

Soviet Nationality Policy towards Kurds, 1917-1956

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Abstract

Soviet policy towards its Kurdish minority shifted from supporting their cultural development during the 1920s and early 1930s to a more repressive policy from 1937-1956 and then back again to a more favorable position. Soviet repression of its Kurdish population reached its height in November 1944 with the deportation of a significant number of them from the areas of Georgia bordering Turkey to Central Asia. Here they were placed under special settlement restrictions limiting their movement and suffered from material deprivations resulting in a significant number of deaths. This article focuses on Soviet policy towards its Kurdish minority from the time of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 until several years after the death of Stalin in 1956 when the Kurds in Central Asia were released from the special settlement restrictions.

Keywords

Kurds, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, NKVD, special settlers

Introduction

Kurds in the Soviet Union represent an interesting case study in the changing nationality policies pursued by the Soviet government from 1917 to 1956. The Soviet policy towards the Kurds was not consistent either through time or geographically. Kurds in different regions of the USSR experienced different treatment at different times. The fluctuating and inconsistent Soviet policies towards the Kurds in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan meant that not all Kurds in the USSR were treated the same. Not only did the policies change over time but, the different republics in the Soviet Union were able to greatly influence local treatment of the Kurds along national lines. Hence even in the early part of Soviet history, the attitudes and actions of the Azerbaijan SSR and Armenian SSR towards the Kurds differed significantly. In Azerbaijan the local authorities sought to reclassify the

Kurds as Azeris and provided few cultural institutions. The Armenian leadership had a considerably more positive view and policies towards its Kurdish minority. Later starting in 1937 and 1944 overall Soviet policy became more repressive towards the Kurds in general. In particular the internal deportations of 1937 and 1944 and the special settlement restrictions imposed after 1945 were particularly onerous. But, the majority of Kurds were never subject to forced resettlement and were allowed to remain in the Transcaucasus largely unmolested. This contrasts significantly with the fate of other nationalities such as Germans, Karachais, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Crimean Tatars, and Meskhetian Turks where the vast majority of the population were subjected to these measures. After April 1956 those Kurds living under special settlement restrictions were released from this status with its severe limitations on their movement and residency.

The Kurds of the USSR

The Kurds of the USSR are the descendants mainly of migrants from the Ottoman and Persian empires into what become the Armenian, Azerbaijan, and Georgian SSRs. Significant Kurdish migration to this region occurred mainly from the start of the Russian-Persian War in 1804 up until the end of World War I in 1918.¹ Large waves of Kurdish migrants into these areas following their annexation into the Russian Empire happened in 1874 and as late as 1916.² The October 1917 Revolution would bring about radical changes for all of the nationalities in the former Russian Empire including the Kurds. The former imperial Russian policies towards the Kurds and other non-Russians underwent a number of policy swings under the new Soviet government from 1917 to 1956.

The first full Soviet census occurred in 1926. It reveals the following demographic information about the Kurdish population in the USSR. First, it divided Sunni Kurds and Yezidis into two separate categories. There were 54,662 Kurds and 14,526 Yezidis counted in the Soviet Union at this time.³ This distinction would disappear in later Soviet censuses. The Kurdish category was divided amongst the various Soviet republics in the following manner. There were 41,193 in Azerbaijan, 7,955 in Georgia, 3,025 in Armenia, and 2,308 in Turkmenistan.⁴ The vast majority of Kurds in the USSR thus lived in Azerbaijan at the time

¹ AMOEV, Kerim Alikhanovitch, MOSAKI, Nodar. *Kurdy i ezidy v perepisyakh naseleniya Rossiyskoy imperii, SSSR i stran postsovetskogo prostranstva*. Moskva: TAUS, 2014, pp. 4-5.

² AMOEV and MOSAKI, p. 5.

³ AMOEV and MOSAKI, pp. 16-17.

⁴ AMOEV and MOSAKI, pp. 16-17.

of the 1926 census. In contrast most of those classified as Yezidis, 12,237 lived in Armenia.⁵ This initial distribution would change radically by 1939 with the massive decrease in the number of registered Kurds in Azerbaijan and increase in Georgia and especially Armenia.

