AD-A270 301

:NTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No 0704-0188

	ORT DATE: April 1993	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED: THESIS/DISSERTATION

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE
Soviet Nationality Policy and National Identity in the Transcaucasian Republics: Drawing Together or Tearing Apart?

5. FUNDING NUMBERS

6. AUTHOR(S)
Richard Terrell

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)
AFIT Student Attending: Indiana University Bloomington

8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
AFIT/CI/CIA- 93-136

9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)
DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
AFIT/CI
2950 P STREET
WRIGHT-PATTERSON AFB OH 45433-7765

10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER

11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for Public Release IAW 190-1
Distribution Unlimited
MICHAEL M. BRICKER, SMSgt, USAF
Chief Administration

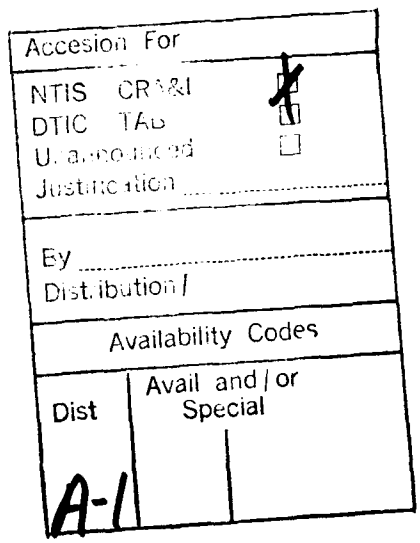
12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE

13. ABSTRACT *(Maximum 200 words)*

93 10 4 042

14. SUBJECT TERMS			**15. NUMBER OF PAGES** 40
			16. PRICE CODE
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT	**18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE**	**19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT**	**20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT**

Soviet Nationality Policy and National Identity in the Transcaucasian Republics: Drawing Together or Tearing Apart?



Richard Terrell
RÉEI MA Paper
13 April 1993

Introduction

In the twentieth century, nationalism has shown itself to be one of the most significant social and political forces in the world. National and ethnic tensions and desires and their associated centrifugal forces played a role in the disintegration of perhaps the largest multinational empire of this century, the former Soviet Union. Despite the destructive effects of nationalism on the unity of the USSR, certain aspects of Soviet nationality policy itself encouraged the growth of nationalism and the development of a national consciousness among the ethnic minorities of the former Soviet Union. In keeping with Marxist-Leninist theory, Soviet nationality policy was directed toward the eventual elimination of national and ethnic differences within its borders, while at the same time encouraging (with varying degrees of determination) the growth of national cultures and languages. The peculiar relationship between these two seemingly contradictory aims defined the unique nature of Soviet nationality policy.

This paper will discuss Soviet nationality policies and specifically the characteristics and effects of these policies in the three Transcaucasian republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. Through the use of demographic and linguistic data, a general assessment of the effectiveness of the Soviet attempt to erase national distinctions will be made. Did Soviet nationality policy in Transcaucasia encourage the ethnic groups to unify, or

did these policies help to tear the USSR apart by sowing the seeds of nationalism?

Nationalism and Marxist-Leninist Theory

Nationalism is one of the most slippery concepts with which scholars have to deal. While most people understand and accept what is meant by the word "nationalism," many have different ideas of precisely what it is and what it is not. Boyd Shafer has advanced a list of ten conditions or beliefs which are typically characteristic of groups exhibiting nationalism. The first four are a defined territory, common cultural characteristics (language being perhaps the most important of these), a common independent or sovereign state (or a desire for one), and common social economic institutions or systems.[1] When a group of people is aware of these common elements, they identify themselves as a nation of people distinct from other nations. These characteristics are very similar to those Stalin ascribed to a nation in 1913: "A nation is a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture."[2]

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[1]Boyd Shafer, *Nationalism: Myth and Reality* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1955), 7-8.

[2]Joseph Stalin, "Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros," in *Sochineniia* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1951), vol. 2, 296.

Stalin goes on to point out that all these conditions must be present in order for a group to be considered a nation. If even one element is missing, the group ceases to be a nation.[3] This claim contrasts with that of many political scientists, who argue that while these common elements are helpful in defining nationalism, they are not all required. For example, the concept of a Jewish nation existed before there was a defined territory associated with it, and Irish separatism manifested itself despite the lack of a completely distinct language.[4] Regardless of the narrowness of the definition of a nation, there seems to be an agreement that the above mentioned factors are to some degree a prerequisite for the formation of a national consciousness and the presence of nationalism.

Regarding the factors which help to promote this awareness of community, Shafer notes that nationalism and the nation-state have grown out of the needs and consequences of modern society; agricultural economies and uneducated, dispersed populations neither fostered nor required the nation-state.[5] Similarly, many have proposed that the emergence of a national consciousness is linked to the growth of political, social, and economic

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[3]Ibid.

[4]Alan B. Philip, "European Nationalism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in *The Roots of Nationalism*, ed. Rosalind Mitchison (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, Ltd., 1980), 5-6.

[5]Shafer, *Nationalism*, 9-10.

institutions associated with modernization - urbanization, industrialization, political parties, mass media, the extension of literacy and higher education, and so on.[6] As a society takes on more of these aspects, especially urbanization and industrialization, its population will tend to acquire an increased awareness of itself as a national entity.

The Marxist view of nationalism has something in common with this theory, but the two disagree on an important point. Marx also noted that nationalism is associated with a modernizing society, since nationalism assists the destruction of the feudal system and helps usher in and strengthen the capitalist phase of societal development. Up to this point, nationalism is a progressive force because it assists what Marx considered an inevitable progression of societal evolution.[7] During the latter stages of capitalism, however, nationalism becomes a device of the bourgeoisie used to divide workers along national lines and to prevent them from realizing their unity as an economic class. Unlike the proponents of the previous theory, Marx predicted that as a society moved along the path of capitalist development (acquiring the "modern" characteristics noted above), the similarities of economic class would prevail over national

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[6]T.V. Sathyamurthy, *Nationalism in the Contemporary World: Political and Sociological Perspectives* (London: Frances Pinter Ltd., 1983), 4.

