

## 1957–1990: Stability and Conflict under “Developed Socialism”

What sets this period apart is the stability of the region’s administrative borders. Beginning in 1957 and until the end of the Soviet era, the Caucasus did not undergo any politically significant redrawing of internal borders. One change that did take place was the expansion in 1962 of the Adyghean Autonomous Province to incorporate the foothill and mountain portions of the Belaya River basin (including the stanitsas of Tulsкая, Kurdzhipsкая, Kamennomostskaya, Daghestanskaya, Dakhovskaya, and Sevastopolskaya) and a portion of the Caucasus Climatological Reserve. There were also a few changes to administrative borders of the republics, territories, and provinces in keeping with various Soviet economic and political campaigns (such as Nikita Khrushchev’s experiments between 1963 and 1965 in dividing territories and local governments along economic lines and sorting them into agricultural and industrial units).

As it worked to strengthen regions’ socioeconomic infrastructure, including those of the country’s ethnic entities, the central government was also striving to reduce the political weight of administrative (internal) borders. At the top of the Soviet Union’s domestic political agenda was the emergence of a single Soviet people (*Sovetsky narod*) as a civic community (nation). This meant also that ethnically grounded administrative borders would gradually lose their significance as the territorial framework within which specific cultural and linguistic policies were conducted. However, as strategies were being developed to shape a single Soviet nation there were also processes under way that rendered this single nation an ideological illusion, a historically vulnerable political project. This civic project of nation-building, which was closely tied to the ideological kernel of “real socialism,” fell victim to the untenability of the Soviet model of social and economic development.

One of the contradictions of the period of “developed socialism” was expressed in the fact that the strategy for strengthening the unity of the Soviet people, a strategy that featured unifying elements in the areas of education and culture, was

developing alongside a gradual growth in the importance of ethnic affiliation and the institution of titularity—administrative entities named for a particular ethnic group. The wave of Russification associated with the “one people” view of Soviet civic nation-building had begun in the early 1960s. By 1977—when the new USSR constitution was adopted—the country’s leadership had decided to omit the mention of the national languages as state or official languages in newly adopted constitutions of union republics. This decision was perceived in some republics as an effort to make Russian the country’s sole official language. (One of the responses to this policy was a number of demonstrations in defense of the constitutional status of the Georgian language in Tbilisi in 1978.)

The Russification that appeared to be taking hold in the 1960s was imperiled by ideological and organizational pitfalls. The central government was trying to achieve greater integration of minorities into a common Soviet civic community built around a Russian ethnic core and to actively promote higher educational and living standards in the national republics. This strategy produced large numbers of highly educated people within the Caucasus’ many nations and created “overcrowded” ethnic intelligentsias. The members of the educated class competed with one another for prestige and influence as they promoted ethnic (rather than Soviet) patriotism, defended the interests of their ethnic “nation,” and discovered the “true” history of their people at a time when it was becoming possible to question the moral authority of the Soviet state. Although this new generation of ethnic elites was a product of the Soviet system, it eventually broke away from the tenets of the single-Soviet-nation paradigm, and its members became the main proponents of ethnic national sovereignty.

By and large this stage in the history of the Caucasus can be seen as a carefully controlled move toward indigenization, where the role of indigenous governing cadres was played by members of the titular ethnic group who had undergone selection within the system of party and Komsomol schools and

had acquired the basic skills of the Soviet governing culture, in particular the ability to apply ethnicity as an instrument of political power. For many years the Communist Party and Soviet central authorities had worked to create an acceptable ethnic bureaucracy and intelligentsia on which they could rely in controlling and absorbing the ethnic periphery. However, this control came with increased political influence by members of the titular ethnic group and reinforced the very institution of titularity—a system that informally put the collective rights of one group above those of other groups.

As the seventies and eighties came to a close, titular ethnic groups began to develop more clearly defined ideas about themselves and their republics as protopolities— aspiring nations with a destiny that was not necessarily tied to the Soviet Union (and Russia). To mitigate the consequences of this trend the central authorities resorted to a tactic of semi-official quotas for nomenklatura (key administrative) posts as a means of supporting ethnic balance within regional governing apparatuses. But quotas only drew greater attention to ethnicity as a criterion on which positive or negative discrimination was based. Both the efforts of the central bureaucracy (which strove for ethnic balance among national cadres) and local national bureaucracies turned ethnic affiliation into an important asset or impediment in vertical mobility. Ethnic affiliation increasingly turned into a key factor in collective and individual competition for prestigious jobs in the apparatus or advantageous positions within the hierarchies of the command economy.

For a long time the central Soviet authorities managed to gloss over the contradictions inherent in the two forms of nation-building they were engaged in as they strove on one hand to create a melting pot, a single supranational state, while on the other they perpetuated ethnic autonomy (cast in Soviet terminology as “the maturing of socialist nations”). The maturity of the Soviet Union’s ethnic nations remained a merely potential threat for the integrity of the country—for now, there was still doctrinal energy behind Communist ideol-