Most of the Kurds in Azerbaijan and thus most of the Kurds in the USSR in 1926 lived in Kurdistan Uezd or “Red Kurdistan” around the area of Lachin between Nagorno-Karabakh and the border of the Armenian SSR. A full 37,182 Kurds lived within its borders in 1926.⁶ This territory existed for six years from 1923 to 1929.⁷ The name Kurdistan in the title of the territory, however, was strictly geographical and not a national one like Nagorno-Karabakh was for the Armenians in Azerbaijan. It thus did almost nothing to promote Kurdish language and culture. The Soviet government eliminated all Uezds in the USSR in April 1929 and moved to a system of larger okrugs. Until May 1930 the territory was incorporated into the Nagorno-Karabakh Okrug before very briefly becoming the Kurdistan Okrug. Then on 23 July 1930 the Soviet government eliminated all okrugs in the USSR.⁸ Afterwards the Soviet Union did not create any more territories with the word Kurdistan or Kurdish in the titles.

The small amount of Kurdish language education in Azerbaijan started only after the abolition of the Kurdistan Okrug. The first Kurdish language classes in Azerbaijan commenced only in 1933.⁹ This was in part due to the fact that the 1926 census only registered 3,123 or 8.4% of the Kurds in the Kurdistan Uezd as speaking Kurdish.¹⁰ But, it also had to do with a strong nationalist bias by the local Azerbaijani leadership against Kurds and other ethnic and national minorities in the republic. The result was that Kurdish language education in Azerbaijan was neglected. By 1938 only 808 pupils had received any Kurdish language education in 12 different schools in the republic.¹¹ This was just one aspect of a policy of forced assimilation pursued by the Azeri government regarding its Kurdish population during the 1920s and 1930s. A more significant aspect was the massive reclassification of Kurds as Azeris from the 1926 to the 1939 census.

The Kurdish population in Azerbaijan greatly shrank between the 1926 and 1939 census. In total the Kurdish population in Azerbaijan fell from 41,193 to 6,005 or a drop of 84.5%. While the total Kurdish and Yezidi population of the USSR fell from 69,184 to

⁵ AMOEV and MOSAKI, p. 18.

⁶ YILMAZ, Harun. The Rise of Red Kurdistan. *Iranian Studies*, vol. 47, no. 5, 2014, p. 813.

⁷ YILMAZ, 802.

⁸ YILMAZ, 803-804.

⁹ YILMAZ, 820.

¹⁰ YILMAZ, 813.

¹¹ YILMAZ, 821.

45,877.¹² The absolute decline in numbers for the USSR as a whole means that migration from Azerbaijan to other areas of the USSR including the internal deportation of Kurds to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan cannot account for most of the losses. Instead the obvious explanation is the massive reclassification of people from the category of Kurdish to Azeri during the 1939 census.

In contrast to Azerbaijan, the cultural conditions of the Kurdish minority in the Armenian SSR during the 1920s and 1930s was considerably better. Between 1920 and 1935, the Armenian SSR promoted teaching, media, and research in Kurdish.¹³ Teaching in Kurdish was much more advanced in Armenia than in Azerbaijan despite the much smaller population. Already in 1921, over a decade before Azerbaijan had any Kurdish language education, there were five Kurdish language schools with 250 pupils in Armenia.¹⁴ In 1934 there was a major Kurdology conference in Yerevan, the capitol of the Armenian SSR.¹⁵ There were even Kurdish language radio broadcasts out of Armenia.¹⁶ This favorable cultural climate for Kurds in Armenia corresponded with a significant increase in their population. The Kurdish population in Armenia grew from 3,025 in 1926 to 20,481 in 1939.¹⁷ Most of this increase, over 12,000, can be accounted for by the reclassification of Yezidis as Kurds. But, migration from Azerbaijan also contributed to this growth. The vast majority of Kurds in Armenia have at least since the 1920s been Yezidis rather than Sunnis. Their classification as Kurds being due primarily to linguistic reasons.¹⁸ Nonetheless, the treatment of Kurdish speakers and Kurdish language culture during the early Soviet period in Armenia contrasts sharply with that of Azerbaijan.

Repressions and deportations

During the Great Terror of 1937-1938 some Kurds were targeted for repression, particularly those living near the borders of Iran and members of its elite. The Soviet government eliminated a number of Kurdish schools, newspapers, and other institutions at this time and arrested a number of elite Soviet Kurds.¹⁹ It also deported a number of Kurds from Armenia and Azerbaijan to Kazakhstan under SNK Resolution no. 2123-420ss promulgated on

¹² AMOEV and MOSAKI, p. 33.

