasised that 16,000 students had finished school the previous year, but only half applied to higher educational institutions, and 'some of those who remained with nothing to do unfortunately fell under the influence of provocateurs and turned out to be participants of the events of 5–9 March of this year'. Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, o. 14, d. 212, p. 37. One of the officers who participated in disbursing the demonstrations told an informant that 'the Georgians' demonstrations were caused not by material difficulties, but by nothing to do and by easy living'. Another said 'Only hard workers (*truzheniki*) should be allowed to remain in Georgia, and the rest should be sent to the Virgin Lands and made to work, since here they graduate from institutes and try to remain in Tbilisi, sitting around with nothing to do and getting drunk'. Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, o. 31, d. 297, pp. 29–30. See also Kozlov (1999, p. 157).

²⁴According to the telegram of Georgian KGB chief Inauri of 26 March, more than half of those arrested on the night of 9–10 March (199 out of 375) were Party or *Komsomol* members. ssusa, f. 6, d. 159, p. 22.

²⁵ssusa, f. 6, d. 159, pp. 28–30.

²⁶Personal interview with Georgian political geographer and president of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (GFSIS), Alexander Rondeli, Tbilisi, 20 June 2008.

²⁷ssusa, f. 6, d. 405–56, pp. 21–22. Another of the Soviet officers who took part in dispersing the demonstrations complained to an informant about the poor work of the Georgian Party organisations, 'since there were many Communists in the crowd who pulled their Party cards out of their pockets during the cleansing of the square. They took no action themselves to restore order, but instead supported the demonstrators'. Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, o. 31, d. 297, p. 28.

were given punishments ranging from reprimands recorded in their Party cards to expulsion from the Party and from their positions.²⁸

Several fairly highly placed government officials were later accused of participating in the 9 March events: Deputy Minister of Agriculture M. Budzhiashvili and Secretary of the Party organisation of the Ministry of Agriculture L. Doidzhashvili were accused of making nationalist and anti-government statements at an official memorial meeting on 9 March; and N. Banetishvili, the head of the Gareubani regional executive committee (*rayonispolkom*) in the city of Tbilisi was accused of writing two anonymous letters on 14 October 1955 and 4 March 1956 'slandering the leadership of the Party and the government'.²⁹

The high level of participation by young and mid-level Party members in the events of March 1956 in Georgia inevitably begs the question of the degree of involvement of the Georgian Party leadership in these events. Philip G. Roeder (1991) has argued that since indigenous elites in Soviet union republics were given a monopoly over the mobilisational resources within their republics, these resources could in turn be used by those elites as instruments of ethnic assertiveness to make demands of the centre. A monopoly over these mobilisational resources meant control by indigenous elites over those resources 'essential to sustained, large-scale political action' (Roeder 1991, p. 2000), such as access to public squares, public address equipment and the local language press.

Roeder was writing about the use of these resources by local ethnic 'machines' in the republics to press demands on the centre in Moscow during the 1980s. But one possible interpretation of the March 1956 events is that the republican leadership or local elites in Georgia purposely organised or encouraged the events and, in so doing, tried to make use of the nationalist sentiment that emerged during the events as a response to Moscow's policy line of attacking Stalin and reducing Georgia's status in the Soviet hierarchy. Unfortunately there are no documents in the Georgian Central Committee or KGB archives to directly support the argument that the republican leadership played any sort of clear role in inciting or organising the demonstrations. The behaviour of First Secretary Mzhavanadze and other top Party leaders in Georgia with regard to the events seems to have been hesitant and uncertain. They appeared to be reacting to events more than directing them. The sense of confusion among the Georgian leadership is captured in a statement made by Aleksii Inauri, then head of the KGB in Georgia, in a newspaper interview given much later in the newspaper *7 dghe*³⁰

I raised the question in the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party: either we should allow the youth to demonstrate publicly at Stalin's monument and ensure their security, or we should officially prohibit such activities. The comrade responsible to Moscow went against this: how can we allow something that goes against the line of the 20th Party Congress? But prohibition would not be good; we did not know what the result would be.

²⁸See for example Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, o. 31, d. 211, 'Informatsii obkomov, RK GK KP Gruzii o faktakh antipartiinogo povedeniya i vyskazyvaniyakh i merakh, prinyatykh po nim', pp. 5–12, 46–52.

