

**"PUNISHED PEOPLES"
OF THE SOVIET UNION**

**THE CONTINUING LEGACY OF STALIN'S
DEPORTATIONS**

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September 1991

A Helsinki Watch Report

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Note: Nationalities are presented in order of 1989 census population.

Preface

Information for this report was gathered during a fact-finding mission to the Soviet Union conducted from June 15 to July 8, 1991, conducted for Helsinki Watch by James Critchlow. Mr. Critchlow, fellow of the Harvard University Russian Research Center, was asked to examine the present situation of the various Soviet ethnic groups deported as entire peoples from their homelands in Stalin's day. The scope of the investigation was limited to ten groups that had been deported in entirety: Germans, Chechens, Koreans, Crimean Tatars, Ingush, Meskhetian Turks, Kalmyks, Karachays, Kurds, Balkars (listed here in order of population size, as recorded in the 1989 census). We have not included in this report groups that were only partially deported, such as the Balts, Western Ukrainians, Poles and Finns, even though large numbers suffered and the injustice was grave. Some borderline cases also were omitted, e.g. the Bulgarians and Greeks deported from the Crimea, or the Khemshins (Armenian Muslims, sometimes known as Khemshils) deported from Georgia, in order to keep the project to manageable size. Exclusion from this report of any group should not be interpreted as a judgment on its grievances or claims. It is hoped that the present report will serve as a basis for further investigations of the plight of the punished peoples to which others can be added in the future.

Mr. Critchlow visited five Soviet republics and spoke with representatives of various deported peoples. The schedule included:

- In Kazakhstan, meetings with Germans, Koreans and Kurds.**
- In Azerbaijan, a visit to Meskhetian Turkish refugees living on a collective farm south of Baku.**
- In Kharkov, Ukraine, attendance at a seminar on "Nationality Problems and Human Rights" organized by Larissa Bogoraz and other human-rights activists, at which information was obtained about the situation of different nationalities.**
- In the Crimea, a visit to a Tatar squatter settlement near Simferopol, and attendance at the first *kurultay* (Congress) held by the Crimean Tatars in seventy-three years.**
- In Moscow, attendance at the First Congress of Repressed Peoples of the RSFSR (Russian Republic) and meetings with Germans, Chechens, Ingush, Karachays, and Balkars.**

It was possible to meet with all of the groups included in the investigation except the Kalmyks: their center around the city of Elista in southern Russia was too inaccessible to be

reached during this visit to the Soviet Union, and there were no Kalmyks present at the various events attended. For the section on Kalmyks, we have relied on second-hand sources.

This report is intended to focus attention on the present situation of the nationalities and the status of their ongoing struggle for national autonomy and territorial rights. It was undertaken because Helsinki Watch is committed to the principle that grave abuses of human rights, even if committed long ago, should be disclosed and acknowledged; because the suffering caused by the abuses that victimized the punished peoples continues today; and because we believe that the present Soviet government, or the successor to the government that abused these peoples, owes them an accounting and good faith efforts to redress their grievances. The report consists of these sections: general background, separate reports on individual nationalities (listed in order of 1989 population size), and general conclusions.

Introduction and Summary

This report examines the present situation of ten Soviet peoples who suffered mass national deportation from their homelands under Stalin--mainly to the Soviet republics of Central Asia. Today, these ten peoples have a combined census population of just under five million. Not one of these nationalities--or its members--has ever received just compensation for the harm done to it. Moreover, successive Soviet governments since Stalin have been reticent about disclosing and acknowledging the injustice done to these peoples, or their innocence of wrongdoing.

Typically, the deportations took place without notice. Everyone of the designated nationality--men, women, the elderly, the sick, the disabled--was included. Some would take along the possessions that they could collect in a few minutes and carry in their hands; others were permitted to take nothing. Soldiers carrying automatic weapons herded them first into trucks and then into railroad box cars for journeys that took from several days to a few weeks to remote parts of Central Asia. There they were unloaded and left to fend for themselves with scant resources. Scores of thousands died during the journey. An even larger number perished from hunger, cold or disease in the forlorn places to which they were exiled. Ostensibly, most of the deportations were carried out because these peoples had betrayed their country at a time of great danger during the German invasion. Yet the evidence suggests that, by and large, the nationalities that were punished in this way had acted as loyally in defending their country as any other citizens of the Soviet Union; indeed, many had died resisting the invasion. In any circumstances, the ascription of collective guilt and punishment by reason of ethnic affiliation was a great crime from which its victims still suffer.

While the nationalities share a common grievance, each has its own set of specific problems. Five have no national homeland in a country where territorial autonomy is the traditional corner-stone of national existence.

The largest of these nationalities, the Soviet Germans, now numbers in excess of two million members, many of them descended from settlers who came to Russia more than two centuries ago. At one time, the main aspiration of the Germans was to be allowed to emigrate to Germany. Today, however, they accept that for most of them emigration to Germany may be a faroff dream, given the difficulties now faced by that country in absorbing new population. In a recent Moscow speech, German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher declared: "I wish to stress that the FRG has an interest in the Germans' staying here in the Soviet Union." Accordingly, the Germans are now concentrating on a demand for restoration of the national territorial autonomy that they enjoyed before deportation. The Soviet government, although it has now ceased arresting German activists and adopted a more conciliatory stance, has so far given little encouragement that this demand will be met. The Germans also charge that, despite *pro forma* rehabilitation, the failure of the regime to state loudly to the Soviet public their innocence of the crimes charged under Stalin exposes them to continuing social abuse.

The Crimean Tatars have made some gains in the past few years in their decades-old struggle to return to their homeland of centuries. Approximately one-third of their population is now back in the Crimea, but most of the returnees suffer continuing hardships due to persisting official and public harassment. Most of the Crimean Tatars, still forced to live in Central Asia, face barriers to their return

caused largely by official hostility or indifference. Ironically, "democratization" of the Crimea is strengthening the hand of the Slavic majority who oppose restoration of the rights which the Tatars lost at the time of their brutal deportation; there is no constitutional mechanism in the Soviet Union to permit them to regain their rights.

The Meskhetian Turks, who underwent a "second deportation" in 1989 after becoming victims of ethnic violence in Central Asia, their home in exile, are also jeopardized by recent changes in the Soviet system. The government of their former Georgian homeland, which has now proclaimed its independence, is using force to prevent their free return. Many Meskhetians are living in tents or other temporary homes, scattered around various republics.

Soviet Kurds have been driven out of many of the Soviet republics in which they found refuge after their 1937 deportation from the Caucasus. Their spokesmen say they are now welcome only in Kazakhstan, leaving them at the mercy of a sudden change in that republic's policy. Moreover, given the poor situation of Kurds in other countries, emigration is no option for the Soviet Kurds.

Soviet Koreans, of whom there are now about half a million, have fared relatively well since restriction of their rights was lifted after Stalin's death, but at the price of assimilation to Russian culture. They now seek state assistance with the creation of Korean schools and other cultural facilities. It has also been reported that Koreans who attempt to return to their former homes in the Soviet Far East have encountered obstacles posed by the local authorities.

The five remaining groups are those exonerated by Khrushchev in his "secret" anti-Stalin speech in 1956. They were allowed to return within a few years to their homelands, but their readjustment has been difficult and incomplete. Of the five, the Buddhist Kalmyks seem to have made a relatively tranquil transition back to life in their southern Russian steppeland. (This judgment is based on indirect evidence; the Kalmyks were the only group whose representatives could not be interviewed for this report.) The other four in this "Khrushchev" category are Muslim mountain peoples, ranging in size from the million-strong Chechens to the Ingush to the Karachays to the Balkars, the last numbering fewer than one hundred thousand. Today, more than thirty years after their return, they report continuing suffering caused by their deportation, notably the encroachment of other nationalities during their absence. The Ingush have been given back only half the territory taken from them. The Karachays and Balkars are forced to share their autonomy with other, never-deported nationalities in what they regard as an uneven and unfair situation. The Chechens, most of whom live below the poverty line, have to roam the USSR in search of seasonal employment, a second exile. (Chechens deported from the Daghestan ASSR have never been allowed to resettle there.) All of these peoples feel badly treated by officials of other nationalities who became entrenched in the power structure while they were away in exile.

The struggle for justice which has been waged for years by these nationalities, and by others on their behalf, is complicated by the devolution of power from Moscow to the Soviet republics. Although the Soviet government has continuing responsibility for the crimes committed under Stalin, its present political paralysis hampers its ability to take action, even if there were a will to do so. (Representatives of the deported peoples say that recent legislative acts passed in their behalf by the USSR Supreme Soviet have remained largely without practical implementation. In some cases, they suspect that government efforts to help them organize are in reality aimed at thwarting their own efforts at self-help.)

Nationalities seeking assistance from the Russian republic were cautiously optimistic about Boris Yeltsin's future role. At the same time, some of the newly-sovereign republics -- especially Georgia in the

case of the Meskhetians -- are openly hostile to their claims and aspirations. This new situation is a difficult challenge to the global human rights movement.

Whatever the constraints on the central government, there is still much that it can do. First, it can abolish the propiska (residence permit) system that restricts one's legal residence to a specific location. Without express governmental permission and the appropriate passport stamp, members of the punished peoples (or anyone else for that matter) are forbidden from residing or finding work in their location of choice. This system has traditionally served as a powerful tool of coercive social control. In recent years, it has been justified as necessary to prevent a flood of migrants to popular cities ill-equipped to house or employ them. This rationale is a relic of the centrally planned economy, and does not have sufficient merit to offset the serious restriction on civil liberties that results from the propiska system. This restriction violates Soviet obligations under international law, in particular under article 12 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights. Eliminating the propiska system would fulfill Soviet obligations under international law, and would be a service to the punished peoples and to all the people of the Soviet Union.

Second, the central government should insure that the Soviet public is better informed about the guiltlessness of these peoples, and the appalling injustice done to them. The government still has controlling influence over important segments of the Soviet media. The fact is that the "rehabilitations" took place with minimal publicity, announced only in obscure official journals without mass readership. Soviet leaders have avoided touching on the problem in their speeches.

Long after World War II, the United States adopted legislation that provided an apology and compensation to the more than 120,000 Japanese Americans who were exiled during World War II from the West Coast and interred for up to four years.

The exclusion and internment of the Japanese Americans is now widely acknowledged to be among the greatest violations of civil liberties in the history of the United States. The principal motive was fear that the Japanese-Americans would side with the enemy and betray their country during an invasion. In the Soviet case, even that explanation does not apply, since the deportations were carried out after the Germans had retreated from the area. There is a similarity between the two cases, however, in that there was little or no evidence of disloyalty by the Japanese-Americans; and the criteria for exclusion and possible internment was ethnic identity. They differed from the deportations in the Soviet Union in the manner in which they were carried out. Some compensation was paid to them in the 1940s for the property that was confiscated, though the amounts were trivial in comparison to their actual losses. More important, the privations and deaths suffered by the peoples who were deported in the Soviet Union had no counterpart in the United States.

In the view of Helsinki Watch, the apology and compensation that the United States eventually provided to the Japanese-Americans is the minimum that is required when such great crimes are committed. The deported peoples in the Soviet Union are also entitled to a full public accounting of everything that can be discovered about what was done to them: why it was done; by whom it was done; how it was done; and at what cost to the victims. Also, at the minimum, the Soviet government should do everything within its power to redress this wrong by creating a more favorable climate for the efforts of the deported peoples in their own behalf and by assisting them in reclaiming their homelands to the extent that this can be done without creating new groups of victims among those who have subsequently settled in these lands.

Meanwhile, these nationalities are still "the punished peoples," as the historian Aleksandr Nekrich called them years ago.

Table 1 lists the Soviet nationalities discussed in this report with their total populations (all parts of the Soviet Union) as recorded in the 1989 census. It should be noted that some of the groups have challenged the census as understating their population.

Table 1. 1989 Populations of Selected Deported Nationalities

Germans	2,039,000	
Chechens	957,000	
Koreans	439,000	
Crimean Tatars	272,000	
Ingush	237,000	
Meskhethian Turks*	208,000	
Kalmyks	174,000	
Karachays	156,000	
Kurds	153,000	
Balkars		85,000

Source: Narodnoe khozaystvo SSSR v 1989 g., Moscow 1990, pp. 31-32.

The Deported Peoples

Joseph Stalin's death on March 5, 1953 and Nikita Khrushchev's subsequent criticism of him in a "secret speech" at the Party congress in February 1956 began a process of reviewing punitive actions taken by the Soviet regime against certain nationalities which had been collective targets of repression in the 1930s and 1940s. In his speech, Khrushchev mentioned ethnic groups which had been deported from their ancestral homelands in the northern Caucasus and southern Russia region: Karachays, Kalmyks, Chechens, Ingush, and Balkars. He passed over in silence other nationalities which had suffered a similar fate, among them indigenous Tatars from the Crimea; Germans from the Volga region and other European districts of the country; Meskhetian Turks and Kurds from the Transcaucasus; Koreans from the Far East. (These actions were notable in that they were directed against *all* members of the given nationality.)

Typically, settlements inhabited by the groups earmarked for deportation were surrounded by troops of the NKVD, forerunner of the KGB. The victims were taken by surprise: in the case of the Chechens, the deportations took place on Red Army Day, February 23, 1944, as many were attending commemorative meetings.¹ At gunpoint, whole families were given fifteen to twenty minutes to pack their belongings, then taken by truck to waiting railroad cars. Territorial institutions which had been created in the names of the various subject nationalities (e.g. the Crimean Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, or the Volga German Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic) were simply abolished.

Post-Stalinist Soviet governments have admitted, but with minimal publicity, that these actions were illegal and morally wrong.