¹³ LEEZENBERG, Michiel. "A People Forgotten by History": Soviet Studies of the Kurds. *Iranian Studies*, vol. 48, no. 5, 2015, p. 762.

¹⁴ LEEZENBERG, p. 755.

¹⁵ LEEZENBERG, p. 758.

¹⁶ LEEZENBERG, p. 762.

¹⁷ AMOEV and MOSAKI, p. 17.

¹⁸ AMOEV and MOSAKI, pp. 31-34.

¹⁹ KASYMOV, Sulkhadin. Kurdy. Ocherk. In ALIEVA, S. U. (ed.) *Tak eto bylo. Natsional'nye repressii v SSSR, 1919-1952 gody*, vol. 1. Moscow: Insan, 1993, p. 97.

17 December 1936. On 25 March 1938 GULag noted that these Kurds were banned from leaving the districts of Kazakhstan where they had been resettled. But, they did not have any special commandants to enforce this movement restrictions and thus escapes were high. Among recorded escapes were 196 (54 families) that fled Kazakhstan back to Azerbaijan in the summer of 1938.²⁰ A report by the NKVD of 23 April 1939 counted 3,101 (553 families) Kurds deported from Armenia and Azerbaijan living in Alma-Ata and South Kazakhstan oblasts. These Kurds were accused of “counterrevolutionary crimes”, smuggling “contraband” and “banditry.” They worked mostly in agriculture although some were employed in rubber factories.²¹ This first wave of deportations was characteristic of Soviet ethnic resettlements in the middle and late 1930s. It was partial and aimed at Kurdish populations in the border regions of the USSR.

The Kurds in Georgia were spared the 1937 internal deportations to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan that effected several thousand Kurds in Azerbaijan and Armenia. The Kurdish population in Georgia was overwhelmingly Sunni and concentrated in the border region with Turkey around Meskheta and Adjara. The Kurdish population in Georgia had grown from 7,955 in the 1926 census to 12,915 in the 1939 census.²² Most of the Kurdish population in Georgia would be forcibly resettled to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan in November 1944. But, a significant minority located away from the border with Turkey would be allowed to stay unmolested.

The Kurds along with the Meskheta Turks and Hemshins were not the first ethnic groups expelled from Georgia by the Stalin regime. Soviet ethnic cleansing of Georgia had already started in 1941 with the deportation of Soviet citizens of German national’nost’ in October 1941. The State Defense Committee ordered the deportation of these Germans with GKO Order 744 on 8 October 1941.²³ The forced removal of Germans in Georgia to northern Kazakhstan during the second half of this month gave the Georgian NKVD valuable experience in organizing such operations.²⁴ By 1 January 1942, a recorded total of 20,423 ethnic Germans had been evicted from Georgia using 12 train echelons out of a total of 799,459 internally deported Germans on 344 train echelons in the USSR during 1941.²⁵ This

²⁰ POBOL, N. P., POLIAN, P. M. (eds.), *Staliniskie deportatsii 1928-1953, Dokumenty*. Moscow: Materik, 2005, pp. 77-78.

²¹ POBOL and POLIAN, p. 77.

²² MOSAKI and AMOEV, p. 32.

²³ GARF f. 9479, o. 1, d. 83, l. 205.

²⁴ GARF f. 9479, o. 1, d. 86, ll. 77-87.

²⁵ GARF f. 9479, o. 1, d. 83, l. 203.

first massive war time resettlement significantly reduced the ethnic diversity of the European areas of the USSR including Georgia.

The Soviet state deported the ethnic Germans on purportedly prophylactic grounds to prevent them from collaborating with the advancing military forces of Nazi Germany. The Stalin regime accused the Volga Germans of awaiting for orders from Berlin to set off explosions.²⁶ This preventative justification for the forced removal of the ethnic Germans contrasts with the official reasons given for the deportation of the Karachays, Kalmyks, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, and Crimean Tatars. They were all accused of collaborating with the German occupation forces. Their internal deportations can thus be described as punitive even if the crimes for which they were collectively charged were spurious. The deportation of the Turks, Kurds, and Hemshins in contrast was proposed by Beria to Stalin as a way of strengthening the security of the Georgian border with Turkey. Beria explicitly accused the Turks, Kurds, and Hemshins of siding with Turkish intelligence agencies against the USSR.

