

Map 39

1989–1991: Overview of the Ethnopolitical Rivalries at the Conclusion of the Soviet Era

Map 40

1991–2003: The Dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Escalation of Armed Conflict in the Caucasus

The crisis that swept over the Soviet state in the late 1980s brought with it a series of competing plans to redraw the map of the Caucasus. The country's deteriorating economy made changes in the name of "ethnic sovereignty" or "the redress of historical wrongs" more appealing. The collapse of Soviet institutions and solidarities opened up a great ideological void that was immediately filled by the historical and political agendas of competing ethnic groups as agents of consolidated action. The goal of these collective agents was envisioned solely in terms of the defense of their own interests—their own "ethnoses" or "nations." It was believed that to accommodate these interests (the interests of "ethnic awakening," "parity," "survival," "territorial rehabilitation," and so on) it would be necessary to redraw administrative and political lines, both political borders and those delineating the legitimate privilege of the collective owners.

In an overview of the numerous ethnic territorial and status conflicts that were developing in the early 1990s it is possible to pinpoint a number of specific disputes.

THE SHAPSUG QUESTION

This issue arose out of the desire of Adyghe political groups united within the Adyghe Khase movement (a union or council of Adyghe NGOs) to restore the Shapsug national district that had existed from 1924 to 1945, or even to establish a national republic, centered in the Krasnodar Territory coastal town of Lazarevskoe. Shapsugia as it was conceived in 1990 encompassed territory on which the Adyghe Shapsug population made up an insignificant minority. This was one of the main impediments to realizing a Shapsug national autonomy, but there were others.

Shapsugia was within a federally designated resort area, Greater Sochi. Furthermore, concern over setting a precedent by restoring a former national entity made the territorial authorities reluctant to work with the Shapsugs to find a compromise.

ADYGHEA

Conflict over the status of Adyghea, an autonomous province (oblast) in Krasnodar Territory, stemmed from the efforts of the Adyghe political elite to secede from Krasnodar and the fact that in 1990 Adyghea was given the status of a national republic. Russians in primarily Russian districts of Adyghea demanded that their districts remain a part of Krasnodar Territory. The political structure of Adyghea was a source of tension stemming from the fact that it was the national republic of the Adyghe people (a circumstance that came with certain privileges for ethnic Adyghes and assured them majorities within institutions of local government), even though the Adyghes constituted a minority of the population.

KARACHAI-CHERKESSIA

The fact that Karachai-Cherkessia was the titular autonomy for two groups—leading to a complex of mutually exclusive claims—and also was home to three additional numerically significant ethnic groups that wanted representation in government inevitably led to conflict. In the early 1990s the Jamagat social and political movement demanded the restoration of the separate Karachai autonomy that had existed in 1943, which included a number of Cossack villages. Cossack organizations were pursuing their own "territorial self-determination" aimed

at the creation of a Russian autonomy (the republics of Batalpashinsk and Zelenchuk-Urup) or the integration of districts with stanitsas into Krasnodar or Stavropol Territory proper (the Karachai-Cherkess AP was part of Stavropol Territory until 1991, when it seceded and became the Karachai-Cherkess Republic, a constituent of the Russian Federation). Cherkess political groups (and Adyghe groups in general) were working to raise the political status of the Cherkess and restore or create a titular autonomy separate from the Karachais, and in so doing to avoid the prospect of Karachai political domination in a united Karachai-Cherkessia. For their part, local Abazas and Nogais, lacking any titular status within the autonomy, demanded the creation of their own national entities. The growing impulse toward ethnic self-determination within Karachai-Cherkessia and the conflicts associated with it were somewhat quelled by the republic-wide referendum in 1992, in which 76 percent voted to preserve a single Karachai-Cherkess Republic. Nevertheless, political problems related to ethnic territorial claims continued into the twenty-first century.

KABARDA-BALKARIA

In 1990–1992, in anticipation of a probable breakup of Kabarda-Balkaria along ethnic lines, territorial conflict began to crystallize between its two titular groups. The broad and amorphous border area between the mountainous Balkaria and the foothills and lowlands of Kabarda became the target of historical-ideological competition by popular political organizations (the Congress of the Kabardin People versus the National Council of the Balkar People and the Tyore ["supreme council"]). The threat that the republic would be divided also provoked the