²⁹Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, o. 31, d. 37, pp. 2–3.

³⁰*7 dghe*, 14 August 1990.

There is circumstantial evidence to suggest that the Georgian leadership at least passively supported the demonstrations at first. The very fact that the demonstrations were allowed to begin during the first few days, and the fact that they were supplied with the necessary equipment such as microphones, loudspeakers, floral wreaths and banners, suggests that there was tacit consent from officials. As Kozlov (1999, p. 157) writes:

Organising such a mourning procession, given a favourable inclination on the part of the authorities, was not at all complicated. The accustomed ritual and the standard script of such official events had been worked out to the last detail. In every school and every institution, in factories and offices—everywhere, from the Central Committee of the Party to the shabbiest communal bureaus—they had the prerequisite items: banners, posters, portraits of the leaders, etc. They probably did not believe the vague rumors (it was only on March 6 that the highest officials in the country would read the ‘closed letter’ of the Central Committee of the KPSS) and it only needed the softest push for a good many people to start acting according to the usual stereotypes for behaviour in such circumstances.

This suggests a certain amount of natural inertia in the start of the demonstrations, and perhaps the leadership feared creating more trouble for itself by preventing them from starting altogether. Yet the authorities did seem to show ‘favourable inclination’, at least at the start, and seemed willing to let events follow their own course. Kozlov continues (1999, p. 158), ‘[w]ith poorly concealed sympathy, [the Georgian leadership] gazed upon the enflaming pro-Stalin hysteria. Perhaps they even wanted to use the mass demonstrations as an argument for the Moscow bosses to “correct the general line”’.

The spread of information about the contents of the ‘closed letter’, Khrushchev’s report on the ‘Cult of Personality’, also suggests involvement on the part of the local leadership. Khrushchev’s report was sent to Georgia after the conclusion of the 20th Party Conference on the orders that its contents should be kept strictly secret (Medvedev & Medvedev 2004, p. 133). The report was read out on 6 March at a closed session of the top Party leadership consisting of ‘about 70–80 people’, according to *Trud* correspondent S. Stanikov’s account.³¹ The information was not given out officially to lower level Party organisations around the republic until the weeks after the March events. Yet from the KGB files and other reports it seems clear that people at the demonstrations were aware of the gist of the ‘closed letter’ well before 6 March.³² In his 22 March report, Serov stated that

[the spread of information] was facilitated by the fact that the permanent representative [*postpredstvo*] of Georgia in Moscow, finding out from the delegates of the Congress about the issue discussed in the closed session, spoke by telephone with leadership officials of the Georgian SSR and informed them about the contents of the report.

These officials in turn, together with the delegates themselves, ‘told their acquaintances about the report on the Cult of Personality’.³³

³¹“‘Ne dopustim kritiki Stalina’”: Sobytiya v Gruzii: mart 1956’, *Istochnik*, 6, 1995.

³²See for example the 7 March telegram of Inauri to Serov, ssusa, f. 6, d. 159, p. 4.

³³ssusa, f. 6, d. 159, p. 29.

KGB telegrams and later reports make reference to an ‘organisational presidium’ (*‘delovoi prezidium’*), and in Party organisation hearings several young Party members and students were either accused of or admitted to being members of this ‘presidium’. Yet despite the efforts of KGB interrogators to show direct ties between these young people and the higher Party leadership or the presence of coordinated nationalist groups in the republic, there does not seem to be any clear evidence of this. However, it does seem that there were indeed contacts between the local party leadership and people who were considered to be organisers and unofficial leaders of the demonstrations.

On 6 March a delegation from the Party organisation of the city of Tbilisi, on orders from the Georgian Party Bureau, met with ‘organisers’ at the demonstration taking place at the Stalin Monument and agreed with them that the demonstration would stay limited to the area surrounding the monument (Nozadze 1992, p. 7).