On 24 July 1944, the head of the NKVD, Lavrenty Beria sent Stalin a report on the situation of the Muslim population of the border region of Georgia and Turkey which included Turks and Hemshins as well as Kurds. This report accused these populations which Beria viewed as a security threat to the USSR of acting on behalf of Turkish intelligence organs and other crimes. To solve this problem Beria recommended to Stalin in his capacity as head of the GKO (State Defense Committee) that these 16,700 households (86,000 people) be forcibly resettled to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. In their place he suggested be settled 7,000 households from kolkhozes with insufficient land in Georgia. I have reproduced an English language translation from the Russian below.

State Defense Committee-

24 July 44

Comrade Stalin, I. V.

In districts of the Georgian SSR, bordering with Turkey, live a Turkish population

For many years a significant part of this population, having connections with inhabitants in bordering regions of Turkey that were familial relations, displayed intentions to emigrate, were occupied in contraband smuggling and served Turkish intelligence organs as a source of recruiting espionage elements and planting bandit groups.

²⁶ RGASPI f. 17, o. 3, d. 1042, l. 112.

With the goal of improving the security of the state borders of the USSR in the section of the Georgian SSR, the NKVD USSR considers it expedient to resettle from Akhaltsikhsk, Adingensk, Aspindzsk, Akhalaksk, Bogdanovsk districts and several villages in Adzhar ASSR 16,700 households of Turks, Kurds, and Hemshins, total numbering 86,000 people, to regions in Kazakh, Uzbek, and Kyrgyz SSRs.

After the resettlement of the Turks it is considered expedient that to these districts be sent 7,000 household from kolkhozes having little land in other districts of Georgia SSR.

At the same time the NKVD in these sections of the borders will undertake special measures to strengthen the border regime.

This project is being presented for a resolution by the State Defense Committee, following your decision.

Measures will be coordinated with the TsK KP (b) Georgia and SNK Georgian SSR.

People's Commissar of Internal Affairs

Union of SSRs

L. Beria²⁷

This memo by Beria to Stalin soon led to a resolution by the State Defense Committee ordering the resettlement of the Turks, Kurds, and Hemshins from the regions of Georgia bordering the Turkish Republic. This resolution closely resembled the previous deportation orders dealing with Germans, Karachais, Kalmyks, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Crimean Tatars and others issued by the Soviet government during World War II.

The mechanics of physically removing the population from their homeland to Kazakhstan and Central Asia. State Defense Committee resolution No. 6279ss ordered the internal deportation of the Turks, Kurds, and Hemshins from the Georgian SSR to the Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Uzbek SSRs. The decree undertook to strengthen the security of the border of the Georgian SSR by forcibly resettling this population of an estimated 86,000. It allocated this distribution in the following manner: 40,000 to Kazakhstan, 30,000 to Uzbekistan, and 16,000 to Kyrgyzstan. The rest of the resolution allocated responsibility to various Soviet People's Commissariats, most notably the NKVD, for the round up, deportation, and resettlement of the Turks, Kurds, and Hemshins and the disposal of their

²⁷ GARF f. R-9401, o. 2, d. 66, l. 19.

property in Georgia. Each family was to be allowed to bring 1000 kilograms of domestic goods such as clothes, shoes, plates, agricultural implements, and food provisions. The Soviet government was to form commissions to assess the value of property remaining in Georgia such as grain, fowl, cattle, buildings, fruit trees, and other immovable assets and vouchers issued for redemption in Kazakhstan and Central Asia. The resolution assigned the provision of housing for the resettled Turks, Kurds, and Hemshins to the local republican authorities.²⁸ The NKVD began the implementation of this resolution five months later.