[7]Walker Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 7.

differences and nationalism would be swept aside in favor of international proletarian unity.[8]

Lenin, whose writings concerning the national question helped form the basis for early Soviet nationality policy, echoed Marx: "Marxism is irreconcilable with nationalism...in place of all forms of nationalism Marxism advances internationalism, the amalgamation of all nations in the higher unity..."[9] This "amalgamation of all nations" is a common theme in Lenin's writings on the national question, as he apparently envisioned the elimination of national differences under the socialist state.

In keeping with this notion of uniting nationalities, Lenin opposed two other concepts: "national-cultural autonomy" and federalism. A proposal made by the Austrian Marxist Otto Bauer, national-cultural autonomy involved the creation of a federalized state with autonomy in cultural matters granted to the various national minorities within it, regardless of whether they occupied a specific territory or were scattered throughout the given nation.[10] Lenin considered this a dangerous and harmful idea which would fuel nationalism by treating nationalities as separate political entities: "'Cultural-national autonomy' denotes

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[8]Ibid., 7-11.

[9]V.I. Lenin, "Kriticheskie zametki po natsional'nomu voprosu," in *Sochineniia*, 4th ed. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1948), vol. 20, 17.

[10]Tom Bottomore and Patrick Goode, eds., *Austro-Marxism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 166-7.

precisely the most refined and, therefore, the most harmful nationalism...this program undoubtedly contradicts the internationalism of the proletariat and appeals only to the ideals of the nationalist petty bourgeoisie."[11]

Federalism was also rejected by Lenin at first (in theory, as we shall see) because the large, unified state represented a higher stage of social and economic development than the small state and is thus closer to achieving the proper conditions for socialism according to the Marxist view. Lenin frequently spoke out in favor of union and against the division of nations:

> The aim of socialism is not only the elimination of the division of mankind into tiny states and the isolation of nations in any form, it is not only to draw the nations together but to integrate them. [April 1916][12]

> We must always and unreservedly strive for the *very closest* unity of the proletariat of all nationalities, and only in isolated and exceptional cases may we advance and actively support demands which lead to the creation of a new class state or to the substitution of a looser federal unity, etc., for the complete political unity of a state. [July 1903][13]

In the first of these two quotes, Lenin uses two very important terms: *sblizhenie*, meaning "drawing together," and *sliianie*, a word which defies precise translation into English but

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[11]Lenin, "O natsional'noi programme R.S.D.R.P.," in *Sochineniia*, vol. 19, 490.

[12]Lenin, "Sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia i pravo natsii na samoopredelenie," in *Sochineniia*, vol. 22, 135.

[13]Lenin, "Natsional'nyi vopros v nashei programme," in *Sochineniia*, vol. 6, 412. Emphasis in original.

most closely approximates "integration" or "amalgamation." It must be remembered that Lenin foresaw this amalgamation and merging of the ethnic groups of a socialist multinational state as a desireable result of his nationality policy. Both an astute political tactician and a pragmatist, Lenin was not above taking a step backward in order to move forward toward this eventuality in the future. Such was the course of early Soviet nationality policy.

Fundamentals of Early Soviet Nationality Policy: Federation, *Korenizatsiia*, and *Rastsvet*

Given the Bolsheviks' opposition to anything but complete state unity, it may appear peculiar that the fledgling Soviet Union was founded on the federal principle, incorporating various regions of the former Russian Empire as union republics. This decision was a response to practical realities and was tempered and supported by ideological principles. In short, it may be said that a federal union was adopted because it was the only kind of union the Soviet government could achieve at the time. In the aftermath of the Russian Empire's demise, a number of nationalities (including those of Transcaucasia) took the opportunity to exercise their independence. When the Bolsheviks seized power in October 1917, the empire was rapidly disintegrating into autonomous national states such as

Byelorussia, the Ukraine, and so on.[14] Therefore the acceptance of a federal state and the granting of union republic status to national regions was in itself a concession to the desires of the nationalities for autonomy and an admission of the inability of the new socialist government to effect an immediate unification of ethnic nationalities.

This new attitude toward federation was supported ideologically by the Bolsheviks as a recognition of the fact that compared to the secession of national minorities and the formation of numerous independent states, federation represented a step in the right direction, that is, toward the eventual unity of all nationalities in the state. Federation was a sort of "halfway house" in the creation of a single unitary state. In 1924, Joseph Stalin explained this while at the same time admitting the complexity of the national question:

> First, the fact that at the time of the October Revolution a number of the nationalities of Russia were in fact in a state of complete secession and complete isolation from one another, and, in view of this, federation turned out to be a step forward from the division of the working masses of these nationalities toward their closer union, their amalgamation.
>
> Secondly, the fact that the very forms of federation which emerged in the course of Soviet development proved not so contradictory to the aims of closer economic unity of the working masses of the nationalities of Russia as might have appeared formerly...
>
> Thirdly, the fact that the national movement proved to be much more serious, and the process of amalgamation of nations much more complicated than might have

[14]Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism 1917-1923* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), 107-8.

appeared formerly...[15]

This concession to the nationalities of the formation of a federal state structure is also indicative of Lenin's basic view on national relations which is crucial to the understanding of Soviet nationality policy. Lenin firmly believed that the surest way to erode support for a rebellious or nationalistic feeling or behavior was to grant the freedom to engage in such behavior. Regarding the structure of a multinational state and the right to secession, he wrote:

> The closer a democratic state system is to the complete freedom to secede the less frequent and less ardent will the desire for separation be in practice, because big states afford indisputable advantages, both from the standpoint of economic progress and from that of the interests of the masses...[April 1916][16]

Thus Lenin thought that the desire to secede from a state existed primarily because it was prohibited; removing the prohibition would weaken and eventually eliminate the desire.

Lenin's ideas about ethnic harmony and *sliianie* followed the same line of thinking. Nationalism and the desire to preserve native cultures persisted among ethnic minorities precisely because such sentiments were suppressed by states such as the Russian Empire. Stalin stated this explicitly in 1913:

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[15]Joseph Stalin, "Protiv federalizma," in *Sochineniia*, vol. 3, 30-31.