The reasons for the actions are obscure. In some cases the nationalities subjected to repression were publicly accused of treason and other crimes against the Soviet state, particularly collaboration with the German invaders during World War II. Thus, the Volga Germans were charged with harboring "thousands and tens of thousands of wreckers and spies," a charge which has long since been disproved.² In some other cases, no justification was given. Even where a reason was offered, as for those charged with collective guilt for wartime collaboration with the enemy, there was a lack of logic. For example, if it was true that some members of the nationality had aided the Germans, many others had fought heroically against them and been decorated for their actions; those heroes, too, lost their homes and were sent into exile on their return from the front. Moreover, all other nationalities, including the Russians, had also had their collaborators, often on a proportionally larger scale than the accused nationalities, but were not subjected to collective repression. Some of the deported nationalities had had little or no contact with the Germans.

¹ Alexandr M. Nekrich, *The Punished Peoples*, New York (W.W. Norton) 1978, p. 58.

² A. N. Kishikhin, "Sovetskie nemtsy: otkuda, kuda i pochemu?", *Voennoistoricheskiy zhurnal*, No. 9, 1990, pp. 33-34 (cited in Vera Tolz, "New Information About the Deportation of Ethnic Groups under Stalin," *Radio Liberty Report on the USSR*, April 26, 1991).

If there is a consistent explanation, it appears to lie in a paranoid fear on Stalin's part of future "fifth columns" that might undermine the security of the Soviet state on behalf of foreign powers. Thus, Koreans settled in the Soviet Far East were deported to Central Asia, far from their Korean homeland. The Meskhetian Turks not only had not collaborated with the Germans but had had no contact with them. Evidence has now come to light that the head of the NKVD, Lavrentiy P. Beria, playing on Stalin's fears, suggested some of the peoples to be deported. Thus, he wrote to Stalin branding the Meskhetian Turks as associates of Turkish intelligence.³ Stalin was apparently persuaded that the presence of a Turkic minority near his border with Turkey could undermine his future plans to put pressure on that country.⁴

The deportees were taken by their guards to destinations in the underdeveloped and sparsely-settled Soviet republics of the Central Asian region, especially Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, and also to Siberia. Conditions of deportation were harsh. Men, women and children were transported into exile in unheated railroad cattle cars, traveling for days with little or no food and water. Table 2 shows data which have recently come to light on presumed deaths in transit of the Crimean Tatars, Balkars and Kalmyks.

Deaths in Transit of Selected Deported Nationalities

	Total Deported	Presumed Deaths in Transit
Crimean Tatars	191,044	7,889 (5%)
Balkars	40,900	3,494 (8%)
Kalmyks	93,139	1,220(1.3%)

Source: Vera Tolz, "New Information." The author has calculated the number of deaths from recently released Soviet archival data on the numbers deported and the number who actually arrived. These official figures tend to be lower than estimates made by representatives of the peoples in question; the late Academician Andrey Sakharov found a Crimean Tatar estimate of 46 percent losses to be reasonable.

On arrival, the deportee groups were broken up and dispersed among remote areas of "special settlement," places in which they were kept under strict surveillance by the authorities and forbidden to leave, even to visit relatives exiled to nearby settlements elsewhere in the region. In November 1948, long after the end of World War II, the special settlement regime was made even more stringent, with the Germans, Karachays, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Kalmyks, Crimean Tatars, Crimean Bulgarians, Crimean

³ Vera Tolz, "New Information" *and Kommunist* No. 3, 1991, p. 110.

⁴ Robert Conquest, "Russia's Meskhetians--A Lost People," *The Times* (London), August 5, 1970 and Conquest, *The Nation Killers*; London (Macmillan) 1970, pp. 48-49 and 197; also, Anne Sheehy, "The Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans and Meskhetians: Soviet Treatment of Some National Minorities," *Minority Rights Group Report No. 6* (London) 1973, p. 31. These sources are cited in S. Enders Wimbush and Ronald Wixman, "The Meskhetian Turks: A New Voice in Soviet Central Asia," *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, Vol. XVII, Nos. 2 and 3 (1975), pp. 323-24.

Armenians, Turks, Kurds and Khemshins sentenced to remain in them for life.⁵

Table 3 shows the number of people of certain nationalities who died between the time of deportation and a re-registration held in 1949, some five years later.

Table 3. Deaths Prior to 1949

	Deaths	As Percentage of Deportees
Deportees from the Northern Caucasus (Chechens, Ingush, Karachay, Balkars)	144,704	24.7
Deportees from the Crimea	44,125	19.3
Deportees from Georgia	14,895	15.7
Kalmyks	16,017	17.3

Source: Tolz, "New Information"

Although Khrushchev had publicly exonerated only a few of the deported peoples in his 1956 speech, the event marked for all of them the beginning of a long and tortuous struggle to regain their national rights. With varying degrees of difficulty and delay, they have been able in the ensuing years to wrest certain forms of redress from a sluggish and generally reluctant Soviet bureaucracy. Today, all those who were publicly charged in Stalin's day with the collective commission of crimes have been exonerated, at least *pro forma*, by the government. (Among these were a USSR Supreme Soviet declaration "On Recognition of the Illegality and Criminality of Repressive Acts Against Peoples Subjected to Forcible Deportation and on the Observance of Their Rights" and, in the case of the Germans and Crimean Tatars, a Supreme Soviet decree that appeared a few days later calling on the Soviet government to assist them in restoration of their rights.⁶ When Helsinki Watch visited during the summer of 1991, nationalities located on the territory of the RSFSR were speaking excitedly of a decree passed April 26, 1991 by that republic's Supreme Soviet, which apparently has more credibility than the All-Union body.)

⁵ Tolz, "New Information."

⁶ *Vedomosti s'yezda narodnykh deputatov SSSR i Verhovnogo Soveta SSSR*, No. 23 (Nov. 15, 1989) and No. 25 (Nov. 29, 1989).

Of the exonerated nationalities, some but not all have had their territories restored as national administrative units, although not always to the full extent to which they had previously existed, and have been allowed to return legally to their homelands. In other cases--most egregiously those of the Volga Germans and Crimean Tatars--restoration of territorial autonomy was denied. As a result, national groups have had to campaign for their rights, often in defiance of authority. Long before glasnost, the Crimean Tatars--with the courageous support of public figures like Academician Andrey Sakharov and Major-General Pyotr G. Grigorenko--were pioneers in agitating publicly for return to full status, through samizdat, demonstrations, aggressive approaches to Soviet officials, and illegal migration. In the course of this campaign, many suffered arrest and imprisonment. In the latter Gorbachev period, official repression of those involved in such acts of defiance has subsided, but many are still fighting for satisfaction of their demands. Some, especially the Volga Germans, the Crimean Tatars, the Meskhetian Turks, and the Soviet Kurds, remain unwelcome in their traditional homelands, so that many still have to live as refugees in other Soviet republics. The practice of local authorities of denying *propiska*, registration of residence, means that many cannot find legal employment. In no known case have any of these victims of deportation received material compensation for the injustices which they suffered, including loss of family members and homes. (Members of these groups who were interviewed by Helsinki Watch in the Soviet Union during June-July 1991 frequently cited legislation passed by the U.S. Congress to compensate Japanese-Americans deported after Pearl Harbor; they felt that they should receive similar assistance from the Soviet authorities.)

Germans

Who are we Russian Germans? Are we eternal wanderers? I don't know a single family of Russian Germans where father and son were born in the same place. Take my case: my great-grandfather was born in East Prussia, my grandfather on the outskirts of Warsaw, my father in Zhitomir (in the Ukraine) and I was born in Kazakhstan. My children were born in Uzbekistan and now I live in Moscow. Where will my grandchildren be born? Where is the place on earth where the endless hounding of Russian Germans will stop?

--Interview by Helsinki Watch

conducted in Moscow, July, 1991

The Soviet Germans, predominantly descended from eighteenth-century settlers in the Volga region, are the most numerous of the deported groups, with a population of 2,039,000 in the 1989 census. They were one of the nationalities passed over in silence by Khrushchev when he condemned Stalin's deportations of other groups at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956. They did not have their civil rights restored until eight years later, by a decree of August 29, 1964, and their autonomous Volga republic has never been re-established. By all accounts, the ultimate goal of the Soviet Germans is to emigrate to Germany, even though many of them are descended from immigrants who came to Russia two centuries ago. In 1990, 150,000 succeeded in emigrating. However, it is now the policy of the German government to encourage Soviet Germans to remain in the USSR. Until Germany, now absorbed by the difficulty of integrating its western and eastern halves, is able to receive them, they seek restitution of the autonomous territorial status that was taken away from them in 1941.

Deportation

The Volga Germans and others of that nationality (there were a total of 1.4 million on the eve of the war) were deported soon after Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union. The deportations came in waves in August 1941: the Volga Germans, the Germans of the Crimea, the Germans of the Caucasus; the Germans in the Western part of the USSR were already in the path of Hitler's advancing armies, but Soviet Germans who were caught in Leningrad during the siege were deported to Siberia as soon as it was lifted in January 1944, despite having stayed on the Soviet side under the harshest of conditions.

A decree dated August 28, 1941 charged that "according to trustworthy" information there were "thousands and tens of thousands of diversionists and spies who on a signal being given from Germany are to carry out sabotage in the area inhabited by the Germans of the Volga." With a fine totalitarian logic, the decree went on to accuse all the Volga Germans with complicity, since "none" had reported the existence of this hostile network. Therefore, the decree explained, it was "necessary to transfer the whole of the German population living in the Volga area into other areas." A later decree (of September 7) ceded the territory of the Volga German republic to the Saratov and Stalingrad provinces. The areas to which the

Germans were exiled were for the most part in the Central Asian republics, Kazakhstan and Siberia.⁷

In fact, before the deportation many Soviet Germans had fought heroically in the ranks of the Red Army against the Nazi invaders. Aleksandr Fitz lists names of Germans who were killed early in the war while defending the Brest fortress, which held out for three months after being surrounded by invaders. He also recalls that on August 24, 1941, just four days before the deportation decree, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* wrote about the tragic fate of an heroic Red Army soldier of German nationality, Genrikh Gofman (Heinrich Hoffman), who fell into German captivity after being badly wounded. Although horribly tortured by his captors, Gofman steadfastly refused to give them information. When the Red Army regained the position where he was held, they found that the Germans had arranged pieces of his body in the shape of a star, with his Komsomol membership card pinned to his heart.⁸

At war's end a second group was in effect deported: some quarter-million ethnic Germans in the territory occupied by the Reich had been taken from their Soviet homes, mainly in the Ukraine, and transported out of the USSR. They were returned to Soviet control by the Americans and British.⁹ A recent Soviet source reveals that of this group 120,192 were then deported into internal exile between 1945 and 1948, making the Germans the largest deported group.¹⁰ That number presumably does not include Germans sentenced to labor camps.

Historical Background

Mass German settlement in Russia dates back more than two centuries to the German-born Catherine the Great, who encouraged German farmers to migrate to the Volga region by offering them land and other advantages, including exemption from military service. For generations, the Volga Germans lived in their own villages, islands of German language and culture, but with little direct contact with their former homeland. The group suffered occasionally from official arbitrariness. Under Alexander II they lost their privileges, becoming increasingly subject to Russification and other pressures, which caused many to emigrate to new homes in North and South America.

⁷ See Nekrich, *Punished Peoples and Conquest, Nation Killers*.

⁸ Aleksandr Fitz, *Bol' v nasledstvo* (Hereditary Anguish), Tashkent ("Yash Gvardiya") 1990, p. 30.

⁹ Sidney Heitman, *The Soviet Germans in the USSR Today*, Cologne (Berichte des Bundesinstituts fuer ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien) 1980, pp. 12-13. Helsinki Watch is indebted to Professor Heitman for his kindness in sending the author a copy of his study and for permission to quote from it in this report.

¹⁰ V. N. Zemskov, "Spetsposelentsy (po dokumentatsii NKVD-MVD SSSR)," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, No. 11, 1990, pp. 3-17, cited in V. Tolz, "New Information about the Deportation of Ethnic Groups under Stalin," *Radio Liberty Report on the USSR*, April 26, 1991, p. 19.

In 1916, during World War I, a law against "German dominance" was prepared which called for an expulsion of the Germans from the Volga region to take place in April 1917. Only the Tsar's abdication saved them from that fate. The Volga German Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was established in February 1924 with a population that was two-thirds German, the rest being mainly Russians or Ukrainians.¹¹

The Volga group were not the only Russian Germans: between 1763 and 1862, in the words of Professor Sidney Heitman, "some 100,000 settlers arrived from various parts of Germany and founded more than 3,000 colonies in European Russia, in Siberia and in the Caucasus."¹² Many settlers came to Russia from the German states as individuals, lured by the open spaces and employment opportunities; many had professional, administrative, craft or business skills and settled in cities. (Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, completed in 1830, includes a routine glimpse of a "meticulous German," a St. Petersburg baker poking his head through a transom. A further sign of German influence: the transom is called by Pushkin a "vasisdas," a Russian word derived from the German "was ist das?"). Russia's heavily Germanic Baltic provinces and other German-populated territories annexed to the Empire were also a source of migrants for other parts of the country. The propensity of the Romanov dynasty for intermarriage with members of the German nobility, as in the case of Catherine, helped to foster a climate that was favorable to German immigration but also, in circles hostile to the monarchy, to spawn anti-German feelings.

Next to the Germans of the Volga, the most important grouping were those who settled in the Ukraine and other southerly parts of the Empire, the "Black Sea" or "Ukrainian" Germans.