The internal deportation of the Meskhetian Turks, Kurds, and Hemshins from the border regions of Georgia took place between 15 and 25 November 1944. The NKVD rounded up these populations loaded them on train echelons and sent them to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.²⁹ This massive uprooting of the Muslim population from the Georgian border with Turkey cleared the territory of people the Soviet government suspected as being sympathetic to Turkey in the event of a military conflict. The only exception to this ethnic cleansing of Meskheta and Adzharia of Turks, Kurds, and Hemshins were women married to Russians, Georgians, and other reliable nationalities.³⁰ This ethnic cleansing resulted in the forced resettlement of almost all of the more than 80,000 Meskhetian Turks in the USSR, but less than a quarter of the Kurds in the Soviet Union. Kurds living in the interior of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan were spared deportation in 1944.

The Kurds were not the main target of the November 1944 deportations from the border regions of Georgia. Instead the Stalin regime targeted them and the Hemshins due to their perceived connections to Turkey and the larger nearby Meskhetian Turk population. The vast majority of Soviet figures dealing with the Turks, Kurds, and Hemshins groups these three national groups into a single cohort. For instance a report on “The Movement of Special Settlers from the Moment of their Resettlement to the Current Time Determines the Following Numerical Data” notes that the total number of Turks, Kurds, and Hemshins deported in 1944 came to 94,955 people. By 1 July 1948, this number had been reduced to 81,074 by the loss of 17,061 members of the cohort.³¹ The vast majority of these losses were deaths due to malnutrition, disease, and exposure.

The Kurds like other internal deportees in the USSR suffered greatly from cold, malnutrition, and typhus both during the transit from the Caucasus to Kazakhstan and Central

²⁸ GARF f. R-9401, o. 2, d. 66, ll. 20-21.

²⁹ BUGAY, Nikolay Fedorovitch. *Kurdskiy mir Rossii: Politiko-pravovaya praktika, integratsiya, ethnokul'turnoe vozrozhdenie (1917-2010-e-gody)*. St. Petersburg: Alteyya, 2012, pp. 163-165.

³⁰ BUGAY, N. F.; BROEV, T. M.; BROEV, R. M. *Sovetskie kurdy: vremya peremen*. Moscow: Kar, 1993, p. 75.

³¹ GARF F. R-9479, o. 1, d. 573, l. 286.

Asia and even more so after arriving in their new destinations. The official Soviet reports recorded 11.8% of the deported Turks, Kurds, and Hemshins perishing in the first four years after their resettlement. This mortality rate would have been much higher if it had not been for the emergency provision of thousands of tons of food to the special settlers by the Soviet government.³² These provisions sought to maintain the special settlers as a viable work force, especially in rural areas of Kazakhstan and Central Asia.

Dividing out the specifically Kurdish component from this cohort is not always easy due to the manner of Soviet record keeping generally not distinguishing the numerical breakdown of Turks, Kurds, and Hemshins. However, there are some exceptions and a limited amount specific demographic data on the deported Kurds can be found. This is not surprising given that Kurds constituted less than 10% of the 94,955 Muslims deported from Georgia, the vast majority being Meskhetian Turks and Azerbaijanis. Kurds totaled 8,694 of these deportees and Hemshins only 1,385.³³ The number of Kurds deported from Georgia in 1944 in addition to being a small minority of the total resettled during that particular operation is also a distinct minority of the total Kurdish population still remaining in the Caucasus at the time, less than a quarter. It did, however, constitute a significant majority of the Kurds living in Georgia at the time. The geographical location of the deported Kurds along the Turkish border and their historical connections to their Turkish neighbors proved to be the deciding factors in the decision to forcibly resettle them as special settlers in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.

The Soviet NKVD placed the Kurds deported from Georgia in November 1944 under special settlement restrictions in their places of internal exile in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. These legal restrictions had been evolving in the USSR since their initial creation as an innovative system to deal with the mass deportation of farmers branded as “kulaks” in the early 1930s and the lack of infrastructure for corrective labor camps and colonies to accommodate them. The initial special settlements for internally deported “kulaks” consisted of actual isolated settlements first in the Far North and Urals and later Kazakhstan and Siberia. These isolated villages formed an archipelago to use Lynn Viola’s expansion of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s metaphor for the GULag corrective labor camps.³⁴ The 1940s saw a clear shift in the special settler population from deportees designated as class enemies such as

³² BUGAY, N. F.; BROEV, T. M.; BROEV, R. M., pp. 84-85.

³³ BUGAY, Nikolay Fyodorovitch. *L. Beriia-I. Stalinu: “Soglasno Vashemu ukazaniyu...”*. Moscow: AIRO – XX, 1995, pp. 169-170.