According to the Protocols of the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia for the month of March, no meeting of the Georgian higher leadership was held until 6 March, when a special session was convened especially to discuss the situation of the previous days in Tbilisi and other cities of the republic. It was decided at that meeting to ‘summon immediately leading Party and *Komsomol* officials and officials of the Interior Ministry and KGB and give them corresponding instructions’.³⁴ Another session was held on 8 March, at which approval was given for the concessionary measures discussed below.³⁵ Thus the Georgian leaders were following events, but only decided on direct action on 8 March. Until 9 March no official statements were made, and no public instructions were given. On 8 March, on the same day as the meeting of the Georgian Bureau, the issue was brought up in Moscow at a session of the Presidium of the Central Committee, where the top leadership specifically criticised the inaction of their Georgian colleagues (Fursenko 2004, pp. 111–12): ‘Mzhavanadze has overslept’, said Molotov; ‘He’s made a fool of himself’ said Kaganovich; and ‘It’s a disgrace. Mzhavanadze’s lost his head’, Molotov said.

Later on 8 March Mzhavanadze and his top lieutenants appealed to those whom they assumed to be organisers both for information and to attempt to retain control of the situation in the republic. According to KGB interrogation reports, on 8 March Georgian Central Committee Secretary M.P. Georgadze requested 10 ‘delegates’ of the demonstration to come to the Central Committee to meet with the First Secretary.³⁶ Mzhavanadze received them and asked them to summarise the demonstrators’ demands. Mzhavanadze responded that ‘the request of the people will be fulfilled’, and asked the ‘delegates’ to inform the demonstrators of this. Before they left the building, Central Committee Secretary D.V. Mchedlishvili asked the 10 ‘delegates’ to be at the Stalin Monument the next morning (9 March) before the demonstrations got started in order to ‘maintain order’.³⁷

³⁴Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, o. 31, d. 37, p. 4.

³⁵Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, o. 31, d. 37, p. 5.

³⁶Five of them had been part of the group that had earlier appealed to Marshal Zhu De, the Commander and Chief of the People’s Liberation Army and the Vice Chairman of the People’s Republic of China who happened to be visiting Tbilisi at that time as part of an official delegation.

³⁷ssusa, f. 6, d. 375–56, pp. 24–25.

At 10.00 a.m. on 9 March Mzhavanadze, Georgadze and Mchedlishvili ‘rose to the podium’ at the Stalin Monument and addressed the demonstration, announcing several concessions: that articles would be published about Stalin in the local newspapers and official memorial meetings would take place in all offices and factories at 1.00 p.m. that day. The crowd remained calm for the hour and a half that the officials spoke, but did not disperse as requested afterwards. The officials appealed again to the 10 ‘delegates’ to restore order. However, one of these ‘delegates’, Konstantin Tsitsishvili, at that point called on the crowd to commandeering trucks and drive to join the demonstration in Gori. He was therefore accused of further inflaming the situation, although in his interrogation he insisted that he did this simply to help disburse the crowd.³⁸

Thus, by the evening of 9 March, it seems that the leadership’s attempts to regain control of the situation and to guide events through concessions and cooperation had failed. According to General-Major Bannykh, head of the Transcaucasian Military District border troops, the city of Tbilisi

was in chaos. There was no order. Complete anarchy. All transport—cars and trucks, taxis, busses, trolleys—are in the hands of the crowd. Cars are driving around this city honking incessantly. The demonstrators have put forth an ultimatum: replace the local government. Dissatisfaction with the leadership is being expressed.³⁹

Although a *spravka* from the Tbilisi Garrison to the KGB on 9 March stated that ‘By request of the government of the Georgian Republic the military will take control of strategically important objects in the city’, it seems that the decision to bring in the military was decisively taken by the central leadership in Moscow.⁴⁰ When Soviet troops appeared on the streets, the hostility of the crowd only intensified, and people began to throw stones and sticks at military vehicles.⁴¹

The confusion among the top Party leaders and their ambivalent reaction to the March events may have resulted in part from the lack of consolidation within the Georgian leadership at the time. As in other union republics, leadership in Georgia throughout the Soviet period was based predominantly on top-down patronage networks. In the final years of the Stalin period and immediately afterwards these patronage networks in Georgia had experienced a series of upheavals: in 1951 the networks of then First Secretary Kandid Chkharkviani and of Lavrenty Beria were

³⁸ssusa, f. 6, d. 375–56, pp. 26–27.