"By the decade of the 1960s," Professor Heitman writes, "the vicissitudes of war had merged all of the small vestigial groups into one or the other of the two major groups--the Volga Germans and the Black Sea Germans, who retained their historic and cultural distinctions down to the present time." He adds that the differences between these two groups reflect important "subjective distinctions among the Germans themselves."

Exile

A German Communist who was allowed to visit the German deportees in Kazakhstan described them as having at first to dig holes in the bare ground in which to live, with many dying of intense cold and hunger until the survivors later built mud huts without windows.¹³ Many Germans were drafted into forced-labor units. When at the end of 1947 these units were disbanded, the Germans expected to return to their homes, only to be confronted with a new decree of the USSR Supreme Soviet: "...Germans, Kalmyks, Ingush, Chechens, Finns, Latvians and others have been resettled permanently to the regions assigned to them and... departure from their places of settlement without special authorization of the organs of the MVD is punishable by hard labor of up to 20 years."¹⁴

¹¹ Most of the information in this paragraph is from the 1939 edition of the *Large Soviet Encyclopedia*, as quoted in Conquest, pp. 59-62.

¹² Heitman, p. 11.

¹³ Conquest, p. 108, citing Wolfgang Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution*, London 1957.

¹⁴ Cited in Fitz, p. 42.

Rehabilitation

It was not until December 13, 1955 that a decree freed the Germans of surveillance by the MVD but with the express provision that this "does not involve return of their property confiscated in the course of deportation, and they do not have the right to return to the places from which they were deported."¹⁵

On August 29, 1964, in the final weeks of Khrushchev's tenure in office, a decree was finally issued voiding the 1941 decree against the Germans and declaring the accusations against them "lacking in substance." However, this decree not only did not restore their autonomous republic but insisted that the Germans had "taken root" in their new places of residence and that their former homeland was now settled by others. As evidence of the regime's intention to keep the Germans where they were, a German-language newspaper, *Freundschaft*, was established in Kazakhstan.¹⁶

The 1964 decree not only doomed the Germans to permanent exile, but kept the Soviet public essentially in the dark about their newly-declared innocence. It was published only in the official *Bulletin of the USSR Supreme Soviet*, and given no further publicity.

Frustration with the limitations of the 1974 decree accelerated a drive by the Soviet Germans to emigrate to Germany. With the support of West Germany, with which the Soviet government had an interest in improving relations, some were able to succeed in this. However, the number who actually emigrated was a very small fraction of those who wished to do so.

Only in 1974 were the Germans allowed to return to their former places of residence. Since many, if not most, Soviet citizens still regarded them as wartime traitors, they were often met with a hostile reception. Moreover, Fitz reports that until the mid-1980s, i.e., until the beginning of perestroika, Germans were still subject to "all kinds of barriers," including denial of *propiska* (permission to reside), in a number of regions including the Baltic republics and Kaliningrad Oblast (formerly East Prussia).¹⁷

¹⁵ Fitz, pp. 42-43.

¹⁶ Fitz, pp. 43-44.

¹⁷ Fitz, pp. 46-47.

Situation Today

In 1990, 150,000 Soviet Germans emigrated to Germany, "three times the 1988 figure."¹⁸ According to a German source in Kazakhstan, 400,000 are expected to emigrate in 1991.¹⁹ The chairman of the grass-roots organization "Wiedergeburt" (Rebirth), Heinrich Groth (Russian spelling "Grout") has said that three Germans in four are ready to leave, that "we are little more than slaves here."²⁰ Another German with whom Helsinki Watch spoke in Alma-Ata told us that "one million" Germans have already registered for emigration, and that all two million would leave if that were possible.

Emigration, long the main goal of the Soviet Germans, has encountered a new obstacle in the form of Germany's difficulty in absorbing newcomers, a problem compounded since 1989 by the task of integrating the two halves of the country. The negative attitude of the present German government toward immigration by the Soviet Germans – a right guaranteed by the German constitution – was made clear by Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher during a recent Moscow press conference:

I wish to stress that the FRG has an interest in the Germans' staying here in the Soviet Union. They would not have sufficient opportunity to find their feet in the new conditions in Germany.²¹

Recent impediments to emigration have caused the Soviet Germans to turn their attention to regaining the national-territorial autonomy on the Volga which they lost in 1941. (The majority of this European nationality are still living in the Asian regions of the USSR.) So far, the Soviet government has temporized in the face of their demands, and of *démarches* by the German government aimed at helping to get the problem solved. There are reports of strong resistance in the Volga region to the Germans' return, resistance which is described as an "organized anti-German campaign."²² President Gorbachev is said to have been asked during a visit to Nizhniy Tagil in the Urals about "solving the German problem," and to have replied that he could not afford to solve one problem and get two new ones; this is construed by the Germans to mean that he fears both the emergence of an autonomous German territory and a hostile reaction to it by other Soviet citizens.²³

The Germans themselves attribute their problems with other nationalities to the fact that the Soviet government has never taken measures to publicize their exoneration from guilt for collaboration with the Nazis and other crimes with which they were charged in 1941. As a result, they say, they are often

¹⁸ *Washington Post*, July 10, 1991.

¹⁹ Yu. A. Gartung (Hartung), *Aktual'nyye voprosy national'noy problemy sovetskikh nemtsev (navstrechu Vsesoyuznomu s"ezdu nemtsev SSSR)*, Pavlodar, Kazakhstan ("Wiedergeburt") 1991, p.2.

²⁰ *Washington Post*, July 10, 1991.

²¹ *Izvestiya*, March 20, 1991 (union edition) [FBIS-SOV-91-056].

²² Gartung, p. 3.

²³ Gorbachev's alleged comments were described to Helsinki Watch by a German source interviewed in Alma-Ata; we have not been able to locate the exact quotation.

called names like "Fritz" or "Fascist"--something that has increased their drive to obtain their own autonomous territory as a shelter from social abuse.

Soviet Germans are upset by a proposal made by the "Committee on Problems of Soviet Germans" (an entity attached to the USSR Cabinet of Ministers) that would apparently give them less than full national-territorial autonomy, limiting them instead to "cultural autonomy" but without their own territory on which to enjoy it. In conversations in the Soviet Union, the point was made to Helsinki Watch over and over that geographic consolidation is essential if the Germans are to retain their distinctive culture and not become assimilated to other ethnic groups. (At present, only a minority of Germans speak the tongue of their nationality as a first language, and they are accustomed to socializing with one another in Russian. From conversations, Helsinki Watch gained the impression that the prime factor in their drive for autonomy is the desire to build barriers to social discrimination rather than concern about linguistic Russification.)

Government-sanctioned plans to hold a Congress of Soviet Germans have stirred considerable dissension among the rank-and-file, many of whom fear that the Congress will be used to sidetrack their drive for territorial autonomy. The decision to hold the Congress was made on July 16, 1990 by two government bodies, one the Committee on Nationalities Policy and Relations Between Nationalities of the USSR Supreme Soviet's Council of Nationalities, the other the State Committee on Problems of Soviet Germans. These two bodies also designated the "organizing committee" for the Congress. It was at first supposed to convene in December 1990, but was postponed to March 12, 1991, ostensibly because of delay by parliamentary bodies in acting on preliminary documents to be submitted "for the delegates' consideration": a "Declaration of the Congress," "a statute on German national self-rule," and the draft of a USSR Supreme Soviet resolution "On State Guarantees for the National Revival of Germans in the USSR."²⁴ In other words, the Congress was expected to ratify documents drafted for it by the government.

Meanwhile, suspicion was growing among the rank-and-file that the delay was in fact due to the government's desire to have more time to shape the Congress as a compliant instrument of control, and to prevent it from being a truly representative body. Indeed, the government seems to have been alarmed by the fact that in January members of the organizing committee (reportedly nine out of 42) had resigned. They had then met at the Moscow "headquarters" of the the Wiedergeburt Society, "a tiny, spare double room in Moscow's rundown Hotel Prinimaet," to draft their own documents for the Congress.²⁵ These were described by Yuriy Gaar, the "loyal" vice-chairman of the organizing committee as "ultimatums."²⁶ The result was that only four days before the Congress was to convene on March 12 the organizing committee suddenly announced still another postponement. In response, the dissidents decided to hold the Congress anyway, under the leadership of Groth. Groth charged in an interview with *Komsomolskaya Pravda* that the real reason for the latest postponement of the Congress was "the incompatibility of the views of the majority of the delegates with the opinion of the congress organizational committee and the State Committee on Problems of Soviet Germans." He explained further:

²⁴ Information in from an interview with Yu. Gaar, vice-chairman of the Congress organizing committee, *Izvestiya*, March 12, 1991, excerpts translated in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, Vol. XLIII, No. 10 (1991).

²⁵ *Washington Post*, July 10, 1991.

²⁶ Gaar interview.

The delegates insist on restoration of the illegally abolished autonomous republic in the Volga region, whereas the organizational committee and the state committee are recommending to them for the umpteenth time to restrict themselves to national-cultural autonomy. Anxious for the fate of its people, the society for Soviet Germans "Rebirth" decided not to agree to the postponement.²⁷

The dissident "First Extraordinary Congress of Soviet Germans" duly convened on March 12, with reportedly more than half of the elected delegates present. The delegates sent a message to USSR Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov demanding that the "old" organizing committee, as well as the State Committee for the Problems of Soviet Germans, be disbanded as having failed in their tasks.²⁸ Yuriy Gaar, vice-chairman of the "old" organizing committee, commented to TASS that the decisions of the Congress would "not have juridical force" but admitted that the main difficulty was that government bodies had delayed taking action on the Germans' problems.²⁹

On the heels of these events, President Gorbachev acted in a manner apparently calculated to increase still further the alienation of the German dissidents. He met with a delegation of members of the "old" organizing committee from which Heinrich Groth, the head of Wiedergeburt, was pointedly excluded. Details of the meeting are somewhat vague, but Gorbachev's spokesman said that Gorbachev had discussed creation of an "extraterritorial" body for the Germans, i.e., one that would deny them their claim to territorial autonomy. In an interview with the German newspaper which reported the meeting, Groth said that he had been trying for a month to get an appointment with Gorbachev, whose latest action showed "that the President wants to play a game with us, instead of solving the question." Groth added that his group was now pinning its hopes on the Russian parliament.³⁰ Thus, Gorbachev seems to have succeeded in driving the German dissidents into the arms of Boris Yeltsin, who was not long in responding (see below).

An adherent of Wiedergeburt interviewed by Helsinki Watch a few weeks later in Moscow commented that:

The point is that the government in Moscow wanted to use that Congress to create a so-called "government without territory" that would deal with cultural problems but would not deal with our real ones. When they discovered that that wouldn't work, that the delegates to the Congress were wholly determined (they did a sociological survey) to achieve rescission of repressive acts against our people and establishment of our statehood (*gosudarstvennost*), they postponed at the last minute. Nevertheless, the Wiedergeburt Society held the Congress and more than half of the delegates came. I have facts about incidents when local authorities pulled our delegates right off planes, or threatened to dismiss them from work, but in spite of that the delegates came and we held

²⁷ *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, March 12, 1991 [FBIS-SOV-91-050, 14 March 1991, pp. 29-30].

²⁸ TASS International in Russian 1300 GMT 13 March, 1991 [FBIS-SOV-91-050, 14 March 1991, p. 30].

²⁹ TASS International in Russian 1658 GMT 13 March, 1991 [FBIS-SOV-91-050, 14 March 1991, p. 30].

³⁰ *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, May 10, 1991 [FBIS-SOV-91-092 13 May 1991, pp. 33-34].

the first stage. We held it in March as planned, in Moscow right here in the House of Culture of the Lenin Factory. The chairman was Groth.

Asked about the "schism" in the German ranks, the same person replied:

It's not a schism. There's a group of Communists, just as there is among the Crimean Tatars and the Koreans. Among the Germans the Communist group is headed by Academician Rauschenbach,³¹ a wonderful scholar—I bow before him as a scholar—a great connoisseur of Russian icons, of Russian church architecture—he's a great man. But why, in the twilight of age and a figure of respect for his people, has he allowed his name to be used for such a dishonest cause? The government can't make two million Germans in the USSR happy, it can only make 100 happy. For these 100 an "organizing committee" was set up—and they meet in the building of the Party School of the CPSU Central Committee, they have a beautiful office, high salaries, and they were created in order not to give the Germans a single thing.

This source confirmed what other Germans (and members of other nationalities located on the territory of the RSFSR) had told Helsinki Watch: many people were now looking to Yeltsin rather than Gorbachev as the authority who can help with their problems:

Therefore, we created our own Congress. The second stage of our Congress will take place at the end of August in Moscow, on the fiftieth anniversary of liquidation of our statehood. And at that second stage we'll make the final decision about what to do—because we still have some faith in this country, because we hope that the democrats will come to power in the country, headed by Yeltsin. We're waiting. If our two million-strong work force is needed by the country, we'll stay. If not, we'll get out of here.

The "orgkomitet" is banking only on the central government, on Gorbachev. But now that the republics have taken over power on their territories, when there's a President and a Parliament there, how can Gorbachev intervene in the affairs of the union republics? The Wiedergeburt Society, and I for one, never believed in Gorbachev... We believe only in the democrats, only in Yeltsin.³²

³¹ Professor Rauschenbach is chairman of the "old" organizing committee.

³² Interview conducted in Moscow, July 4, 1991 at First Congress of Repressed Peoples of the RSFSR in the House of Culture of the Lenin Factory.