³⁴ LYNNE, Viola. The Other Archipelago: Kulak Deportations to the North in 1930. *Slavic Review*, vol. 60, no. 4 (Winter, 2001), pp. 730-755.

the “kulaks” to those classified as internal enemy or treasonous nationalities. It also marked a shift in the special settlers from being people confined to special settlements to people living under special settlement restrictions in confined to particular villages where the population consisted of a mix of special settlers and free Soviet citizens. The decisive change in the character of special settlers in both of these aspects occurred in fall 1941 with the mass forced relocation of Soviet citizens of German national’nost’ from European areas of the USSR, particularly the Volga region, Crimea, northern Caucasus, eastern Ukraine, and Trans-Caucasus to Siberia and Kazakhstan. This pattern continued with the later internal deportations of the Karachays in November 1943, Kalmyks in December 1943, Chechens and Ingush in February 1944, Balkars in March 1944, Crimean Tatars in May 1944, and finally the Meskhetian Turks, Kurds, and Hemshins in November 1944. It is following these deportations that the special settlement restrictions become codified into a few pieces of standardized legislation rather than a mass of ad hoc decrees and circulars. Resolution No. 35 which is translated from Russian into English below set forth the legal status of all special settlers in the USSR in a single page. It specifically notes the legal disabilities that distinguished them from other Soviet citizens and marked them as a defined class of people with inferior rights compared to the majority of the population of the USSR. The condemnation of millions of people to this status based upon their national’nost’ clearly violated the 1936 Soviet constitution which prohibited both collective punishment and discrimination based upon national’nost’.

Council of People's Commissariats Union of SSRs

Resolution No. 35

From 8 January 1945

Moscow, Kremlin

On the legal situation of special settlers

Council of Peoples Commissariats Union of SSRs RESOLVES:

- 1. Special settlers enjoy all rights of citizens of the USSR, with the exception of restrictions, provided for in the present Resolution.*
- 2. All able bodied special settlers are obliged to be engaged in socially useful labor.*

Towards this goal local Soviets of workers deputies in coordination with organs of the NKVD are to organize labor arrangements of the

special settlers in agriculture, industrial enterprises, construction, and economic cooperative organizations and institutions.

The violation of labor discipline by special settlers is subject to punishment according to existing laws.

3. Special settlers do not have the right without the authorization of the NKVD special commandant to be absent from the boundaries of the region of settlement served by their special commandant.

Voluntary absence from the boundaries of the region of settlement, served by the special commandant, will be viewed as flight and treated as a criminal matter.

4. Special settlers – heads of families or people substituting for them are required within a three day period to report to the special commandant of the NKVD all events that change the composition of the family (birth of a child, death of a family member, flight, etc.).

5. Special settlers are obliged to strictly observe the established regime and social order of the places of settlement and obey all orders of the special commandant of the NKVD.

The violation of the regime and social order in the places of settlement by special settlers is subject to administrative sanction in the form of a fine up to 100 rubles or arrest up to five days.

Deputy Chairman

Council of Peoples Commissariats Union of SSRs V. Molotov

Administrative Affairs

Council of Peoples Commissariats Union of SSRs Ia. Chadaev³⁵

The restrictions on special settlers, particularly those belonging to those deported on the basis of their nationality got considerably stricter in 1948. Acting in response to escapes by special settlers, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR issued an Ukaz making the resettlement of internally deported nationalities permanent and flight punishable by 20 years of hard labor. Free citizens assisting members of deported nationalities to return to their previous areas of settlement faced five years of imprisonment. Kurds are not mentioned in this decree. But, an

³⁵ ZEMSKOV, Viktor Nikolaevitch. *Spetsposelentsy v SSSR*. Moscow: Nauka, 2005, pp. 120-121.

MVD circular of 22 December 1948 does specifically mention Kurds as being subjected to all the restrictions included in the Ukaz.³⁶ The creation of a permanent class of citizens with restricted rights due to their ethnicity in the USSR represented the creation of a system of discrimination with many similarities to apartheid in South Africa.³⁷

UKAZ

PRESIDIUM of the SUPREME SOVIET of the USSR

On the criminal responsibilities for flight from places of obligatory and decreed settlement of people exiled to distant regions of the Soviet Union in the period of the Fatherland War.