³⁹State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), f. P-9401, o. 1, d. 4442, p. 183.

⁴⁰Kozlov offers the following account (1999, p. 171): ‘When at 22.25 Interior Minister Dudorov informed Central Committee Secretary Aristov about the growing tension in the city, and Aristov in turn informed another Secretary of the Central Committee, M. Suslov, it turned out that “everything was known” to the latter, and Fedyukinskii, the Commander of the Transcaucasian Military District, “had already received all the necessary instructions”. Moscow had conclusively taken the decision to send in the Army’. Eduard Shevardnadze also emphasised in an interview that Mzhavanadze was powerless to take such a decision himself, and therefore the order must have come from Moscow. Author’s interview in Tbilisi, 1 July 2008. It should be mentioned though, that in the protocol for the 8 March meeting of the Presidium in Moscow (Fursenko 2004, p. 112), Suslov is recorded as saying ‘Mzhavanadze is asking for tanks’.

⁴¹ssusa, f. 6, d. 159, p. 17.

attacked as part of the so-called 'Mingrelian Affair',⁴² and network members were replaced in the top positions by members of the network of Akaki Mgeladze, who had cultivated his own clients while First Secretary of the Abkhazian Party organisation and was presumably himself a direct client of Stalin. Mgeladze's network was itself disrupted during Beria's grab for power in the spring of 1953 after Stalin's death, and it was never rehabilitated (Fairbanks 1983).⁴³ Beria's network in Georgia, especially at the top levels, was removed and disgraced after Beria's arrest in June 1953. Beria's main client in Georgia, Aleksandre Mirtskhulava, was removed as First Secretary in September 1953 and replaced by Mzhavanadze, who had been a long-time Khrushchev client.⁴⁴ Mzhavanadze was therefore seen within the republic as very much an outsider, and by the spring of 1956 he was still consolidating his own patronage network and authority. This meant that the Georgian leadership at the time may have felt itself apprehensive and, unusually, particularly dependent on the authority of the central leadership in Moscow.⁴⁵

This situation left a significant layer of lower and mid-level Party and state functionaries feeling uncertain of their future career opportunities. Based on the precedents of previous political shake-ups, they may have feared that the attack on Stalin might mean disruption of their careers or their removal because of their past associations with earlier dominant networks. For First Secretary Mzhavanadze and the Georgian leadership this must have been seen as an important potential constituency that they needed to deal with in a careful manner.

Therefore the strongest argument that can be made based on the available evidence is that the Georgian top leadership may have been passively allowing the demonstrations while watching them closely and attempting to keep things within acceptable boundaries, in part as a response to Moscow's denigration of Georgia's status, and in part (and in so doing) to appeal to an important constituency of young lower and mid-ranking elite members, or at least to avoid alienating them. Late in the day on 9 March the Georgian leadership appears to have lost the ability to control events, and because of its own weakness and lack of consolidated authority it was forced to defer to the central leadership in Moscow and to acquiesce to forceful measures by the Soviet Army.

The Protocols of the Georgian Bureau show that an emergency meeting was held at 3.30 a.m. on the morning of 10 March, just as the military activity to disperse the demonstrations was coming to an end. A decision was taken at that meeting to begin holding Party meetings from 7.00 a.m. that morning in every institution in the city to 'denounce the behaviour of provocateurs, anti-Soviet elements and hooligans' and to

⁴²This was a case manufactured by Stalin in 1951–1952 in which Beria's Mingrelian clients were arrested for corruption and supposed bourgeois nationalism. Mingrelia (*samegrelo*) is a region in western Georgia whose indigenous inhabitants, Mingrelians (*megrelebi*), comprise a Georgian ethnic subgroup.

⁴³Mgeladze himself spent the rest of his career as a state farm director in the Kareli region of Georgia.

⁴⁴Mzhavanadze had been a former political commissar and later a general in the Soviet Army who had worked with Khrushchev in the Ukraine and who had made his career outside Georgia, primarily in the Kharkov, Kiev and Transcarpathian Military Districts.