[16]Lenin, "Sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia..." in *Sochineniia*, vol. 22, 135.

> What is it that particularly agitates a national minority?
> A minority is discontented not because of the absence of a national union but because it does not enjoy the right to use its native language. Permit it to use its native language and the discontent will pass of itself.
> A minority is discontented not because of the absence of an artificial union but because of the absence of its native schools. Give it its own schools and discontent will lose all grounds.[17]

This basic assumption regarding the means of reducing discontent among ethnic minorities and soothing nationalist sentiments guided the Bolsheviks' thinking about the path of Soviet nationality policy on the way to an eventual merging of nations.

During approximately the first ten years of the Soviet Union's existence, this philosophy was embodied in the policy of *korenizatsiia*, which translates roughly as "indigenization." One of the primary thrusts of this policy was the "nationalization" of the state and party structures in the non-Russian republics, that is, placing local nationals in leadership positions in the organs of the Communist Party and the government.[18] By creating cadres of leaders drawn from the local populations and committed to Soviet ideals and goals, the Bolsheviks hoped to give the republics a sense of self-government while at the same time extending Soviet control to these regions. Stalin described this process of "indigenizing" the local party organs as follows: "It is,

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[17]Stalin, "Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros," in *Sochineniia*, vol. 2, 363.

[18]Mary K. Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia* (Westport, Conn.: Hyperion Press, 1962), 37.

therefore, necessary that all Soviet organs in the border regions...should as far as possible be composed of the local people who are acquainted with the manner of life, habits, customs, and language of the native population; that these institutions should draw to themselves all the best people from the local masses..." [October 1920][19]

This practice of nationalizing local government and party structures was symbolic in the sense that it did not represent true political autonomy from the central government in Moscow. Unlike the state apparatus of the Soviet Union, the Communist Party was not federalized, but rather it operated on Lenin's principle of "democratic centralism." According to this principle, every organ of the party was subordinated to and bound by the decisions of the organ above it. Thus central control was established by way of the party apparatus in each republic, the members of which normally occupied key positions in the local government. Also, it was common practice for Russian second party secretaries and deputy ministers to be put in place behind their native superiors, presumably acting as a sort of "watchdog."[20]

The concept of *korenizatsiia* did not apply only to the formation of regional party organizations. In a broader sense, it

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[19]Stalin, "Politika sovetskoi vlasti po natsional'nomu voprosu v Rossii," in *Sochineniia*, vol. 4, 358.

[20]Michael Rywkin, "Searching for Soviet Nationalities Policy," in *Soviet Nationality Policies: Ruling Ethnic Minorities in the USSR*, ed. Henry R. Huttenbach (London: Mansell Publishing Ltd., 1990), 64-5.

implied the permission to retain and develop the native culture of a people, so long as the goals of socialism and the Communist Party were promoted to the fullest extent. From this idea is derived the well-known phrase "national in form, socialist in content." To the Soviets, "national in form" was principally equivalent to "in the native language of the nationality."[21] Each republic was allowed to publish newspapers, books, journals, and the like in its native language and also to maintain native language schools, so long as the content of the publications and the orientation of the education was strictly in line with Communist ideology.

This development of native cultures was known as *rastsvet*, or "flourishing." By encouraging native languages and pride in national heritage within the framework of Soviet economic development, the Soviets hoped to maintain the support of the non-Russians while modernization and the growing size of the working classes in the non-Russian republics caused a shift in attitudes from traditional and nationalist to modern and international. In Transcaucasia, however, the traditional cultures proved resistant to change. The Islam-based lifestyle of the Azerbaijanis and the centuries-old cultural patterns of the Georgians and Armenians not only remained intact, but drew strength from the use of the peoples' native languages and their participation in local

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[21]Robert Conquest, ed., *Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1967), 63.

government in the early years of Soviet rule.[22]

Korenizatsiia in Transcaucasia and the Retreat Under Stalin

The form which the policy of *korenizatsiia* took in the Transcaucasian republics was a drive toward proportional representation or even over-representation of nationals in the Communist Party organization of their own republic. This was particularly marked in Georgia and Armenia, republics which already had relatively well-developed (and socialist oriented) local ruling elites in the early 1920s. In both Georgia and Armenia, the percentage of natives in the republic's party organization in 1930 was greater than in the general population.[23] As we shall see, participation of natives in local government was not merely a boost to the pride of the Transcaucasian republics, but it also helped define their relationship with Moscow in later years.

Along with *korenizatsiia*, the drive towards modernization had a significant effect in Transcaucasia in the 1920s and 1930s. The Soviets focused their efforts on the breakup of villages and traditional rural lifestyles, the change from an agricultural-

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[22]Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone, "The Study of Ethnic Politics in the USSR," in *Nationalism in the USSR and Eastern Europe in the Era of Brezhnev and Kosygin*, ed. George W. Simmonds (Detroit, Mich,: University of Detroit Press, 1977), 27.

[23]T.H. Rigby, *Communist Party Membership in the USSR 1917-1967* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), 369.

based economy to an industrial one, the transformation of the traditional roles of family and women in society, and the secularization of education.[24] While the results were dramatic in some cases (industrial output in Georgia rose 670% from 1921 to 1940).[25] these attacks on traditional life contrasted with the revival of native heritage and languages associated with *korenizatsiia*. On the one hand, people were imbued with a renewed reverence for native arts, literature, history, language, and the like, but at the same time they were encouraged to develop internationalist values and reject the traditional ties of religion and the family.[26]

This leads us again to the question of whether modernization and its consequences lead to a decrease in national consciousness within an ethnic group or has the opposite effect of unifying the group and galvanizing it against assimilation. Walker Connor has pointed out that the experiences of the twentieth century throughout the world have favored the latter conclusion, in part because increasing contact between members of a society resulting from urbanization and modern communications not only raises minorities' awareness of other ethnic groups, but also their

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[24]Ronald G. Suny, *Armenia in the Twentieth Century* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1983), 47-49; Matossian 61-64.