Despite such strong and angry statements, the Germans with whom Helsinki Watch spoke (including the above interviewee) expressed understanding that they might need to compromise, if not on the principle of national-territorial sovereignty at least on the precise location of a national territory. With that in mind, it remains to be seen how they react to the recent decision of the RSFSR Parliament to establish an autonomous German region in the Altay region of Western Siberia.³³ Meanwhile, Helsinki Watch was told that Wiedergeburt is working, as a fallback, on plans for a third alternative, the possibility of mass emigration to North or South America, "as our ancestors did in the 1880s."

³³ See *Washington Post*, July 10, 1991.

Chechens

The monument to General Ermolov (Tsarist conqueror of Chechnia) put up after we were deported was finally pulled down again in 1989, but his spirit lives on in people's minds.

--Interview with Chechen representative, Moscow, July, 1991

The Chechens, second most numerous of the peoples treated in this report, are one of the four Caucasian nationalities exonerated by Khrushchev in 1956. Most of them have by now been able to return to their homeland, with the exception of those who were deported from the Daghestan ASSR. The Chechens complain, however, of continuing discrimination by other nationalities who while they were in exile became entrenched in positions of power on their territory, and of an 80-percent poverty rate which effectively forces them into a second exile in quest of seasonal unemployment far from home.

Deportation

Nekrich describes the surprise deportation of the Chechens (together with their Ingush kin) as they were observing Red Army Day, February 23, 1944. Soldiers appeared with automatic weapons, a Supreme Soviet decree was read out on "total deportation" of both nationalities (then numbering about half a million) for collaboration with the Germans, and American Lend-Lease trucks were used to transport the victims to railheads for the trip to Asia. Each family was allowed only twenty kilograms (44 pounds) of baggage. (During Helsinki Watch's recent visit, a Chechen representative of the "Memorial" Society, which seeks to commemorate victims of Stalinist repression, reported an incident in a remote village which could not be reached by the trucks: instead of being deported, women and children were forced into a stable which was ignited, causing 700 deaths. The "Memorial" representative complained that, although some of the perpetrators are still alive and their names are known, the KGB is refusing to open its files to those seeking evidence, "protecting its own executioners.")

Ironically, the Chechens and Ingush had been praised just before their deportation for their spirit in fighting against the Germans, whose advance onto Soviet territory had stalled at the outskirts of Grozny, the Chechen capital.³⁴

It was only after the war, on June 26, 1946, that the government newspaper *Izvestiya* published the decree on deportation of the Chechens (as well as the Ingush, Karachays, Balkars, and Crimean Tatars) either for fighting on the German side or for "taking no counter-action against these betrayers of the

³⁴ Nekrich, pp. 55-60.

Fatherland." In particular, abolition of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was announced.³⁵

We now know that an extra blow was dealt to the Ingush through cession of part of their territory, the Prigorodnyi (Suburban) Rayon outside of Vladikavkaz (formerly Ordzhonikidze), to Northern Ossetia. Masses of Soviet citizens of other nationalities were brought in to settle the former Chechen-Ingush republic. Nekrich comments: "There was one main reason for this--to make the restoration of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR impossible in the future."³⁶

Historical Background

The Chechens have inhabited the Caucasus since ancient times. They lived originally in the high mountains, moving down into the valleys of the River Terek's tributaries only in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.³⁷ Until the dislocations of this century, the Caucasus region was the only place on earth where Chechens were to be found. Conquest refers to the Chechens' egalitarian tradition and winning personal traits, quoting a French anthropologist who wrote of them in 1887 as jolly and intelligent, and added that: "The Russian officers call them the French of the Caucasus."³⁸

No peoples resisted the encroachment of Russian rule more fiercely than the Muslim mountaineers of the Caucasus, as typified by the legendary Sheikh Shamil. Russian literature of the nineteenth century is full of their exploits as fierce but respected enemies. The Chechens (together with the Ingush, Karachays and Balkars) were in the forefront of the battle for independence. In an effort to intimidate and subdue them, Tsarist General Ermolov set up a fortress called "Grozny," a name evocative of ruthless repression (in Russian, Ivan the Terrible is called "Ivan Grozny"). Despite overwhelming Russian military superiority, freedom-minded "bandits" continued to hold out in the mountains. Nekrich ties this history to the later Soviet deportations: "There can be no doubt that when the fate of the Chechens and Crimean Tatars was decided, the historical experience of the relations between these people and the Russian state played no little role."³⁹ The fact that in the Soviet period the mountaineers also resisted collectivization and the campaign against their Islamic religion was no doubt also a factor.

A Chechen Autonomous Oblast was created in 1922; the Ingush were merged into it in 1934. Two years later, in 1936, the territory became the Chechen-Ingush ASSR until its liquidation in 1943.

Exile

The Chechens and Ingush were transported to the East in long freight trains which took days to make the

³⁵ Conquest, pp. 46-47, Nekrich pp. 91-92.

³⁶ Nekrich, p. 60.

³⁷ "Chechenler," *Azerbaijan Sovet Ensiklopediyasi*, Vol. X, Baku 1987, p. 336.

³⁸ Conquest, p. 27.

³⁹ Nekrich, p. 108.

trip. Both Conquest and Nekrich give lengthy descriptions of the appalling conditions facing those who survived the trip: not even rudimentary housing, in winter as well as summer; lack of food, partly because local officials were diverting the deportees' rations to others; raging disease caused by exposure and malnutrition.⁴⁰

We do not have figures for the actual deaths in transit, as we recently obtained for the Crimean Tatars, Balkars and Kalmyks, but there are now official data (which may be understated) for deaths of the Caucasian deportees occurring during the first five years of exile: the group (including Karachays and Balkars as well as Chechens and Ingush) has the highest figure of all: 24.7 percent, or approximately 125,000 men, women and children.⁴¹ Given the hellish conditions of exile, the number of deaths is hardly surprising, especially in view of the fact that more than half were children under sixteen. On top of all this suffering, the deportees were forbidden to leave the immediate vicinity of their new homes, and were required to report monthly to the MVD. Many Chechens refused to bow to authority even under these conditions. There was a report of 4,000 of them being sent to penal camps in Krasnoyarsk alone; in October, 1954 they were involved in an uprising in one of the camps, "the rebellion at site 521," and some managed to escape.⁴²

Rehabilitation

Four years after the war, Moscow's decree of November 26, 1948 sentenced the Chechens and other deportees to permanent exile, depriving them of the right ever to return to their homelands. Only Stalin's death on March 5, 1953 brought relief. Within little more than a year, travel and registration restrictions had been eased but not eliminated. As an example, Nekrich cites the fact that "all children under ten years" were exempted from administrative surveillance.⁴³ Even before the 1956 Party Congress, Chechens and members of other deported nationalities began to try to return to the Caucasus on their own, often to face violence and bloodshed.

Khrushchev's "secret" speech gave this movement new impetus.⁴⁴ "...No man of common sense," he declared, "can grasp how it is possible to make whole nations responsible for inimical activity, including women, children, old people, Communists and Komsomols, to use mass repression against them...." Khrushchev's words quickly leaked to the West; they might have had more impact on Soviet public opinion had it not been many years before they were published officially.

Apparently there was high level opposition to inclusion of the Chechens and Ingush in the decree

⁴⁰ See Conquest pp. 103-11, Nekrich pp. 116-30.

⁴¹ Tolz, p. 19.

⁴² Conquest p. 103-04, Nekrich p. 120.

⁴³ Nekrich, p. 129.

⁴⁴ See Bertram D. Wolfe, *Khrushchev and Stalin's Ghost*, New York (Praeger) 1957, p. 190 for his mention of the Chechens and Ingush.

restoring the national autonomy of the peoples deported from the Caucasus. However, their determined efforts prevailed, and a decree, dated November 24, 1956, restored their rights in principle; a later one, dated January 9, 1957, provided for "restoration of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR."

The Chechens' return was a stormy one, marked by ethnic conflict. There were by then 540,000 inhabitants of other nationalities living in the Grozny district, and 500,000 Chechens were expected there over a four-year period, doubling the existing population.⁴⁵ In August, 1958 there were days of ethnic violence in the city itself, marked by fighting between Chechens and other nationalities. A Chechen interviewed in Moscow for this report said that riots had been caused by "those seeking to prevent return of the Chechens," and that their actions had included anti-Khrushchev slogans. The demonstrators claimed that Grozny, the former Tsarist fortress, was theirs and that the Chechens should find another capital. Symbolic of this attitude was the fact that a statue of General Ermolov, pulled down after the Revolution, had been put back in place after their deportation. (After the Chechens' return, there were various attempts to bomb it, but it was not finally pulled down until 1989.)

Situation Today

The 1989 census listed nearly one million Chechens in the USSR (956,879). In the Chechen-Ingush republic itself, they are a majority (57.8 percent, together with 12.9 percent Ingush and 23.1 percent Russians).⁴⁶ Their economic situation is described as very bad, with severe unemployment. According to a Chechen with whom Helsinki Watch spoke, 80 percent of the nationality are living below the official Soviet poverty line. Much of the Chechens' former grazing land was ploughed under for collective and state farms during their exile. Many have been forced to leave their own republic to seek summer agricultural employment in Siberia and other parts of the Soviet Union, a second exile without kin and in a foreign language environment. Some Chechens have remained in Central Asia, or returned there because of poor economic conditions at home: the 1989 census lists 50,000 as living in Kazakhstan, their former home in exile.

More than thirty years after the Chechens were allowed to return, housing for them is still in critically short supply. For a long time, the land shortage prevented them from building new homes. Recently, Helsinki Watch was told, plots of land have become available but the price of building materials has skyrocketed.

⁴⁵ Nekrich, p. 149.

⁴⁶ *Argumenty i fakty*, No. 13, March, 1991. Cited in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, Vol. XIII, No. 21 (1991).

A Chechen spokesman reported a significant problem: returning Chechens who before deportation lived to the east of Chechnia in neighboring Daghestan, the so-called "Akkinty" or "Aukhovtsy," have still not been allowed to settle on their own territory. Meanwhile, their territory has been occupied by the Laks, another Caucasian nationality, also as a result of forced resettlement. Boris Yeltsin and other RSFSR officials met with a group of the deportees in April 1991 during a visit to Makhachkala, the capital of Daghestan. He appealed to them to "show wisdom and patience," and said that the RSFSR Council of Nationalities should send representatives to the locality to "work out a mechanism for co-ordinating the interests of all interested parties."⁴⁷ The Yeltsin visit was followed a week later by a demonstration of thousands in central Makhachkala calling for quick action on the problem. The demonstrators threatened to move in and squat on the land if the Daghestan government could not give them satisfaction. Apparently, a part of the problem was procrastination of a Daghestan Council of Ministers commission headed by one Abdurazak Mirzabekov. The demonstrators demanded that the Congress of People's Deputies of Daghestan be convened to settle the issue.⁴⁸ In July Chechens in Moscow reported, with evident relief, that this was being done.

There are no Chechen-language schools but last year, "in keeping with perestroika," Chechen classes were introduced in elementary schools (grades 1-4). In the city, Chechen is taught as a "foreign language." One Chechen told Helsinki Watch sadly, "We speak Chechen as a household language ('na bytovom urovne'), but when we begin to talk with each other about politics, say, half the words are Russian."

There is a Chechen newspaper (dismissed by Helsinki Watch's informant as a "Party organ"). There is also a publishing house that brings out works in Chechen, but its output is described as skimpy. In particular, it is criticized for not issuing enough textbooks for even the limited needs of Chechen-language teaching. Radio broadcasts are available in Chechen (as well as Ingush and Russian). The Chechens have a national theater which has no building ("although the Russian theater has one").

A Chechen historian complained in conversation that the "false" theory of Chechnia's "voluntary" annexation to Russia remained in force until 1988. He himself had been expelled from the Institute of History for challenging it and is now working as a laborer. The theory has now been discarded, he added, but the people who subscribed to it have gone on to occupy "higher and higher" positions in the academic establishment, at the levels of *prorektor* and department chairmen.

⁴⁷ Moscow TASS in English 1704 GMT, April 8, 1991 [FBIS-SOV-91-068, April 9, 1991, pp. 50-51].

⁴⁸ Moscow TASS in English 1704 GMT, April 15, 1991 [FBIS-SOV-91-073, pp. 47-48].

Koreans

The Koreans share with the Kurds the unwelcome distinction of being one of the first Soviet nationalities to undergo wholesale deportation. Despite the hardships and restrictions which they suffered until after Stalin's death, this industrious people is proud of its achievements in the face of adversity.

Deportation

Between September and December 1937, all 182,000 Koreans living in the Soviet Far East were deported in freight trains to Central Asia and Kazakhstan. According to one source, "Thousands perished on the way and on the barren steppes after the forced transportation."⁴⁹ The same source quotes from Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*.

In 1937 some tens of thousands of those suspicious Koreans—with Khalkhin-Gol in mind, face to face with Japanese imperialism, who could trust those slant-eyed heathens?—from palsied old men to puling infants, with some portions of their beggarly belongings, were swiftly and quietly transferred from the Far East to Kazakhstan. So swiftly that they spent their first winter in mud-brick houses without windows (where would all that glass have come from!). And so quietly that nobody except the neighboring Kazakhs learned of this resettlement, no one who counted let slip a word about it, no foreign correspondent uttered a squeak.

Historical Background

Koreans had begun to settle in the eastern reaches of the Russian Empire between the Ussuri and Amur rivers after the territory was acquired from China in 1860. At first, the settlers were mainly agricultural workers. Following Japan's annexation of the Korean motherland in 1910, the Korean population was swelled by political refugees. By the time of the 1937 deportation, Koreans had become an important part of the local economy, raising rice and other crops, and breeding silkworms.

