

Map 35

1937–1949: World War II and Ethnic Deportations from the Caucasus

Map 36

1943–1956: A Selective Purge of the Ethnopolitical Map

Soviet social and foreign policies of the 1930s set in motion processes that altered the ethnic and administrative composition of the Caucasus. The most dramatic changes resulted from the forced resettlement of entire population categories. Decisions about what social or ethnic groups would be removed were determined first by the logic underlying the building of Soviet socialism and later by the social upheavals of the thirties and the great military confrontation between the Soviet Union and Germany from 1941 to 1945.

In the late 1920s one of these processes, collectivization, targeted kulaks—peasant farmers, now deemed too prosperous—as yet another category of people threatening the building of communism. Kulaks became the first collective target of large-scale repression in the 1930s. The elimination of this category from the social structure was achieved by moving tens of thousands of families to distant regions of the Urals and Siberia between 1930 and 1933 (according to some estimates, by the autumn of 1932 more than 300,000 people had been expelled from the North Caucasus Territory in the course of wholesale collectivization and the “destruction of the kulaks as a class”). In Kuban a number of stanitsas were “black boarded,” literally labeled *chernodosochnye*, a term originating from the practice of hanging a black board (*chernaia doska*) in public places to cast shame on a stanitsa for not turning over its quota of requisitioned grain to the government. As punishment, the populations of these stanitsas (including Poltavskaya, Urupskaya, Uman-skaya, Novorozhdestvenskaya, Medvedovskaya, Nezamaevskaya, Beisugskaya, Platnirovskaya, and Plastunovskaya) were entirely or partially deported.

Collective punishment was targeted at particular social groups, just as it had been in the case of the Cossacks during the Civil War and its aftermath. But social groups were not the only types of collective actors to be assigned such roles by the

government. Indeed, even Cossacks were categorized not only in terms of their place in society (a military estate pledged to serve the empire) but as an ethnic category (Russian military colonists). Initially, ethnic groups in the Caucasus were also assigned (or assigned themselves) the same sort of collective identity. Their collective identity in the region—and their common privileges and responsibilities—was something firmly engrained in the Soviet worldview and policies.

BORDER AREA “PREVENTIVE DEPORTATIONS”

With the beginning of the collectivization experiment and the famine that ensued in many agrarian regions of the USSR, the country began to deemphasize its role as a model of socioeconomic and political development. The loss of this status and the worsening international situation in many ways changed the social function of the Soviet state’s external borders. A desire to ensure the impenetrability of its borders from emigration coupled with military considerations led to the beginning of a series of border-area expulsions. Among politically unreliable elements—risk groups—were foreign and Soviet citizens who shared a common homeland with members of their ethnic group outside the borders of the Soviet Union. The first ethnic deportees were Finns from borderlands in Leningrad Province and Karelia, followed by Poles living along the country’s western border and Koreans in the Far East. In the Caucasus the first to be removed were Kurds (1,325) and Iranians (approximately 6,700) from the borderlands of Soviet Azerbaijan and Armenia.

These and subsequent deportations did not involve physical expulsion from the country, however. All the collective deportations that took place after 1922 were to places of internal

exile deep within the Soviet Union, far from the country’s European regions and from any external borders. Although deported peoples remained residents and citizens of the USSR, within Soviet political lexicon the term “deportations” suggested that they were no longer members of the family of (true) Soviet peoples.

MILITARY “PREVENTIVE DEPORTATIONS”

At the beginning of World War II a new category was identified for collective punishment: Soviet Germans. In September–October 1941 people with German ancestry were expelled from throughout the Caucasus: 23,580 from Georgia, 22,741 from Azerbaijan, 212 from Armenia, 33,300 from Rostov Province, 5,327 from Kabarda-Balkaria, 2,929 from North Ossetia, 34,287 from Krasnodar Territory, and 95,489 from Orjonikidze Territory (of whom approximately 50,000 had been sent there from the Crimea in August 1941). Additionally, in April–August 1942 more than 7,000 Greeks were expelled from Rostov Province and Krasnodar Territory. While the motivation behind the deportation of Germans was based entirely on ethnicity—no evidence was considered necessary in order to brand two million Soviet citizens collaborators with the land of their ancestors—the fate of Greeks was tied to a different factor. As the war approached, a significant number of the Greeks who had settled the Caucasus Black Sea coast still held foreign citizenship, and a series of systematic deportations was conducted as part of the expulsion of foreign subjects from the fronts of Rostov and Krasnodar Territories. (Greeks who were deported from the Crimea later, during the summer of 1944 after the peninsula was liberated by the Red Army, were accused of “economic” collaboration with the German occupation of the Crimea, a fate that also befell