[25]J.W.R. Parsons, "National Integration in Soviet Georgia," *Soviet Studies* 34, no. 4 (October 1982), 549.

[26]Suny, *Armenia*, 48.

awareness of themselves as a unique group.[27] Another effect of modernization and rapid industrialization noted by Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone also seems particularly applicable to Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan in the 1920s and 1930s. She points out that when the pace of social mobilization is very rapid (exceeding the rate of assimilation) and this mobilization is imposed forcefully from above on a society by an alien group, the minority group is made increasingly aware of the differences between itself and the would-be assimilators and of its same lower position in the socio-economic hierarchy.[28] This trend certainly would seem to play a possible role in Transcaucasia where Soviet collectivization efforts of the late 1920s and early 1930s attempted to dismantle the traditional rural society.

These efforts at nation-building and cultural *rastsvet* slowed in the early 1930s and essentially came to halt in 1934. Stalin, presumably guided by a distrust of non-Russians, took steps to curb the autonomy of the non-Russian republics.[29] The term *korenizatsiia* gradually disappeared from the press, and later the

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[27]Walker Connor, "Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying?" *World Politics* 24, no. 3 (April 1972), 329-332.

[28]Rakowska-Harmstone, "Study of Ethnic Politics," 23. Rakowska-Harmstone refers here to the theory presented by Karl Deutsch in *Nationalism and Social Communication* (Cambridge, Mass.: Mass. Institute of Technology, 1953).

[29]Gerhard Simon, *Nationalism and Policy toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union* (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1991), 138.

entire concept was denounced as an expression of local nationalism which threatened Soviet unity. At the same time, a new brand of Soviet patriotism which identified the Russian nationality as the leading group in the USSR emerged and reached its peak during World War II.[30]

The mid-1930s also witnessed a tremendous turnover in Communist Party membership culminating in the Great Purge of 1936-1938. The Transcaucasian republics were no exception. During these years, virtually all the "Old Bolshevik" leaders who had held positions of power in Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan since before Stalin's rise to power were arrested and executed. Although local nationals took their places, these new officials were those whose loyalty was to Stalin and to his chief henchman, Lavrenti Beria.[31] The result of the purges was the consolidation of Stalin's authority in the non-Russian republics and the elimination of any real local autonomy gained in the previous period of nation-building.

Despite Stalin's heavy-handed rule and the tragedy of the purges, there remains some evidence that the Transcaucasian republics received some preferential treatment during these years which spared them the full centralizing effects of the Stalinist period. Certainly the Transcaucasian nationalities did not suffer the horrors of famine, collectivization, and deportation to the

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[30]Ibid., 149-152.

[31]Suny, *Armenia*, 62.

same extent as did the Ukrainians, for example. Also, with the ratification of the "Stalin" constitution in 1936, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan were elevated to full Union Republic status.[32] The Transcaucasian republics were exempted from new laws mandating Russian-language instruction in vocational and higher education.[33] Stalin's alleged favoritism of Georgians and Armenians was even reflected in the CPSU's Politburo: in 1952, the Politburo's eleven voting members included seven Russians, two Georgians, and one Armenian.[34]

The Post-Stalin Years: Decentralization and Attempted Assimilation

After Stalin's death in 1953, the Soviet leadership undertook an almost immediate change in nationality policy which was reminiscent of the *korenizatsiia* policies of the 1920s. Not only were repressive measures aimed at stifling native cultures and subjugating nationalist sentiments to Russian patriotism withdrawn, but sweeping administrative reforms decentralized the Union's bureaucracy and transferred a great deal of authority, especially in the realm of economic planning and execution, back

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[32]Simon, *Nationalism*, 147.

[33]Ibid., 151-152.

[34]T.H. Rigby, *Political Elites in the USSR: Central leaders and local cadres from Lenin to Gorbachev* (Aldershot, England: Edward Elgar Ltd., 1990), 260.

to the republics.[35] Also, there was a renewed emphasis on recruitment of locals into the non-Russian republics' party and government structures and re-nationalization of local bureaucracies.

Table 1 shows the relationship between the proportion of Armenians, Georgians, and Azerbaijanis in the general population of their republics and the USSR and their representation in party organizations. In both 1960 and 1964, natives represented a higher proportion of new candidate members to the CPSU in their own republics than they did as a proportion of the general population, indicating a determined effort to recruit natives in the 1960s. Furthermore, Armenians and Georgians continued their traditional strong showing in the All-Union CPSU as they were over-represented in the party in both 1961 and 1965 based on their numbers from the 1959 census (although their percentage of total members declined slightly).

During the first twenty years of the post-Stalin period, the Transcaucasian republics also enjoyed a certain degree of latitude with regard to key positions in their party and state organizations. From 1952 to 1955 and 1956, respectively, Georgia and Azerbaijan had native first and second party secretaries until this arrangement was replaced with the typical pattern of a native

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[35]Simon, *Nationalism*, 233-239.

Table 1[36]

CPSU Membership of Major Transcaucasian Nationalities, 1961-1965

Nationality	As Percent of Home Republic's Population (1959 Census)	As Percent of New CPSU Candidate Members in Republic 1960	1964
Armenians	88.0	91.7	91.8
Azerbaijanis	67.4	71.0	74.4
Georgians	64.3	*	78.2

Nationality	As Percent of Total USSR Population (1959)	As Percent of CPSU Membership 1961	1965
Armenians	1.3	1.7	1.6
Azerbaijanis	1.4	1.1	1.2
Georgians	1.3	1.8	1.7

*Not Published

first secretary and a Russian second secretary.[37] Armenia, however, which had two Armenians in these positions until 1973, was one of only three union republics to enjoy this privilege for such an extended period.[38] The leaders in these republics also enjoyed remarkably long terms of office. Vasilii Mzhavanadze (Georgian first secretary 1953-72), Anton Kochinian (chairman of Armenian Council of Ministers 1952-56, first secretary 1966-74),

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[36]*Partiinaia zhizn'* no. 1 (January 1962), p. 49; *Partiinaia zhizn'* no. 10 (May 1965), p. 12; *Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1970 goda* (Moscow, 1973), vol. 4, 9-15.