Exile

The deported Koreans were transported to Kazakhstan and Central Asia. According to Han Din, chief editor of the Korean newspaper *Koryo Ilbo*, and members of his staff—all of them elderly—visited by Helsinki Watch in the newspaper office in Alma-Ata, 40,000 Korean deportees, many of them children, died

⁴⁹ Youn-Cha Shin Chey (Center for Korean Studies, U.C. Berkeley; Korean Center, Inc., San Francisco), "The Soviet Koreans: The Politics of Ethnic Education," paper prepared for delivery at the IV World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies, Harrogate, England, 21-26 July, 1990. Helsinki Watch relied extensively on this paper for the Korean section of this report.

in the first year, especially of typhus.⁵⁰ Like others, the Koreans were subject to "special settlement" restrictions forbidding them to move, to serve in the military, or to enter higher education.

Despite the harsh conditions of exile, the Koreans succeeded even in the early years in achieving relative prosperity. Korean collective farms located in the Tashkent region, the principal area of Korean settlement, gained fame throughout the Soviet Union.

Rehabilitation

Koreans became eligible for military service after the end of World War II, but only after Stalin's death in 1953 were the other restrictions abated. The Koreans were not mentioned among deported peoples in Khrushchev's 1956 Congress speech. A landmark in their rehabilitation was an October anniversary speech by Yuri Andropov after his accession as Party General Secretary in 1982, in which he made public mention of them as one of the nationalities now living with equal rights ("ravnopravno"). However, the editors told Helsinki Watch that only with the onset of perestroika were Koreans admitted to the more prestigious centers of higher education.

Dozens of Koreans in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have been decorated "Heroes of Socialist Labor"; particularly prominent among them were Kim Pen-Hwa, chairman of the "Polar Star" collective farm and in 1949 appointed member of the Tashkent regional Communist Party committee; Hwan Man-Kim, chairman of the "Political Department" collective farm and a member of the Central Committee of the Uzbek Communist Party who was graduated in 1960 from the prestigious Higher Party School in Moscow; and Lyubov Li, a well-known corn-grower who became a member of the Uzbek Party Central Committee. All three were members of the deported generation. They and other Koreans were variously elected to the Supreme Soviets of the USSR, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.⁵¹

Situation Today

Of the 439,000 Soviet Koreans listed in the 1989 census, the largest number (183,000) were living in Uzbekistan, mainly in Tashkent and the surrounding region, with 107,000 in the RSFSR. In Kazakhstan there are just over 100 thousand. Helsinki Watch was told in Alma-Ata that the Korean population in the RSFSR includes some 40,000 living on Sakhalin who stayed on after the Japanese evacuated the island at the end of World War II. Youn-Cha Shin Chey gives approximately 30,000 as the number living along the Soviet mainland's Pacific Coast; around 6,000 are said to reside in Moscow and Leningrad, and another undisclosed number in Ukraine and the Caucasus. The Korean editors insisted that their countrymen enjoy good relations with "all" other Soviet nationalities.

⁵⁰ Han Din puts the number deported from the Far East at 220,000, nearly 40,000 more than the figure of 182,000 used above, which is taken from Youn-Cha Shin Chey's paper.

⁵¹ This information is taken from the article "Koreyslar" ("Koreans") in the 14-volume *Ozbek Sovet Entsiklopediyasi* (Uzbek Soviet Encyclopedia) published in Tashkent in the 1970s, and from the biographical entries in the encyclopedia for Kim, Hwan and Li. Hwan Man-Gim was caught in the wave of arrests for "corruption" in Uzbekistan which followed Gorbachev's rise to power, but has since been exonerated and released. According to a prominent Korean with whom Helsinki Watch spoke in Alma-Ata, Hwan's troubles were not connected with his being Korean.

Soviet Koreans have had to wage an uphill struggle to maintain their culture. The Uzbek Encyclopedia notes, with evident approval:

Among Koreans living in the USSR great changes have occurred in the homes, clothing, customs, cooking and other things. The Koreans no longer live in houses thatched with rice-straw and heated from underground but in modern brick apartment houses.⁵²

At the same time, the Encyclopedia reports the survival of some customs. While "city" dress is now widely worn, Koreans still resort to the traditional broad-brimmed rice-straw hats for work in the fields. Eating customs have also been retained, such as a preference for "rice dishes, salt cabbage (*chimchā*, bitter vegetable salad (*kimchā*), cayenne pepper, a pasta dish called *kuksu*, a kind of bread called *chaltok*, and tea and milk as beverages."⁵³

Linguistic russification is widespread, due partly to the lack of Korean-language schools since the deportation. As a group, the Koreans are well-educated, but in Russian. Of 12,000 living in Alma-Ata, 30 are said to have doctoral degrees and more than 100 "master's" degrees (*kandidatskaya stepenʹ*).⁵⁴ One result of this educational advancement is that many Koreans no longer know their own language, especially among the youth. According to the latest census, just over half of all Koreans do not regard Korean as their mother tongue, a substantial increase since the preceding census in 1979. (In Uzbekistan with its somewhat denser Korean population, Korean has held its own marginally better, with 56 percent of Koreans still calling it their mother tongue—down from 62 percent in the preceding census.)

According to the Korean editors with whom Helsinki Watch spoke, there are no public schools with principal instruction in Korean. They said that there is now a movement to organize Korean schools, but that it lacks funds and qualified teachers. Korean education has been given a boost, however, by the efforts of Catholic missionaries from the U.S., Germany and South Korea to set up Korean-language schools, which have reportedly received a good response. Since 1985, Korean has again been taught at the Nizami Pedagogical Institute in Tashkent to train teachers in the language, and the University of Vladivostok is also undertaking the training of Korean-language teachers.⁵⁵

The venerable Korean newspaper in Alma-Ata, *Koryo Ilbo*,⁵⁶ has seen its circulation decline to less than 10,000 copies.⁵⁷ There is only one other Korean-language paper in the country, a regional organ published on Sakhalin. There is a Korean radio broadcast three times a week in Alma-Ata, and Korean

⁵² "Koreyslar," *Ozbek Sovet Entsiklopediyasi*.

⁵³ "Koreyslar," *Ozbek Sovet Entsiklopediyasi*.

⁵⁴ Chey, "Soviet Koreans." Another indicator of the Koreans' ability to succeed in Soviet society is the fact, reported in this same source, that of 40,000 Koreans residing in the Tashkent region 30 percent belonged to the Communist Party.

⁵⁵ Chey, "Soviet Koreans."

⁵⁶ From 1938 until January 1, 1991, the newspaper was called *Lenin Kichi* (Lenin's Banner). It was founded in 1923 as *Commune* (or the Korean equivalent) and in 1925 was renamed *Vanguard*.

⁵⁷ Chey, "Soviet Koreans."

television programs are reportedly being planned. Soviet Koreans take special pride in their theater founded in Vladivostok in 1932, which is said to have been "better than any theater in Korea" in those days. The theater survived through the Stalin period, and in 1991 has scheduled guest performances in South Korea.⁵⁸ The Zhazushey Publishing House in Alma-Ata has been bringing out one book a year in Korean, and approximately fifty Soviet Korean writers, many of whom belong to the Union of Soviet Writers, find outlets for their creative writing in these limited media.⁵⁹

Other Korean authors have been able to achieve national prominence by writing in Russian, among them Anatoliy Kim and Kim Brut. There are said to be six Korean professors at Moscow State University (MGU), including Mikhail Pak and Vladimir Li (who is also a department head at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences).⁶⁰ Although he is not exactly one of their number, Soviet Koreans with whom Helsinki Watch spoke are proud of the fact that the Korean-American economist Chan Young Bang is now serving as advisor to President Nursultan Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan.

To help revive Korean culture and defend the rights of Koreans, an All-Union Korean Cultural Association was formed in May 1990 under the chairmanship of Professor Mikhail Pak, and received official governmental recognition in the form of acceptance for registration. The Association has branches in several cities with Korean population.

Efforts are now underway to expand cultural and economic ties with the two Koreas, especially South Korea. Delegations from Seoul have visited both Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan as well as Moscow, and have expressed interest in dealing through their fellow Koreans.⁶¹

Despite the interest in ties with South Korea, there is apparently no movement of any importance toward repatriation of Soviet Koreans. The Korean editors said that life in the Republic of Korea is too "strange" for Soviet Koreans, even for those relatively few who are still at home in the language. Some have gone to visit relatives under Red Cross auspices, but Helsinki Watch was told that they invariably return. An editor knew of a group of forty Soviet Koreans who had visited Korea recently, but he was quite sure that all had returned.

Evidently of more importance to Soviet Koreans is the prospect of a return to the Soviet Far East. Helsinki Watch was informed that there is a movement afoot to do so, but that it has met with "some obstacles." A Russian editor in Tashkent told us further that Koreans in Uzbekistan have now become interested in the possibility of returning to the Soviet Far East because, as Russian speakers, they fear violence by Uzbek nationalists.

⁵⁸ Conversation with Han Din and associates.

⁵⁹ Chey, "Soviet Koreans."

⁶⁰ Chey, "Soviet Koreans."

⁶¹ For information on incipient trading relations between South Korea and Uzbekistan, see James Critchlow, "Uzbeks Looking to World Market," *Radio Liberty Report on the USSR*, March 30, 1990, p. 14.

Crimean Tatars

It is impossible not to feel the pain and sorrow of the continuing tragedy of our people: that the majority of delegates are present at the Kurultay and in the Crimea as guests, and not as members of an indigenous people living here.

**--Speech at Crimean Tatar
Kurultay held June 1991
in Simferopol.**

The Crimean Tatars were the first national movement of deported peoples to issue a frontal challenge to Soviet power in demanding the right to return to their homeland. For years, Crimean Tatar activists braved arrest and other repressions to wage their struggle. Today, they are still far short of achieving their goal in full, but a goodly number of their nationality have now succeeded in resettling in the Crimea, though often under extremely harsh conditions. In June 1991, the Crimean Tatars were able, with official sanction, to hold their first "Kurultay" (national constituent assembly) in 73 years on their ancestral territory. It was held in Simferopol, the Crimean administrative capital.

Deportation

Removal of the Crimean Tatars from their homeland followed the general pattern of the earlier wartime deportations of the Karachays, the Kalmyks, the Chechens, the Ingush, and the Balkars. Aleksandr Nekrich, the former Soviet historian now at Harvard who smuggled out his book-length manuscript on the deportations, cites one woman's recollection:

The deportation was carried out with great brutality. At 3:00 in the morning, when the children were fast asleep, the soldiers came in and demanded that we gather ourselves together and leave in five minutes. We were not allowed to take any food or other things with us. We were treated so rudely that we thought we were going to be taken out and shot. Having been driven out of the village, we were held for twenty-four hours without food; we were starving but were not allowed to go fetch something to eat from home. The crying of the hungry children became continuous. My husband was fighting at the front, and I had the three children.

Finally we were put in trucks and driven to Evpatoria. There we were crowded like cattle into freight cars full to overflowing. The trains carried us for twenty-four days until we reached the station of Zerabulak in Samarkand region, from

which we were shipped to the Pravda kolkhoz [collective farm] in Khatyrchinskiy district.⁶²

No Crimean Tatar was exempt from the deportation order, even those fighting at the front, but Nekrich has noted a peculiar fact of the Soviet social system: those in leadership positions who had official automobiles were allowed to travel in them to the railroad station in order to board the trains taking them into exile with the rest of their fellow Tatars.⁶³

Laurentiy Beria, head of the NKVD which ran the operation, reported to Stalin that 191,044 Crimean Tatars had been deported.⁶⁴ Years later, Crimean Tatars were to estimate that 46 percent of their number perished in the first eighteen months of exile, a figure used by Academician Andrey Sakharov in his campaign in their behalf. In 1968, when Brezhnev was running the Soviet Union with Yuri Andropov as his KGB chief, Crimean Tatar activists were prosecuted, *inter alia* for using this figure to "slander" the USSR. To prove the Tatars' "guilt," the KGB produced figures showing that *only* about 22 percent had died.⁶⁵ (Recently available data suggest that the actual figure may have been as much as one-third of the total Crimean Tatar population.⁶⁶) Even the figures used by the KGB make clear that this was an unspeakable crime.

It was not until more than two years later, on June 26, 1946, that a decree of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR (Russian Republic) was published setting forth the reasons for deporting the Crimean Tatars (as well as the Chechens and Ingush). "Many" Crimean Tatars had collaborated with the Germans, according to the decree, which was the only justification given for punishing *all* members of the nationality, including decorated war heroes just back from the front. The decree affirmed abolition of the Crimean ASSR. (The decree was the one which also announced abolition of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR.)⁶⁷

Nekrich, himself a veteran of the Red Army in World War II, has given careful study to the charges against the Crimean Tatars. His conclusion:

The Crimean Tatars took part in the war against Hitler's Germany just as much as any of the other peoples of the USSR. The percentage of the Tatar population of the Crimea who served in the ranks of the Red Army, beginning with the men called up in the fall of 1939, was the same as the percentage in other parts of the USSR.

⁶² Nekrich, pp. 110-11. As his source Nekrich cites R. I. Muzafarov, *Vdali ot krymskykh gor. Anatomiya deportatsii* (Far from the Crimean hills: Anatomy of a Deportation), manuscript (Moscow) 1974, pp. 94-97.

⁶³ Page 97.

⁶⁴ See Tolz, p. 19.

⁶⁵ Described in Conquest, p. 161. See also Nekrich, pp. 112-13.

⁶⁶ Tolz, p. 19. She calculates that 7,889 died in transit, and cites an official report on the number of deaths occurring in the first five years of exile, a longer time-frame than the eighteen months of the Tatars' own estimates. The data cited by Tolz apparently do not take into account Tatar deaths that may have occurred in the course of the arrests.