⁴⁵Author's interview with Eduard Shevardnadze Tbilisi, 1 July 2008.

enforce the official line. In addition, an order was given to 'have at the ready no less than 2,000 Communists in every region of the city to bring order in case of necessity'.⁴⁶ It was also required that the Minister of Education of the Georgian SSR and the directors of all institutes of higher education expel all students who did not appear for classes without a reasonable excuse.⁴⁷ Although the range of options open to the Georgian leadership by that time had been somewhat restricted, and in a sense also facilitated, by the intervention of the Soviet Army, the decisions taken at this session of the Georgian Bureau do suggest that the Georgian leadership might have been able to implement decisive measures to curtail the demonstrations much earlier than the night of 9 March.⁴⁸

Thus in conclusion there is at least indirect evidence to support the interpretation that concern about, and protest against, the status shift of the Georgian SSR as a result of the de-Stalinisation policy played a role among Georgian elites. To some degree motivation probably depended on social categories. For participants of the demonstrations from among the less educated working class and the agricultural sector, as well as for many war veterans, the simple fact of the Great Leader being criticised was probably enough to arouse their indignation. For others, the opportunity to say what they felt in public for the first time probably played a role in their decision to participate actively. Perhaps for some of the more marginalised youth the demonstrations were an opportunity to vent frustration with their social situation. But there does seem to have been a real sense among young Party members and the *intelligentsia* that Georgia's status had been diminishing since Stalin's death in 1953 and, together with it, their own educational and professional opportunities. The implication of the centre's de-Stalinisation policy must have been perceived by many people in these categories to be a sign of further such diminutions.

This interpretation perhaps helps to shed light on the confusing issue of Stalin's place in Georgians' mentality and self-definition in 1956 and up to the present day. It suggests a more nuanced understanding of why Georgians felt so aggrieved by the de-Stalinisation policy, and helps to explain the paradox of why those sectors of the Georgian population, particularly the *intelligentsia* who suffered greatly under Stalin's rule (both personally and through the experience of relatives, friends and colleagues), would so passionately protest against de-Stalinisation. It also helps to explain the deeper motivation of those young people from *intelligentsia* and *nomenklatura*

⁴⁶Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, o. 31, d. 37, p. 5.

⁴⁷Partarkhiv TsK KPG, f. 14, o. 31, d. 37, p. 5. A telegram from Georgian KGB head A. Inauri to Moscow in May 1956 describes in detail the extensive measures taken to prevent a rumoured resumption of mass demonstrations in Georgia scheduled for 24 March of the same year, including forming patrol groups made up of Party and *Komsomol aktivs*, strengthening the police, setting up checkpoints to prevent 'population flows' to Tbilisi and Gori, and mobilising the 'agent apparatus' to weed out 'hostile element' and 'spreaders of rumours' (ssusa, f. 6, d. 159, pp. 23–24).

⁴⁸In a recent interview with the author, Eduard Shevardnadze said that he thought events could have been resolved in a more peaceful way if Mzhavanadze had been more proactive in addressing and calming down the protesters from the beginning. He also felt that Mzhavanadze's inability to speak Georgian well hindered his ability to appeal to the people. Shevardnadze also emphasised that as head of the *Komsomol* in Kutaisi at the time, he addressed the demonstrations in that city a total of five times over the course of those days, which he felt was the key to resolving the situation there peacefully. Author's interview, Tbilisi, 1 July 2008.

backgrounds for whom the March 1956 events became the first taste of nationalist agitation that encouraged them to then become the backbone of the radical Georgian nationalist dissident movement in later decades (Kozlov 1999, pp. 179–82).

There is also a fairly strong argument that can be made to support an interpretation of the March 1956 events that suggests that the Georgian leadership at least passively allowed the actions to take their course in the beginning, but then perceived that it had lost control of the situation by late in the day on 9 March. That this passive support on the part of the Georgian leadership was motivated by a desire to influence the central leadership in Moscow remains unproven, but that explanation seems at least plausible, especially in conjunction with other factors such as the lack of consolidation among the Georgian leadership itself and its desire not to alienate what it must have seen as important segments in society.