[37]John H. Miller, "Cadres Policy in Nationality Areas: Recruitment of CPSU first and second secretaries in non-Russian republics of the USSR," *Soviet Studies* 29, no. 1 (January 1977), 15.

[38]Ibid., 13.

and Veli Akhundov (Azerbaijan first secretary 1959-69), had the support of the Khrushchev and Brezhnev regimes and managed to develop extensive, well-entrenched native cadres in their republics.[39]

These men and their organizations, however, became the most marked examples of promoters of the Soviet Union's "second economy" of black market dealings and patron-client networks. The central government's economic permissiveness and encouragement of native cadres both before and after the Stalin period in these republics (which had a history of operating on strong systems of familial ties) created political and economic networks which proved highly resistant to Soviet control. When corruption reduced the republics' economic production to levels below the limit of Moscow's tolerance in the early 1970s, Brezhnev was forced to put in place as first party secretaries men such as Aliev (Azerbaijan), Shevardnadze (Georgia), and Demirchian (Armenia) to attempt to clean up Transcaucasia's economic and political systems.[40]

Needless to say, these examples of resistance to Soviet interference in the economies of the Transcaucasian republics demonstrate an absence of the internationalist outlook and

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[39]Ronald G. Suny, "Transcaucasia: Cultural Cohesion and Ethnic Revival in a Multinational Society," in *The Nationalities Factor in Soviet Politics and Society*, ed. Lubomyr Hajda and Mark Beissinger (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1990), 229.

[40]Ibid., 230.

economic integration which the Soviets hoped to inspire. Quite to the contrary, the nativization programs of *korenizatsiia* produced local ruling groups which maintain support in their republics by promoting the interests of their own region and nationality in the realms of culture, language, economics, and political representation.

While the indigenization of the non-Russian party and state apparatus was revived under Khrushchev and Brezhnev, there was no comparable return to cultural "flourishing" of the USSR's nationalities. Rather, official policy hinted at the "drawing together" of the nations, and there is evidence that a determined effort toward cultural and linguistic Russification was carried out during the 1960s and 1970s.[41] The vehicle of this attempted assimilation was language policy, as Moscow persistently promoted the learning and use of Russian throughout the Soviet Union. The response of the non-Russian nationalities, and the Transcaucasian republics in particular, is illustrative of the resistance of the Soviet Union's non-Russian nationalities to cultural assimilation.

In 1958 the Supreme Soviet of the USSR passed an extensive educational reform law which addressed, among other things, language instruction in schools. The 19th Thesis of the new law stated that in order to reduce the burden on children of learning several languages (at the time, children in both Russian and non-Russian schools had to study both the republic's native language

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[41]Simon, *Nationalism*, 246.

and Russian), parents would be given a choice of sending their children to a Russian-language school where the study of the indigenous language would be optional, or to a non-Russian school where Russian would be an optional subject.[42]

On the surface, the 19th Thesis seemed relatively harmless and quite democratic: parents would still retain choice of schooling and language study for their children. The non-Russians, however, saw this as an attempt to remove native language instruction from Russian schools and erode the use of their native tongue within their republics' borders. The reaction in Transcaucasia came out strongly in favor of retaining the status quo and was led not only by scholars and intellectuals, but in some cases by important local government and party officials as well.[43] The Armenian and Georgian Supreme Soviets eventually ratified the law in 1959, but not before declaring that it would be interpreted so as to strengthen the teaching of the native language, and the government in Azerbaijan omitted the specific provisions of Thesis 19 entirely until after a purge of local officials by Moscow which included the ousting of the party first secretary, Mustafayev.[44]

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[42]Yaroslav Bilinsky, "The Soviet Education Laws of 1958-9 and Soviet Nationality Policy," *Soviet Studies* 14, no. 2 (October 1962), 139.

[43]Ibid., 141.

[44]Ibid., 145-7.

The pressure for linguistic Russification intensified in the 1970s as Russian was touted as the language of socialist communication as well as the common basis for the study of economics, science, and politics. It is interesting that this encouragement to learn Russian in order to access political literature is the opposite of the policy pursued by Lenin and Stalin - the translation of political articles and propaganda into many non-Russian languages in order to reach the greatest number of people.[45] A notable clash between Moscow and a non-Russian group over the language issue occurred in Georgia in 1978. In the 1978 draft constitution of the Georgian SSR, authorities in Moscow eliminated the statement confirming Georgian as the state language of the republic. Following vociferous protests and a large demonstration in Tbilisi, the reference was restored not only to the constitution of the Georgian SSR but to that of the Armenian and Azerbaijan republics as well.[46]

Soviet nationality policy in Transcaucasia has been characterized by periods of concession to nationalities contrasted with efforts by Moscow to centralize bureaucratic authority and encourage assimilation of ethnic groups. All the while, the republics have become more industrialized, urbanized, and literate

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[45]Yaroslav Bilinsky, "Expanding the Use of Russian or Russification?" *Russian Review* 40, no. 3 (July 1981), 319.

[46]Ann Sheehy, "The National Languages and the New Constitutions of the Transcaucasian Republics," *Radio Liberty Ressearch Bulletin* RL 97/78, vol. 22, no. 19 (12 May 1978), 5-10.

than at the time of the formation of the USSR. If in fact national and ethnic differences were disappearing and economic and class awareness was growing among the peoples of Transcaucasia as Soviet theorists had proposed, then we would expect to see the "merging" of nations reflected in a willingness among people to move away from their traditional cultural, linguistic, and territorial ties in favor of those associated with modern institutions. On the other hand, we must consider the possibility that Soviet permissiveness in allowing native cultures to develop and in granting at least the trappings of autonomy to the non-Russian republics has created among Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and Georgians a sense of identification with their home republic as a symbol of both their traditional heritage and their hope for the future.

The Results of Nationality Policy: the Failure of *Sliianie*

There is little doubt that the Soviet economic and political system, despite its evils and inefficiencies, succeeded in transforming the Transcaucasian republics from predominantly rural, agrarian societies to relatively modern states with developed industries, urban areas, and institutions of higher education. Table 2 shows the increasing urbanization of the republics' population from 1940 to 1991. While Azerbaijan remained the most rural of the three republics in 1991, Armenia had made the most progress in this regard, almost reversing its

proportion of urban to rural population.