⁶⁷ Nekrich pp. 91-92.

Nekrich makes the point that of the *Burgomeisters* (occupation mayors) of six major Crimean cities appointed by the Germans, all but one had Slavic names. By contrast, he lists names of Crimean Tatars who were prominent in the anti-German partisan movement. Many Tatars suffered at the hands of the German occupiers.

Crimean Tatars in the armed forces were transferred into labor battalions after the deportation. Those who returned from the front expecting to find their homes and families were met with orders to go into exile. In the Crimea itself, attempts were made to erase all traces of the onetime inhabitants. Villages, rivers, hills and streets were renamed.⁶⁸ After the war, Nekrich writes, "an attempt was made to lure new settlers to the depopulated Crimea from the Ukraine."⁶⁹

Historical Background

The first independent Tatar Khanate in the Crimea peninsula dates from the fifteenth century. Before that time, cities along the coast had been inhabited by "Greek, Armenian and Jewish populations" with "a sizeable Italian and Frankish minority in political and economic command... Visitors from both East and West could not mistake the fact that these cities were European in influence."⁷⁰ The land north of the mountains dividing the peninsula into two parts was inhabited mainly by Muslim Turkic nomads. The Turko-Mongol ("Tatar") invasions of Eastern Europe and the Middle East that began with the thirteenth century propelled these nomads into "political ascendancy" under Tatar governors. With the waning of Tatar military power in the 1400s, one such governor, Haji Giray Khan, founded an independent Giray dynasty that survived under Turkish suzerainty for more than three centuries. As Fisher notes, the Giray Khans retained many of the prerogatives that "they had received from their Jenghizid heritage (i.e. that of Jenghiz Khan), not their Ottoman overlords." He disputes the contention of Soviet historians, aimed at justifying the later Russian annexation by force, that the Crimean Khans were "marionettes in Ottoman hands."⁷¹

The principal element of the Crimean economy under the Khans was the slave trade, although Fisher makes the point that "the Muslims merely replaced the Italians as the major slave merchants in the Crimea."⁷² Within the Khanate, there were sizeable Christian and Jewish minorities who were more heavily taxed than Muslims, in lieu of having to perform military service; according to Fisher, "there is no evidence, however, that they were subject to any of the discrimination or persecution that infidel subjects experienced in the Christian states in the North."⁷³

⁶⁸ Nekrich (p. 34) notes that Greek and German names were also changed.

⁶⁹ Nekrich, p. 35.

⁷⁰ Alan W. Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars*, Stanford (Hoover Institution Press) 1978, p. 1. The remainder of this paragraph draws on Fisher's work.

⁷¹ Fisher, p. 14.

⁷² Fisher, p. 26-27.

⁷³ Fisher, p. 30.

The decline of Ottoman power and Russian expansionism under Peter the Great jeopardized the stability of the Giray Khans' rule. After a number of Russian incursions, the Crimea was finally annexed by St. Petersburg in 1783.

Under Russian hegemony, the stately palaces and mosques built by the Giray Khans remained to enhance the natural beauty of the peninsula. Pushkin's "Fountain of Bahcesaray," written during the poet's exile to the south, was to immortalize the Crimea in Russian culture: "Oh, magic land! The eyes' delight / All's lively there: the hills and forests, / The amber and the red of grapes, / The valleys beckoning sublime, / The streams and coolness of the trees..."⁷⁴ The river which captured his imagination ("The river Salgir's gurgling banks...") is today no more than a muddy trickle, its water diverted to the fields of Soviet state and collective farms. (When Stalin had place names changed to eliminate memory of the deported Tatars, Bahcesaray remained, perhaps because Pushkin's poem had made it an inalienable part of Russian culture.)

The Tatars' Muslim religion and Turkic culture were to cost them the suspicion of the Tsarist authorities during the Crimean War of 1854, which pitted Russia against the Ottoman Empire and the British and French. The result was a precursor of their later fate under Stalin, as 100,000 Tatars were expelled from the Crimean coastal areas. Alexander Herzen and other liberal Russians of the last century publicized the injustice, setting an example to be followed by Andrey Sakharov and other supporters of the Tatar cause in the Soviet era.⁷⁵

At the turn of the century, Crimean Tatar intellectuals like Ismail Bey Gaspirali (Russian form of name "Gaspirinsky") were in the forefront of Muslim reform movements within the Russian Empire. Gaspirali is credited with being the founder of the most important of those movements, the "jadids," who sought to introduce modern, secular education into Muslims schools. Jadids who lived into the Soviet era were liquidated by Stalin as "Turkish spies," but the movement's prestige is again enormous in the age of perestroika in the Soviet Muslim republics. After the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II, an independent Tatar government was set up, only to be overthrown by Bolshevik force of arms. The Crimean ASSR, established in 1921, was a Bolshevik creation but accorded the Tatars a goodly measure of autonomous self-rule, especially in cultural areas. In retrospect, it is the Tatars' golden model.

Exile

Like the other deported nationalities, the Crimean Tatars were placed under the regime of "special settlement." This was not lifted until 1955, by an unpublished decree of the USSR Supreme Soviet. In his book, Nekrich describes the harsh conditions of "spetsposelenie."⁷⁶ Most of the Tatars were exiled to Uzbekistan, where 32 percent of them were women and 53 percent, i.e. more than half, children. Nekrich comments: "And so the wrath of the state descended primarily on women and children. Can it be that they

⁷⁴ No attempt has been made to do justice to the pyrotechnics of Pushkin's rhyme scheme.

⁷⁵ Nekrich 105-06.

⁷⁶ Pp. 85-135.

were 'traitors' and 'betrayers'?"⁷⁷ He cites the testimony of a Tatar woman:

We were forced to repair our own individual tents. We worked and we starved. Many were so weak from hunger that they could not stay on their feet... Our men were at the front and there was no one who could bury the dead. Sometimes the bodies lay among us for several days... Some Crimean Tatar children dug little graves and buried the unfortunate little ones.⁷⁸

Rehabilitation

The 1955 decree did nothing to restore the good name of the Crimean Tatars, nor to end their exile. The following year, they were one of the peoples passed over in silence by Khrushchev when at the Party Congress he condemned Stalin's deportation of others. Undaunted, the Tatars in June, 1957 sent a 6000-signature-petition to the Supreme Soviet demanding rehabilitation and return to the Crimea, the first of a series of petitions with a growing number of signatures. The regime's response was a series of arrests of individual Tatar activists.

The Tatars only stepped up their efforts. For several years, the sole result was more arrests and trials. It was not until September 9, 1967, after more than 23 years of exile, that a decree of the USSR Supreme Soviet finally retracted "indiscriminate accusations in respect of all the citizens of Tatar nationality who lived in the Crimea."⁷⁹ However, this decree was unsatisfactory to the Tatars in two major respects:

1. It was published only in areas inhabited by the Tatars in exile, meaning that in the eyes of most Soviet citizens their reputation as "Nazi collaborators" continued to exist.
2. Far from enabling the Tatars to return to their homeland, the decree perpetuated their exile by insisting that they had "taken root" in the republics to which they had been deported, and limited efforts to assist them, as by providing cultural facilities, to those republics.

In the following years, the Tatars continued their lobbying and demonstrations. Three acts of self-immolation are on record. There were also attempts by individuals or groups to return to the Crimea, attempts which succeeded only on a small scale due to the resistance of the authorities. One major Tatar achievement was to win the support of prominent human-rights activists of other nationalities: among others, the names of the writer Aleksey Kosterin, of General Pyotr Grigorenko, of the Jewish activist Ilya Gabay, and of the physicist Academician Andrey Sakharov are indelibly associated with the Crimean Tatar cause.

The new climate of perestroika emboldened the Tatars to intensify their efforts. In 1987, they began to hold demonstrations in the center of Moscow, near the Kremlin. These resulted in further arrests,

⁷⁷ Nekrich pp. 115-116.

⁷⁸ Nekrich pp. 116-17.

⁷⁹ Conquest, pp. 186-87.

and much vilification, but were also successful in the sense that they alerted world public opinion as never before to the injustices committed against the Tatars.

To defuse the situation, the Gorbachev leadership created a commission to look into the Tatar grievances. Its head was the aging Andrey Gromyko, Politburo member and chairman of the presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet whose name had often been associated with hard-line policies during his longtime tenure as minister of foreign affairs.

Meanwhile, the Tatars intensified their drive to return to the homeland.

After a year of deliberations, the Gromyko commission concluded that there was "no basis" for restoration of Crimean Tatar autonomy or for a full return to the Crimea. This decision seems to have been unsatisfactory even to the Soviet leadership, for a new commission was soon formed, and in November 1989 recommended restitution of Tatar autonomy, but without specifying concrete measures. In turn, the USSR Supreme Soviet issued a decree affirming the commission's recommendations and proposing creation of still one more commission "for resolution of practical problems connected with the restoration of rights."⁸⁰

Finally, a "conception of a state program for return of the Crimean Tatars to the Crimea" resulted from this series of bureaucratic steps. According to Vitaliy Kh. Doguzhiev, chairman of the third commission, this last document provided for a mass return to the Crimea beginning in 1991 and "essentially" ending in 1996. He spoke of allocation of "tracts of land, and material and financial support" by the state.⁸¹ Doguzhiev has also announced a special USSR government resolution for formation of commissions among the Tatar diaspora to help families who return solve their legal, economic, transportation and other problems.⁸²

Situation Today

Moscow's belated intercession on behalf of the Tatars seems to have thrown the local authorities in the Crimea (and some elements of the population) into a panic. While professing to give in to the latest decisions in Moscow, the authorities have stressed that the Tatars' return would have to be "orderly" (*planomernō*), that housing materials would have to be found, that there would have to be an "infrastructure," etc. This has prompted Valeriy Vozgrin, a Leningrad historian and leading supporter of the Tatar cause, to comment that the Tatars have become fed up with years of decisions in which they have not participated, that they know full well the worth of such "concern" by the administration. Second, he wrote, there are 517 abandoned Tatar villages which they are willing to begin restoring immediately, without "mythical" assistance from the authorities.⁸³ Third, every day is precious because old people will soon be deprived of their precious dream of being buried in their homeland. Finally, there is reason to believe,

⁸⁰ *Vedomosti s"ezdā narodnykh deputatov SSSR i Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR*, No. 25 (Nov. 29), 1989, p. 669.

⁸¹ *Pravda*, May, 17, 1990.

⁸² *Izvestiya*, May 27, 1991.

⁸³ Information about the availability of land for resettlement was confirmed by G. Tarazevich, chairman of the commission on nationality policy and inter-nationality relations of the USSR Council of Nationalities. See *Izvestiya*, November 29, 1989.

according to Vozgrin, that the authorities were preparing one last desperate measure: distribution of agricultural land in the form of private property to millions of present inhabitants of the Crimea. He accused the local authorities of willingness to foment ethnic violence as a means of holding on to power. He praised the Tatars for having held back from provocations.⁸⁴ An example of the challenges faced by the Tatars was a "demonstration" held August 9, 1990 in Simferopol by "representatives of labor collectives," Soviet shorthand for an officially organized action, in which the participants, according to TASS, demanded that the Crimean Tatars "be called to order" for having seized land.

Vozgrin revealed further that walls in the Crimea have been covered with messages from the "Union for Salvation of Slavs" and the notorious right-wing "Pamyat" organization appealing for the physical elimination of the of the returning "foreigners," and that none of the perpetrators have been punished.⁸⁵

The crowning blow in the campaign against restitution of Tatar rights was a referendum organized in January 1991 that enabled the non-Tatar population to vote overwhelmingly (93 percent) in favor of their own "autonomy" for the Crimea. The referendum was boycotted by the Tatars, as is the Slav-dominated "Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic" which was hastily created in its aftermath⁸⁶--a mockery, since it bears the same name as the administrative unit of which the Tatars were deprived by Stalin back in 1945 and which they have been fighting ever since to re-establish. *Pravda*, however, has called the referendum "an example of a lawful, democratic solution of the question of the region's statehood."⁸⁷

The timing of Helsinki Watch's research enabled this report's author to be present at a historic event, the Crimean Tatar *Kurultay* (national constituent assembly) held June 26-29, 1991, the first since 1917. It took place in Simferopol. Perhaps anticipating that the event would command worldwide attention, the authorities had provided the spacious House of Culture of the Trade Unions, a modern, well-appointed government building with a large, brightly-lit auditorium, comfortable lounges and several buffets that offered a selection of foods and soft drinks that was generous, given the generally depressed state of catering in Simferopol.

The stage of the auditorium had been set up with a speaker's podium and a table for the presidium. High above the proceedings were a large blue-and-yellow Crimean Tatar banner and an even larger portrait of Jihan Chelebi Noman (Chlebiev), who had been elected at the first Kurultay in 1917 to head a Crimean Tatar government, only to be executed by the Bolsheviks a few months later.

The defiant tone of the Kurultay was set by an "appeal to the Crimean Tatar people" prepared by the organizing committee for ratification by the elected delegates. It included the following passage:

The state, having admitted that its actions toward our people were criminal, is not

⁸⁴ *Smena*, June 16, 1990.

⁸⁵ *Smena*, June 16, 1990.

⁸⁶ Moscow TASS in English 1018 GMT 13 Feb 91 (FBIS-SOV-91-031, p. 73).

⁸⁷ *Pravda*, January 29, 1991.

adopting adequate measures to organize state return, and the present authorities of the Crimea are thwarting in every way the process of return. Moreover, at the initiative of the present authorities of the Crimea and with the tacit consent of the All-Union authorities, measures have been adopted in the Crimea which are directed against the re-establishment of the statehood of the Crimean Tatar people. It was with precisely that purpose that in January 1991 a referendum was illegally organized on determination of the state status of the Crimea, and there are now hasty efforts to reinforce its results with various resolutions by organs of state authority of the Crimea and the Ukrainian SSR.