With the goal of strengthening the regime of settlement for those exiled by Supreme organs of the USSR in the period of the Fatherland War Chechens, Karachais, Ingush, Balkars, Kalmyks, Germans, Crimean Tatars and others, that at the time of their resettlement there was not a specified length of their exile, establishes that those resettled to distant regions of the Soviet Union by decrees of people in the high leadership are exiled forever, without the right to return to their previous places of residence.

For the voluntary leaving (flight) from places of obligatory settlement those exiles that are guilty will be subject to being prosecuted for criminal acts. It is determined that the punishment for this crime is 20 years of hard labor.

Cases related to the flight of exiles will be reviewed by Special Boards of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR.

People, guilty of harboring exiles, fleeing from places of obligatory settlement, or assisting their flight, giving permission for exiles to return to their places of previous residence, and rendering them help in accommodations in their places of previous residence, are subject to criminal penalties. It is determined that the sentence for this crime is deprivation of freedom for a period of five years

Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR

N. SHVERNIK

Secretary of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR

A. GORKIN

Moscow, Kremlin

26 November 1948³⁸

³⁶ BUGAI, BROEV, and BROEV, pp. 87-88.

³⁷ POHL, J. Otto. Soviet apartheid: Stalin's ethnic deportations, special settlement restrictions, and the labor army: The case of the ethnic Germans in the USSR. *Human Rights Review*, 2012, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 205-224.

³⁸ ZEMSKOV, p. 160.

These severe legal restrictions remained on the deported Kurds for eleven years. The Kurds deported from Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1937 came under these restrictions at the same time. In Kyrgyzstan this contingent numbered 812 in 1944.³⁹ The legal distinctions between these two groups of deported Kurds in Central Asia ended at this time.

The end of the special settlement regime and the partial restoration of legal rights to the Kurds and other deported peoples in the USSR took place several years after Stalin's death on 5 March 1953. Between December 1955 and July 1956, the Soviet government systematically ended the special settlement regime in regards to most of the nationalities internally deported during World War II. First, the Germans, then the Kalmyks, followed by the Crimean Tatars, Turks, Kurds, Hemshins, and Balkars, and finally the Karachais, Chechens, and Ingush.⁴⁰ The Soviet government released the Kurds along with the Meskehtian Turks, Crimean Tatars, and Balkars from special settlement restrictions on 28 April 1956. Supreme Soviet issued Resolution No. 136/142 "On Lifting the Restrictions of Special Settlement from Crimean Tatars, Balkars, Turks – Citizens of the USSR, Kurds, Hemshins and members of their families, exiled in the period of the Great Fatherland War" on this date. As a result of this resolution the deported Kurds no longer had to report to special commandants and could move around Kazakhstan and Central Asia. However, it specifically banned the former special settlers from returning to the territories from which they had been forcibly resettled or seeking any compensation for lost property.⁴¹ This partial restoration of their previous rights allowed the Kurds in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan to begin the process of integrating into the local economies and societies of these regions.

Conclusion

The Soviet policies towards the Kurds from 1917 to 1956 were characterized by ambiguity, geographical differentiation, and sudden movements towards repression and forced resettlement for a significant minority of the population in 1937 and again in 1944. Part of this fragmentation of policy has to do with the differences in interests and policies of republican governments in Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. But, the swings towards repressive resettlement have to do with general Soviet trends of repression against diaspora groups and geopolitical tensions with neighboring states such as Turkey and Iran. The Kurds

³⁹ BUGAI, BROEV, and BROEV, p. 80.

⁴⁰ ZEMSKOV, p. 251 and BUGAY, N. F. *Iosif Stalin-Lavrentiyu Berii: «Ikh nado deportirovat'...»: dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii*. Moscow: Druzhba Narodov, 1992, pp. 270-275.

⁴¹ BUGAI 1992, p. 273.

as a diaspora group in the USSR without a recognized autonomous national territory either within its borders or outside it were in an unusual position. The lack of an external state, however, in some ways protected them from the much more thorough and repressive treatment meted out to ethnic Germans, Poles, and Finns. On a continuum the Kurds come closest to resembling the Greeks in a middle position between the Germans on the most repressive end and Jews on the least regarding the Soviet treatment of significant diaspora groups within the USSR.

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