Table 2[47]

Urbanized Population in the Transcaucasian Republics, 1940-1991

Percentage of Population Living in Urban Areas

	1940	1959	1970	1979	1991
Armenian SSR	28.4	50.0	59.5	65.8	68.2
Azerbaijan SSR	37.0	47.8	50.1	53.1	53.5
Georgian SSR	30.6	42.4	47.8	51.8	56.2

The level of education in the Transcaucasian republics has also increased dramatically in the past four decades. Table 3 demonstrates the significant increase in the percentage of the republics' populations having higher and secondary education from 1959 to 1989, which in almost all cases more than tripled. It is also interesting to note that the extent of higher and secondary education in all three republics was always above the all-union average, sometimes by 50% or more (note the level of higher education in Georgia). Furthermore, Armenians and Georgians stand out as being particularly well-educated, showing higher rates in the secondary and higher education columns than their own republics' averages in 1959 and 1970. This counters a possible argument that the high educational level of these republics is due to the presence of non-native (i.e. Russian) specialists and scientists.

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[47]*Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1979 godu* (Moscow, 1980), 10-11; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1990 godu* (Moscow, 1991), 72-3.

Table 3[48]

Educational Level of the Population of the USSR and the Transcaucasian Republics, 1959-1989

Percentage of those age 10 or older* with:	Entire USSR	Armenian SSR	Azerbaijan SSR	Georgian SSR
Higher Education				
1959	2.3	3.9 (4.0)**	3.0 (2.4)	4.8 (5.7)
1970	4.2	5.7 (5.9)	4.4 (3.9)	7.3 (8.4)
1979	6.8	9.1	6.5	10.3
1989	10.8	13.8	10.5	15.1
Incomplete Higher or Secondary				
1959	12.0	16.9 (17.3)	13.9 (11.7)	20.5 (22.6)
1970	20.0	25.8 (26.2)	21.8 (19.8)	29.8 (32.1)
1979	32.9	39.5	35.4	41.1
1989	50.4	57.7	58.1	57.4
Incomplete Secondary				
1959	21.8	23.7 (23.8)	23.1 (22.4)	19.5 (19.1)
1970	24.1	20.1 (19.8)	20.9 (20.0)	18.3 (17.3)
1979	24.1	22.7	23.3	18.4
1989	20.0	18.6	19.2	15.2

* Figures for 1989 represent the percentage of those age 15 and above. This redefinition has virtually no effect on the data for higher and secondary education.

** Numbers in parentheses represent the percentage of the titular nationality in the appropriate category for 1959 and 1970 (the only years such data is available).

[48] *Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia SSSR 1979 goda* (Moscow, 1989), vol. 3, 6-14; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1990 godu* (Moscow, 1991), 210; *Vestnik statistiki* no. 6 (1980), 43-6.

If the republics have indeed become modernized, then what of the Marxist-Leninist concept of *sliianie*? The data presented in the following four tables point to three conclusions which suggest the absence of any characteristics of the "merging" of Armenians, Georgians, and Azerbaijanis with each other or any other group. First, the three peoples have shown little or no signs of linguistic assimilation, especially in their own republics. Second, they have demonstrated a strong desire to live in and migrate to their own republics (Armenians are something of an exception which will be discussed). Finally, the Transcaucasian nationalities have exhibited high rates of ethnic endogamy which leads one to believe they are very conscious of their ethnicity and are resistant to assimilation.

The data in table 4 reveal a number of interesting trends. First and foremost is the fact that in their home republics, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and Georgians claim the nationality language as their native tongue almost exclusively, and very few claim their native language is Russian. Furthermore, this disparity has shown no sign of weakening, and if anything, the gap has grown larger over the thirty years the table covers. Azeris in particular show very high rates of nationality language use and very low rates of Russian as a native language in all republics as well as the USSR as a whole. It is not surprising that Armenians,

Table 4[49]

Native Language Use in the Transcaucasian Republics, 1959 to 1989

Percentage of census respondents claiming their native language to be:

	Language of Own Nationality				Russian			
	1959	1970	1979	1989	1959	1970	1979	1989
Entire USSR								
Armenians	89.9	91.4	90.7	91.7	*	7.6	8.4	7.6
Azerbaijanis	97.6	98.2	97.9	97.7	*	1.3	1.8	1.7
Georgians	98.6	98.4	98.3	98.2	*	1.4	1.6	1.7
Armenian SSR								
Armenians	99.2	99.8	99.4	99.6	0.7	0.2	0.6	0.3
Azerbaijanis	99.3	99.6	99.3	99.7	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.2
Georgians	61.9	82.3	*	74.6	22.2	10.4	*	12.4
Azerbaijan SSR								
Armenians	85.3	83.5	77.5	84.2	14.3	16.4	22.4	15.5
Azerbaijanis	98.1	98.9	98.7	99.1	0.8	0.7	1.0	0.4
Georgians	78.3	84.2	80.9	87.7	20.7	14.6	*	10.8
Georgian SSR								
Armenians	82.3	84.8	83.3	85.0	7.5	8.0	9.3	9.2
Azerbaijanis	98.3	97.6	98.0	97.7	1.2	1.2	1.4	1.3
Georgians	98.4	99.4	99.5	99.7	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.2

Percentage of census respondents claiming Russian as a second language:

	1970	1979	1989		1970	1979	1989
Entire USSR				In Home Republic			
Armenians	30.1	38.6	47.1	Armenians	23.3	34.2	44.3
Azerbaijanis	16.6	29.5	34.3	Azerbaijanis	14.9	27.9	31.7
Georgians	21.3	26.7	33.1	Georgians	20.1	25.5	31.8

*Data not published

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[49]*Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia [v.p.n.] SSSR 1959 goda: Armianskaya SSR* (Moscow, 1963), 102; *Itogi v.p.n. SSSR 1959 goda: Azerbaidzhanskaya SSR* (Moscow, 1963), 134; *Itogi v.p.n. SSSR 1959 goda: Gruzinskaya SSR* (Moscow, 1963), 134; *Itogi v.p.n. SSSR 1970 goda* (Moscow, 1973) vol. 4, 253, 263, 303; *Vestnik statistiki* no. 7 (1980), no. 10 (1980), no. 11 (1980); *Natsional'nyi sostav naseleniia SSSR po dannym v.p.n. 1989 goda* (Moscow, 1991), 20-21, 114, 118, 134.

as the Soviet Union's most dispersed nationality, were much more likely to be native Russian speakers, but once again this is true only outside their home republic.