Helsinki Watch was told that 262 Kurultay delegates had been elected, on the basis of approximately one for every 1,000 Tatars. Apparently some 240 were actually present. The delegates were seated in the front rows, each with a card entitling him or her to vote. Others (like myself) had to have a pass issued by the Kurultay staff. Microphones were provided for speakers from the floor. Most speeches were in Russian, which nearly every Crimean Tatar speaks flawlessly, often to the exclusion of his own language, but those who wished were free to speak in Tatar.⁸⁸ To insure order and check passes, a number of stalwart youths with green armbands and military-looking caps reminiscent of the Ottoman Empire were on hand. On at least one occasion they obeyed the chairman's request to eject from the hall a persistent speaker who had refused to sit down when called to order.

Chairmanship rotated among members of the presidium, but the Kurultay was dominated by the presence of one of the presidium members, the 48-year-old Mustafa Jemilev (or Dzhemilev), a veteran of some 20 years of Soviet penal institutions and acknowledged leader of the Crimean Tatars' struggle for their rights. In general, the atmosphere was good-humored, even festive, with a sense of unity. The speeches struck a triumphant note, reflecting the years of suffering and harassment that had been overcome to make the Kurultay, held on Crimean soil, a reality. At the same time, the opening report by the organizing committee, read by Rifat Chubarov, noted, "It is impossible not to feel the pain and sorrow of the continuing tragedy of our people, that the majority of delegates are present at the Kurultay and in the Crimea as guests, and not as members of an indigenous people living here."

The delegates, accustomed for years to the rigidity of Soviet public meetings, had difficulty at times with parliamentary concepts; it took several hours of discussion for them to come to grips with the idea of a quorum. Debate was often heated, with speakers occasionally heckled from the floor. Except for the one ejection noted above which Helsinki Watch witnessed, the chairmen were quite permissive and patient in trying to reach a consensus before making rulings. Wrangling, when it occurred, was usually limited to procedural matters, not differences over substance. Generally, there was no official harassment of the Kurultay, although Crimean Tatars who had come from Turkey reported that they had had their visas held up by the Soviet Embassy in Ankara and had received them at the last minute only after being warned by the Ambassador that if they participated in the proceedings they would never again be allowed to visit the USSR. In the Crimea, a sign of tolerance toward the Kurultay was the fact that local officials took part.

⁸⁸ In Uzbekistan, the principal place of Crimean Tatar exile, most Tatars opted for schooling in Russian rather than Uzbek, a Turkic language related to their own but, under Soviet conditions, less suited to educational and professional advancement. There was a certain irony in a complaint by a visitor to the Kurultay from Uzbekistan that Tatars there are now being required to use Uzbek in keeping with Uzbekistan's anti-Russification drive.

One of the speakers was Aleksandr I. Balagura, a Ukrainian who is deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers of the newly-created Crimean ASSR and who has direct responsibility for dealing with the Tatars. Despite the fact that he is blamed for many of the Tatars' local problems, his speech received polite attention although a few snickers were heard when he was introduced. The autonomy-minded audience was in no mood for Balagura's effort to lay down the law: "We'd like to have the Mejlis [see below] be an organ that would collaborate constructively and execute decisions made by the organs of state administration of the Crimean republic."

Other speakers included a representative of the opposition group "Birlik" from Uzbekistan, where the great majority of Crimean Tatars still live; a representative of the Meskhetian Turks; and a spokesman for the Ukrainian "Rukh" opposition movement (who received an ovation for stating that the "Crimean ASSR" makes sense only if it gives priority to the Tatars). The Leningrad historian Valeriy Evgenievich Vozgrin (see above) also received a big hand. In his speech, he told those assembled that on a recent trip to the West (in connection with his election to the Danish Academy of Sciences) he had found appalling ignorance of the true state of affairs of the Tatars, despite all the publicity that their struggle had received. One problem was the lingering belief that charges of large-scale collaboration with the Germans were true, despite the fact that, as Vozgrin put it, they had suffered four times more from Stalin, statistically, than from the German occupation. He urged the Kurultay in forming the Mejlis to equip it with a "powerful international department."

The Kurultay adjourned after adopting a Declaration of Crimean Tatar sovereignty which read in part:

The Crimea is the national territory of the Crimean Tatar people on which only it possesses the right to self-determination, since the latter has been set forth in international legal actions which have been recognized by the world community. The political, economic, spiritual and cultural rebirth of the Crimean Tatar people is possible only in its sovereign national state—the Crimean Tatar people will strive for that goal by making use of all means sanctioned by international law and which do not conflict with general human norms of morality.⁸⁹

At the same time, the declaration stipulated that relations with other peoples living in the Crimea must "be established on a basis of mutual respect and the recognition of human and civic rights and interests"; and that there must be strict observance of "the political, economic, cultural, religious and other lawful rights of all people, regardless of their ethnic affiliation." However, the document warned that any attempt to thwart the self-determination of the Crimean Tatars would be in violation of "the United Nations Charter and other international legal acts." As for the version of the "Crimean ASSR" which had been recently established without the Tatars' affirmation, it was dismissed as "an attempt to consolidate juridically the results of the deportation of the Crimean Tatars in 1944," and was pronounced as "not recognized" by the Kurultay.

Doubtless the most controversial action of the Kurultay, given the Soviet Union's development of the Crimea over many decades as a rest and recreation center for citizens from all over the country, and a

⁸⁹ From the draft of the declaration proposed by the organizing committee for the Kurultay to approve. Helsinki Watch's representative was not able to obtain the version officially approved by the Kurultay before leaving Simferopol, but was given to understand that there had been no significant changes.

retirement home for top-ranking officials from Moscow, was inclusion in the Declaration of the following wording:

The land and natural resources of the Crimea, including its therapeutic and recreational potential, are the basis of the national wealth of the Crimean Tatar people and cannot be utilized without its will or its clearly expressed approval. Any actions which harm the ecological status of the Crimea, including its offshore Black Sea waters, must be halted. Damage to nature and the resources of the Crimea must be compensated by the perpetrators.

Finally, the Declaration warned of the possible consequences of continued flouting of the Tatars' rights:

In cases of flagrant resistance by state organs or any other parties to the achievement of the goals proclaimed by the Kurultay and the present Declaration, the Kurultay charges the Mejlis to obtain recognition for the Crimean Tatar people of the status of a people fighting for its national liberation and to act in accordance with that status.

A 33-member Mejlis, or executive body, was elected to conduct Crimean Tatar affairs until the next Kurultay. The Kurultay also voted to create a Crimean Tatar charitable fund.

Aside from the official program, the Kurultay was marked by two unscheduled events that helped to demonstrate the spirit of the Tatars. An elderly Russian supporter of the Tatar cause had died suddenly in his hotel while in Simferopol to attend the meeting. His open coffin was brought to the outdoor plaza in front of the building, the proceedings were adjourned, and delegates filed past to pay their respects. On the final day, when word came that a longtime Tatar activist had died, the delegates adopted a motion by the presidium for a moment of silence, which was immediately observed. However, when the meeting resumed a woman delegate rose in her seat to protest, saying that "We are Muslims, after all," and demanding that a mullah who was present be asked to say prayers. Without objection, the mullah strode to the podium and recited verses from the Koran, ending with a homily in Tatar. The response of those present was varied, with some covering their heads with handkerchiefs or copies of the program; however, at the end all raised their hands in the gesture of the *fatih*.

Brief news stories about the Kurultay appeared in both the national press in Moscow and the local press of the Crimea. After it had closed, an item appeared in *Sovetskaya Kultura* with the headline "Dual Authority in the Crimea." It gave a fairly neutral account of the Kurultay, highlighting the Tatars' determination to continue their struggle for statehood in the Crimea but ending with a warning that the clash of dual authorities there "is transforming the peninsula into still one more zone of tension."⁹⁰ The local *Krymskaya Pravda* carried sketchy but on the whole objective day-by-day items on the proceedings. It also published a longer feature on Crimean Tatar housing problems while the Kurultay was in session, its tone obviously designed to soothe the Tatars but with enough reserve to keep members of other nationalities from feeling that the Tatars were being coddled.⁹¹ An excellent account, the most complete

⁹⁰ *Sovetskaya Kultura*, July 6, 1991.

⁹¹ *Krymskaya Pravda*, June 28, 1991.

and balanced that came to Helsinki Watch's attention, was in Moscow's new national newspaper, *Nezavisimaya gazeta* (The Independent Newspaper), whose correspondent (evidently himself a Crimean Tatar) included an interview with Chubarov of the organizing committee about a disinformation campaign allegedly being conducted by the authorities in the Crimea to stir up feeling against the Tatars: "Among Russians and Ukrainians rumors are being spread, false information about fictitious atrocities committed by Crimean Tatars during the Great Fatherland War." The correspondent cited the Kurultay's appeal to the people of the Crimea as evidence of the peaceful character of the Tatar movement, since it stated clearly that those who return to their homeland have no unkind intentions toward the Russian-speaking population of the peninsula and are counting on the latter's support in helping the Tatars achieve national statehood.⁹²

Ironically, the holding of the Kurultay gave impetus to an opposition movement among the Crimean Tatars. A dissident group met in Novorossiysk from April 30 to May 1, 1991 and issued a resolution condemning the event on the basis that it was in reality aimed at subverting the independence of their people. This "All-Union Meeting," which claimed 240 participants, dismissed the Kurultay as a "parallel structure" which effectively sanctioned the dominance in the Crimea of "newcomer ethnic groups" through its implicit recognition of the odious structure of the "Crimean ASSR." Helsinki Watch had a meeting away from the Kurultay with a leader of the opposition movement, Yuriy Bekirovich Osmanov, who described at length his group's reservations about the gathering as an alleged mechanism aimed at holding the Crimean Tatars in thrall. He handed Helsinki Watch's representative a "White Book" of documents. Many of these had to do with his own dismissal on March 18, 1991 by the Crimean Oblast Executive Committee (soon to become the Council of Ministers of the Crimean ASSR as a result of the January 20 referendum) as acting head of that body's Committee for the Affairs of Deported Peoples. In that capacity, Osmanov seems to have been a scapegoat for failure by the local authorities to solve problems over which he had no control. In any case, the White Book included a document signed by V. V. Kurashin, chairman of the Executive Committee, referring to Osmanov's "insufficient experience with practical economic and administrative activity." Other documents showed that there had been a split within the staff of the committee, apparently involving complex issues of construction and budgeting. Differences between Osmanov and the more "radical" Mustafa Jemilev seem to be largely tactical; both have served prison terms for their activities and share the same goals. Helsinki Watch has made no effort to assess the relative merits of the two conflicting factions. Unfortunately, the schism appears to be serious enough to weaken the Tatars politically.

There was also some geographic dissonance at the Kurultay itself. A Tashkent delegate rose to complain that the presidium was dominated by local delegates from the Crimea, whereas two-thirds of the Crimean Tatars still live in Uzbekistan. To this a member of the organizing committee rejoined, "Why didn't you get more people from Uzbekistan involved in preparation for the Kurultay?", a reference to election of delegates on the basis of 1000-member constituencies. Evidently this geographic cleavage is also a social one: during a conversation in the wings, one Tatar told Helsinki Watch that those who had been able to immigrate to the Crimea tended to be the more affluent and that many had remained in Central Asia because they lack the means to make the move.

Even without the problem of disunity, the overwhelming odds which stand in the way of the Tatars' achievements of their national goals as proclaimed by the Kurultay are evident from the demographic

⁹² *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, July 2, 1991.

situation of the Crimea. In the years since the deportation, there has been a massive influx of other nationalities into the Crimea, much of it stimulated by the regime. TASS reported in June, 1991 that 130,000 Tatars have returned to the Crimea over the past five years, and that they now make up 1.8 percent of the population, compared with 68.7 percent for Russians and 29.3 percent for Ukrainians.⁹³ If one accepts the Tatars' own estimates that there are now some 190,000 of their number in the Crimea (70,000 of them without *propiska*), which is about four times the number of Crimean Tatars for the Ukraine as a whole recorded in the 1989 census, that is still less than eight percent of the 2.5 million total population listed by the census for what is now called the "Crimean ASSR."⁹⁴ And even if all of the country's other Crimean Tatars were to immigrate to the Crimea (as many as 600,000 by some Tatar estimates but only slightly more than 200,000 by the census), it would bring their share of the population up at most to about a third--and these estimates seem almost wildly optimistic. In other words, the more "democratic" the Crimea becomes, the poorer the Tatars' chances of obtaining redress of their wrongs on the basis of any vote split along ethnic lines. In the absence of some constitutional mechanism to reaffirm the rights which they lost in 1944, they are fated to confront the "tyranny of the majority."