That the central state in the end forcefully disbursed the Tbilisi demonstrations on 9 and 10 March is not particularly surprising. The regime was clearly anxious about the precedent of large-scale disturbances in a union republic capital, all the more so because of the nationalistic overtones. In addition to aggressively dispersing the demonstrations, the central government placed much of the blame on abstract ‘hooligans and provocateurs’, and to a lesser degree on local Party institutions, especially primary Party organisations in schools and universities and the *Komsomol*, for failures in ‘ideological preparation’ and for not properly ‘explaining the policy of the Party’ with regard to the dangers of the ‘Cult of Personality’. The nationalist element to the demonstrations was played down wherever possible and classified as misplaced admiration for Stalin that was manipulated by ‘provocateurs’.⁴⁹ Yet ultimately it seems that this very nationalistic aspect of the protest also seriously unnerved the central leadership in Moscow, and soon after the crackdown (and despite the criticism in the 10 July Decree) the policy towards Georgia very quickly turned to concessions. There was no purge of the Georgian Party leadership and no attempt to hold particular leaders accountable.⁵⁰ On the contrary, over the next few years the Georgian elite received greater control over appointments within their republic than they had before, and were granted greater cultural freedoms (Suny 1994, pp. 303–04). Most of those arrested after the events were quietly released soon afterwards. The policy of appointing an ethnic Russian as Second Secretary in the republic began soon after the March events, and may have been a reaction to those events. But this became part of a larger policy of Khrushchev’s regime towards national republics, and in any

⁴⁹The phrases shown in quotations in this paragraph show wordings that appear repeatedly throughout the official documents rather than quote any one particular source. See, for example, ssusa, f. 14, o. 31, d. 211; f. 14, o. 31, d. 212; and f. 14, o. 31, d. 37.

⁵⁰The absence of a purge and the fact that Mzhavanadze and most of his clients remained in place may have been in part due to the fact that the Moscow leadership did not have any alternative Georgian elites whom they could trust. All the more so since Khrushchev and some of his main clients (particularly KGB Chairman Serov) had come to power less than three years previously by undermining Beria, so they may have been apprehensive towards cadres in the republic that had previously been one of Beria’s strongholds (Blauvelt 2008a). In his 1990 interview in *7 dghe*, Georgian KGB head Inauri said ‘I should point out Khrushchev was very much afraid of Georgians. Perhaps this was why he brought up the cult of Stalin at the 20th Congress of the Party. He was receiving offensive letters, so he felt himself braver when I was next to him’.

case, at least in Georgia, in practice the Russian Second Secretaries often became more loyal to the Georgian leadership than to the central leadership in Moscow.⁵¹

Ultimately, whether or not the Georgian leadership in fact played a role in mobilising nationalist sentiment and popular support in the course of the March 1956 events as a reaction to the change in the republic's status, it appears that the final result of those events for Georgia's status was positive: though Georgia could clearly not maintain its 'most-favoured lord' status after 1956, and the regime took pains to demonstrate that Georgians were no longer 'favoured',⁵² Georgia nevertheless was not reduced to Laitin's 'colonial' status. Georgia may have taken on a status more akin to that which Laitin (1998, p. 67) terms 'integralist' and ascribes to the three Baltic republics: in such republics, elites had limited opportunities in the centre, but had essentially free reign over nominations and cultural and local affairs within their own republics, as long as they made the proper reports to the centre and kept overt expressions of nationalism to a minimum, maintaining 'institutional completeness' within their own domain.

Finally, whether or not the Georgian leadership was engaging in mobilisation during the 1956 events, the ultimate lesson that the local leadership in Georgia seemed to have taken from the incidents was that such mobilisation could be very effective in achieving goals in relations with the centre in Moscow. If the occurrence of such active mobilisation is questionable with regard to the 1956 case, the Georgian leadership (and local ethnic elites in other republics) would later mobilise national sentiments more and more openly to gain dividends from the centre in future interactions, such as the April 1978 demonstrations protesting against the change in the status of the Georgian language in the new constitution, and the demonstrations during the *Perestroika* period at the end of the 1980s in Georgia and in other parts of the Soviet Union.

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⁵¹ Author's interview with Eduard Shevardnadze, Tbilisi, 1 July 2008.

⁵² Armstrong (1992 [1968], p. 244) for example emphasises that while Georgian Party membership was proportionately still very high in 1968, its percentage of Party membership growth had been restricted since 1956 'probably because the regime wishes to eliminate the impression that Georgians are favored politically'.

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