The knowledge of Russian as a second language among Transcaucasian nationalities increased steadily from 1970 to 1989 (once again Armenians were in the lead), most likely as a result of the official promotion of Russian as the language of interethnic communication and the *de facto* necessity of learning Russian in order to advance outside one's republic, especially in the bureaucracy. As the table shows, however, increased knowledge of Russian is not equivalent to, nor does it imply, linguistic assimilation - the replacement of one's native language by another.

Turning to demographic trends in Transcaucasia over the past three decades, it should first be mentioned that the use of raw census data has some shortcomings when attempting to demonstrate migration patterns. For instance, there are no data showing how many people of a certain nationality moved from one given location to another. Despite this, it is possible to infer the following using the information in tables 5 and 6: the concentrations of Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and Georgians in their own republics is becoming greater, while the proportions of other nationalities in their populations is shrinking.

Table 5 shows the absolute numbers of each nationality in the Transcaucasian republics since 1959. The data for Armenia show that between each census year the rate of growth of the Armenian

population in their own SSR has been greater than the rate for the USSR as a whole: 42.3% compared to 27.7% from 1959 to 1970, 23.4% compared to 16.6% from 1970 to 1979, and so on. At the same time, the growth of the Azerbaijani and Russian populations in Armenia experienced a steady decline, and these nationalities experienced a decline in absolute numbers from 1979 to 1989. Although lack of data on Georgians in Armenia in 1979 prevents a similar trend analysis, the fact that the size of the Georgian population remained the same from 1970 to 1989 indicates that it was an even smaller proportion of the population of the Armenian SSR by 1989.

Similar trends are seen in Azerbaijan and Georgia: while the titular nationality in each republic experienced growth roughly on a par with that nationality's growth in the entire USSR, the Armenian and Russian populations in these two republics experienced a decline in both growth and absolute numbers. The conclusion that can be drawn from this table is that the three major Transcaucasian nationalities experienced considerable growth within their own republics while the number of other nationalities within their borders grew even smaller, thus making the titular nationality a greater proportion of the republic's population and increasing ethnic homogeneity.

Table 5[50]

Population Change of Major Transcaucasian Nationalities in USSR and Transcaucasian Republics, 1959 to 1989

	Population (thousands)				% Change		
	1959	1970	1979	1989	1959-1970	1970-1979	1979-1989
Entire USSR							
Armenians	2787	3559	4151	4623	+27.7	+16.6	+11.4
Azerbaijanis	2940	4380	5477	6770	+49.0	+25.0	+23.6
Georgians	2692	3245	3571	3981	+20.5	+10.0	+11.5
Russians	114114	129015	137397	145155	+13.1	+6.5	+5.6
All Others	86294	101521	111489	125214	+17.6	+9.8	+12.3
Armenian SSR							
Armenians	1552	2208	2725	3083.6	+42.3	+23.4	+13.2
Azerbaijanis	108	148	161	84.9	+37.0	+8.8	-47.3
Georgians	0.8	1.4	*	1.4	+76.3	*	*
Russians	56	66	70	51.6	+17.9	+6.0	-26.3
All Others	46.2	68.4	81	83.2	+48.0	+18.4	+2.7
Azerbaijan SSR							
Armenians	442	484	475	390.5	+9.5	-1.9	-17.8
Azerbaijanis	2494	3777	4709	5805.0	+51.4	+24.7	+23.3
Georgians	9.5	13.6	11.4	14.2	+42.7	-16.2	+24.6
Russians	501	510	475	392.3	+1.8	-6.9	-17.4
All Others	251.5	332.4	356	419.0	+32.2	+7.3	+17.5
Georgian SSR							
Armenians	443	452.3	448	437	+2.1	-1.0	-2.4
Azerbaijanis	154	218	256	307.5	+41.6	+17.4	+20.1
Georgians	2601	3131	3433	3787	+20.4	+9.6	+10.3
Russians	408	397	372	341	-2.7	-6.3	-8.3
All Others	438	488	484	528.5	+11.4	-0.8	+9.2

*Data not published

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[50]*Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1970 godu* (Moscow, 1971), 15, 18-21; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1979 godu* (Moscow, 1980), 29; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1989 godu* (Moscow, 1990), 30; *Naselenie SSSR po dannym vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1979 goda* (Moscow, 1989), 27-30; *Natsional'nyi sostav naseleniia SSSR po dannym vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1989 goda* (Moscow, 1991), 20-21, 114, 118, 134.

Table 6[51]

Location of Major Transcaucasian Nationalities, 1959-1989

	Percent of Nationality Located in:					
	Own SSR	Other Transcaucasian SSR			RSFSR	Remainder of USSR
		Armenia	Azerbaijan	Georgia		
Armenians						
1959	55.7	--	15.9	15.9	9.2	3.3
1970	62.0	--	13.6	12.7	8.4	3.3
1979	65.6	--	11.4	10.8	8.8	3.3
1989	66.7	--	8.4	9.5	11.5	3.9
Azerbaijanis						
1959	84.9	3.7	--	5.2	2.4	3.8
1970	86.2	3.4	--	5.0	2.2	3.2
1979	86.0	2.9	--	4.7	2.8	3.6
1989	85.7	1.3	--	4.5	4.9	3.6
Georgians						
1959	96.6	0.0	0.4	--	2.1	0.9
1970	96.5	0.0	0.4	--	2.1	1.0
1979	96.1	*	0.3	--	*	*
1989	95.1	0.0	0.3	--	3.9	0.7

*Data not published

Table 6 indicates what percentage of the total population of each nationality is located in each of the Transcaucasian republics and in Russia. Once again, we cannot determine exactly who is moving from where to where, but it can be seen, for example, that with each census a greater percentage of all

[51]Ibid.

Armenians in the USSR lived in Armenia, and the portion of the Armenian population residing in Azerbaijan and Georgia grew steadily smaller. The same pattern is evident with respect to the Azerbaijanis.

The data in these two tables indicate an inclination among the Transcaucasian naticnalities to live in and migrate to their own republic (Georgians in particular are extremely unlikely to live outside Georgia). The exception which bears mention is that of the Armenians. The Armenians were the Soviet Union's most dispersed major nationality, as roughly one-third of Soviet Armenians lived outside the Armenian SSR in 1989 and several million more live in a worldwide diaspora. The Armenian republic itself, however, stood out as the most ethnically homogeneous republic of the USSR: in 1989, 93.3% of its population was Armenian.[52]

A statistic which is sometimes used to estimate the "affinity" of one ethnic group for another and the level of a group's ethnic awareness is its rate of endogamy, that is, the preference of members of the group for marital partners of the same nationality. Table 7 shows the number of pure and mixed marriages involving each Transcaucasian nationality by republic of their residence for 1978 and 1988. "Male mixed" indicates a

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[52]*Natsional'nyi sostav naseleniia SSSR...*, 18.

Table 7[53]

Mixed Marriages Among Major Transcaucasian Nationalities in the Three Transcaucasian Republics 1978 and 1988

Armenians

Republic of Marriage		Armenian Armenian	Male Mixed	Female Mixed	Total Marr.	% Mixed
Armenia	1978	27,966	609	220	28,795	2.9
	1988	23,779	549	190	24,518	3.0
Azerbaijan	1978	3,768	543	466	4,777	21.1
	1988	2,524	505	521	3,550	28.9
Georgia	1978	4,082	995	713	5,790	29.5
	1988	2,620	812	725	4,157	37.0

Azerbaijanis

Republic of Marriage		Azeri Azeri	Male Mixed	Female Mixed	Total Marr.	% Mixed
Azerbaijan	1978	41,784	1,685	623	44,092	5.2
	1988	58,045	1,674	818	60,537	4.1
Armenia	1978	1,518	42	20	1,580	3.9
	1988	1,208	20	15	1,243	2.8
Georgia	1978	977	201	107	1,285	24.0
	1988	2,459	134	87	2,680	8.2

Georgians

Republic of Marriage		Georgian Georgian	Male Mixed	Female Mixed	Total Marr.	% Mixed
Georgia	1978	28,728	1,963	1,211	31,902	9.9
	1988	23,703	2,193	1,378	27,274	13.1

[53]Data on Ethnic Intermarriages, *Journal of Soviet Nationalities*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Summer 1990), 166-7.

marriage between a man of the given nationality and a woman of a different nationality (the opposite being true for "female mixed").

As Table 7 shows, the incidence of mixed marriages for these nationalities is extremely low, especially for Armenians residing in Armenia and for Azerbaijanis living both in Azerbaijan and Armenia. In fact, the rates of inter-ethnic marriage for these groups are lower than the rate for any other combination of nationality and republic of residence included in the source study.[54]

When considering endogamy and exogamy as indicators of ethnic relations between groups, it is important to remember a hidden aspect of these statistics: a "mixed" marriage between an Armenian and a non-Armenian, for example, does not tell us the nationality of the Armenian's spouse or the sex of either party. A more detailed examination of intermarriages would likely reveal that the few that do occur in Transcaucasia are between groups which are ethnically more "similar" than others. For example, during the years 1967 to 1969 in Armenia, the most common mixed marriage was between an Armenian man and a Russian woman, and marriages between culturally diverse groups such as Armenians and Azerbaijanis or Kurds was extremely rare.[55]

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[54]Ibid.

[55]A.E. Sarkisiants, "O natsional'nom aspekte brakov v Armianskoi SSR," *Sovetskaia etnografiia* no. 4 (1973), 90-91.

Conclusion

By the time the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, the republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia and their indigenous populations had developed a number of the characteristics of modern "nations." The people of these nationalities were conscious of a common territory where their culture, heritage, and particularly their language, was preserved. The data in the preceding pages demonstrate three trends: the Transcaucasian nationalities, especially those living in their home republic, did not assimilate linguistically to Russian to a significant degree in the Soviet period, these republics showed a definite tendency toward increased ethnic homogeneity in favor of the titular nationality, and finally, the major Transcaucasian nationalities exhibited a high degree of ethnic endogamy. The retention of their native languages and their tendency toward ethnic homogeneity by avoiding intermarriage between ethnic groups indicates an awareness of their ethnicity and a resistance to assimilation.

Based on this data, it is clear that *sliianie* and the elimination of national differences never took place to any perceptible degree in Transcaucasia. To what extent were Soviet nationality policies responsible for the growth of ethnic consciousness in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia?

The concessions made by the Soviet government to the republics in permitting and even encouraging the flourishing of

native cultures in the 1920s and early 1930s created a basis for the nationalities' identification with their republics during these difficult years of Soviet economic transition. The leadership of local cadres was also significant in Transcaucasia: at the very least, they stood as a symbol of the republics' autonomy; at worst, these cadres exploited their connections to familial patron-client networks to create a very real economic autonomy from Moscow. Efforts, whether real or perceived, to infringe upon the rights of Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and Georgians to use their native languages have met with stiff resistance from the nationalities (whose interests were often defended by their local leaders), further galvanizing them against assimilation.

These factors led to the creation of republics which have been increasingly hospitable to titular natives and which have become more ethnically homogeneous over the years. As the populations of the Transcaucasian republics have acquired more commonality in culture, language, and political interests, their national consciousness has grown and developed into ethnic nationalism. It would seem that *rastsvet* did not encourage *sliianie*, but rather this policy had the opposite effect, and attempts by Soviet leaders to force the issue showed little results. In retrospect, the failure of Soviet nationality policy to achieve its professed aims may have proven fatal to the USSR.

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