The daunting obstacles faced by the Crimean Tatars, and their incredible determination to overcome them, were brought home by a visit to a "samozakhvat," one of their squatters' camps, at a place now called Lugovoe (instead of its former Tatar name of Chukurcha) that is just outside the Simferopol city limits. Helsinki Watch found 117 families living there in two meadows, some in "vremyanki," the rest in tents. There had just been a summer rain shower, and the clay soil had turned to mud; our small Zhiguli bogged down on the unpaved road and had to be heaved out by a group of squatters. Before entering the "vremyanki," we had to use crude boot-scrapers located outside the doors. The "vremyanki" are squat one-story, one room cinder-block structures measuring about three by four yards, some with as many as ten people squeezed in. The floors are earthen, although one that Helsinki Watch visited had a sheet of plastic laid over the dirt. (It also had a Koran--in Turkish with Latin letters--hanging in a place of honor on the wall.) There is no electricity, gas, or running water. Lighting is by kerosene lamp. A few of the squatters have stoves using bottled gas. Our hosts pointed in the distance to the nearest source of drinking-water, saying that to get there and back on foot took nearly an hour. There were a few privies standing in the fields. Last winter the temperature reached a low of minus 24 degrees Centigrade (11 below zero Fahrenheit), unusually cold for the Crimea. Many of the squatters with whom Helsinki Watch spoke were educated professional people who had given up good jobs in Uzbekistan to be able to come to the Crimea and live in these conditions.

All of the families at Lugovoe are without *propiski*, meaning that their members cannot be legally employed; Helsinki Watch was told that there are about 5,000 families living in similar conditions in the Crimea. Many have been unemployed for years. The families receive 50 rubles a month in coupons per

⁹³ Moscow TASS English 1351 GMT 25 Jun 91 [FBIS-SOV-91-123 26 June 91 p. 72].

⁹⁴ There seems to be good reason to believe that the Crimean Tatar population is significantly understated in the census. V. Kh. Doguzhiev (see below) has estimated it at between 330,000 and 350,000. (See *Pravda*, May 17, 1990.) Moscow TASS English 1351 GMT 25 Jun 91 [FBIS-SOV-91-123 26 June 91, p. 72] reported: "Experts estimate the number of Tatars now living in the Soviet Union at between 300,000 and 350,000." One reason for the discrepancy may be that hostile census takers reportedly refused to register the nationality as "Crimean Tatars," a new category introduced for the first time in the 1989 census.]

member, hardly enough for food. One person with whom Helsinki Watch spoke estimated that only about one Crimean Tatar family in ten lives in "normal" conditions.

The Lugovoe camp came into being some years ago when homeless Tatars heard that fields belonging to a state farm were to be turned over to Russians and Ukrainians so that they could construct "dachas." The Tatars, feeling that they had a greater need, occupied the land. The militia responded by blocking access. In turn, the Tatars barricaded the main highway from Simferopol to Bahchesaray. This caused the militia to relent to the extent of letting them onto the land, but roadblocks were set up to prevent importation of building materials. The squatters managed by smuggling their materials onto the land under cover of darkness. The authorities have now conceded the land to them, but still without *propiski*

One of the major complaints of the squatters is that in order to obtain building materials they are forced to pay from six to ten times the regular price to speculators, who prey on their situation.

Several of the Tatar returnees with whom Helsinki Watch spoke stressed that they are not seeking to evict the present tenants of their former homes, only to be given a chance to build new homes in the Crimea.

A reason given by the authorities for opposing the return of large numbers of Tatars is the alleged unavailability of land. Yet 150,000 tracts have been turned over in recent years to non-Tatars to build dachas or other private buildings.⁹⁵ As it is, most Tatar returnees have had to settle in the northern part of the peninsula, far from the scenic southern coast where many lived before deportation.

Earlier, Helsinki Watch had noticed that in the former Crimean Tatar quarter of Simferopol, Aq Mechet, many old houses are standing empty. Our hosts at Lugovoe said that when they offer to renovate the abandoned houses the authorities turn them down.

At the time of the deportation, the Crimea was part of the Russian Republic. When Khrushchev was in power, he had it ceded to Ukraine, his old fief as Party secretary. Some Ukrainians, like the Rukh spokesman who took part in the Kurultay, are sympathetic to the Tatar cause, but others are not. Not long ago a deputy to the Ukrainian Parliament announced that Ukraine will have nothing to do with the return of the Tatars since it had had nothing to do with their deportation.⁹⁶

The settlers at Lugovoe told Helsinki Watch that a few local Russians and Ukrainians have shown kindness, especially Christian believers and those who are old enough to remember the Tatars from earlier days. But most of the population, they said, is hostile, influenced by the authorities' campaign to stir up resentment of the Tatars by blaming them for shortages in the area. Another tactic used by the local authorities has been to send representatives to Crimean Tatar communities in Central Asia to discourage potential immigrants. This effort is futile, given that studies taken by the USSR State Statistics Committee have shown that in areas with high concentrations of Crimean Tatar population "the absolute majority of them wish to return to the Crimea and take up permanent residence in the next three years."⁹⁷

⁹⁵ *Molodezh' Estonii*, December 14, 1990.

⁹⁶ *Molodezh' Estonii*.

⁹⁷ *Izvestiya*, May 27, 1991.

Ingush

The Ingush have a close and warm relationship with their more numerous kin, the Chechens. For centuries, their twin destinies have been closely interwoven. However, the Ingush continue to suffer in a special way because deportation cost them nearly half their ancestral territory.

Deportation

The Ingush were transported into exile together with the Chechens *en bloc*. (See "Chechens" section of this report.) The special blow dealt the Ingush on liquidation of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was cession of a large part of their territory, the Prigorodnyi ("Suburban") Rayon outside the city of Vladikavkaz (formerly Ordzhonikidze), to the neighboring North Ossetian ASSR, whose population was not deported.

Historical Background

An ancient mountain people like the Chechens, the Ingush began their descent into the lowlands somewhat later, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Ingush joined in the Muslim mountaineers' fight against Russian rule. Their migration into the lowlands was speeded up in the 1830s through the 1860s, the period of Shamil's rebellion, as the invading Russians moved them from the mountains down to places where they could be more easily controlled. In their lowland habitat, the Ingush engaged in crop- and livestock-raising, and some fishing. The name "Ingush"--they call themselves "Galgay" in their own language--comes from one of their lowland villages, Angush or Angushit.⁹⁸

After a period of separate autonomy in the early Soviet period, the Ingush were merged in 1934 into the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Oblast in 1934, which in 1936 became an autonomous republic up until the time of its abolition after the deportation.

Exile

The Ingush distinguished themselves in exile by staging an uprising in the spring of 1945 in Borovoe, Kazakhstan which was evidently put down with considerable bloodshed.⁹⁹ (For other details of the exile period, see "Chechens" in this report.)

Rehabilitation

⁹⁸ "Ingushlar," *Azerbaijan Sovet Ensiklopediyasi*, Vol. 4, Baku 1980, p. 443.

⁹⁹ *Conquest*, p. 103, *Nekrich* p. 120.

In most respects the process of rehabilitating the Ingush was parallel to that for the Chechens, except for the significant problem that when the Chechen-Ingush republic was reconstituted, the Ingush lands ceded to North Ossetia were not returned.

After they were freed from exile, the Ingush pressed ever more insistently for return of their ancestral territory. In 1973, they held a demonstration lasting four days (January 16-19) on the main Lenin Square in Grozny. Their action resulted in the arrival from Moscow of the RSFSR prime minister, Mikhail S. Solomentsev, a candidate member of the Politburo. Solomentsev made some promises and left. The demonstration was dispersed by security forces using water cannons.¹⁰⁰

In 1981, the Ingush say, Ossetians living on the former Ingush territory staged disorders, tipping over cars belonging to Ingush. The Ingush representatives with whom Helsinki Watch spoke assured us that this behavior had the support of the center in Moscow. Bearing this contention, the center issued Decree #183 dated March 5, 1982, which banned residence registration ("propiska") of citizens of Ingush nationality in the disputed territory.

In September, 1989, after the elections to the USSR Supreme Soviet, the Ingush held a Congress in Grozny at which they decided to re-establish the separate "statehood" which they had lost on being merged with the Chechens in 1934. (As far as I could tell from discussions with Chechens and Ingush, this action was not motivated by rancor toward the Chechens but by a desire to strengthen the campaign for return of the lost lands.)

In March, 1990 an article in *Pravda* which the Ingush perceived as hostile to their claims triggered a meeting in Nazran, the principal city of Ingushetia, attended by a reported 10,000 people. Helsinki Watch was told that the meeting began March 6 and did not disperse until March 14. In response, the "Belyakov Commission" of the USSR Supreme Soviet was formed, reportedly at the initiative of a People's Deputy from Chechnia-Ingushetia, Salambek Khajiev. When the Commission came to the region to look into matters, Ingush Supreme Soviet deputies who accompanied it said they were under pressure from the center not to move things forward for their people. One Ingush with whom Helsinki Watch spoke accused Aleksandr S. Zasokhov, a Politburo member who is a former first secretary of the North Ossetian Oblast Party Committee, of having interfered directly in the work of the Commission when he came to the region on May 11, 1990.¹⁰¹ The Ingush and their Chechen friends charge that the Ossetians, as "longtime allies" of the Russians, have their own people in high places in the Moscow KGB, the General Staff, and the Party Central Committee, and are able to exercise undue influence to thwart the legitimate aspirations of the Ingush.

Only after 380 Ingush had gone to Moscow by bus did the Commission issue a document which the Ingush interpreted as favorable to their claim. However, they say, the USSR Supreme Soviet refused to deal with the document, although the Supreme Soviet is the direct legal heir of the body which ordered the

¹⁰⁰ Based on an interview conducted in Moscow in July, 1991. Nekrich, pp. 158-59, gives a more detailed account.

¹⁰¹ Zasokhov is perceived as the Ingush cause's major enemy in Moscow. Helsinki Watch's informant, an Ingush People's Deputy, claimed to have been present together with seven other deputies at a reception on September 16, 1989 at which Zasokhov made the following statement: "Dear Ingush! I declare to you in the name of the Ossetian people that if the Russian Parliament adopts the law on rehabilitation of repressed peoples, we Ossetians will respond fittingly." The law was passed on April 26, 1991.

deportation in the first place. After the Ingush appealed to the Russian Parliament--"it's more democratic"-the USSR body took up the Ingush case but reaffirmed the combined Chechen-Ingush republic, thus "ignoring the will of the Ingush people."

Situation Today

The Ingush are bitter about their continued failure to regain their lost territory or to achieve separate national autonomy. Because of the "propiska" ban, they are still not able even to live on the land ceded in 1943 to Northern Ossetia, which they say represents 47 percent of their total territory. They complain also that they are not able to bury their dead in their ancient cemetery in the village of Angush (from which the name "Ingush" is derived) because it is now barred to them as Ossetian territory. One recent incident of violence involving Ossetians and Ingush was described: some old people who were working in a garden in the Prigorodnyi Rayon (the disputed territory) were reportedly attacked and beaten up by Ossetians. Ingush homes are said to have been fired on. The Ingush accuse the North Ossetian leadership of having stirred up such incidents. In April, *Pravda* complained that some Ingush, apparently emboldened by legislative action in the USSR Supreme Soviet, were trying to seize back their homes in the disputed area. Six such incidents were reported, with fights, at least one death, and declaration of a state of emergency and curfew in the disputed territory as well as a state of emergency in the city of Vladikavkaz. More than 1,500 MVD troops were deployed from other parts of the RSFSR.¹⁰²

With respect to the threat of violence, an even more serious problem for the Ingush may lie in recent confrontations with local Cossacks, descendants of the same Cossack forces which helped Tsarist armies to subdue the local inhabitants in fierce and bloody fighting. On April 28, 1991, three young Ingush driving through the village of Troitskoe in the evening were pulled from their car and beaten by Cossacks celebrating a wedding. This precipitated a fight which ended with eight dead and 24 wounded.¹⁰³

The Ingush accuse the North Ossetian leadership of instigating the Cossacks to violence against the Ingush, telling them, "We're both Christians and they're Muslims." The incident in question occurred right after Cossacks had reportedly picketed (on April 26) against the Russian Parliament's passage of the law in favor of the deported peoples. A meeting in Chechnia-Ingushetia, at which conciliatory speeches were made by officials and local Muslim leaders about "ties of brotherhood" between the Ingush and the Cossacks, was followed just one day later by a gathering of Cossack atamans who declared that, if a state of emergency were not declared providing for "volunteer Cossacks to guard Cossack settlements," then "we will take our own measures."¹⁰⁴ The Chechen historian with whom Helsinki Watch spoke noted that the Chechens and Ingush had lived in peace beginning more than 400 years ago with the original Cossacks settlers of the region and their descendants, and had no quarrel with them. It was those Cossacks who had been used by the Russians as frontier troops against the mountaineers who had become an enemy. (Unfortunately, the recent outbreak of nostalgia for the past which is sweeping the Soviet Union has

¹⁰² *Pravda*, April 23, 1991.

¹⁰³ *Izvestiya*, May 1, 1991. Helsinki Watch was also told about this incident by our Ingush interlocutors.

¹⁰⁴ Moscow Central Television First Program Network in Russian 1200 GMT, May 8, 1991 IFBIS-SOV-91-090, May 9, 1991; *Izvestiya*, May 9, 1991 IFBIS-SOV-91-092, May 13, 1991.

inspired some descendants of those Cossacks to revive their militaristic traditions, even to the wearing of the old uniforms. President Nursultan Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan has complained of the same phenomenon among Cossacks in his republic.

The outbreaks of violence involving the Ingush with the Ossetians and Cossacks took place in spite of Boris Yeltsin's visit to the area last March. Yeltsin attended a "huge rally" in the Ingush city of Nazran which had been going on for thirteen days.¹⁰⁵ He was reported as offering help to the Ingush in regaining their autonomy, and as suggesting that their territorial dispute with the Ossetians be the subject of negotiations involving the Russian Parliament, but the rally continued despite this attempt to soothe the participants. Ingush confidence in Yeltsin may have been somewhat shaken by his attendance at a meeting of Ossetians at which he assured his audience that the Russian Parliament did not intend to "adopt decisions on refashioning existing territories." He also met with local Cossacks.¹⁰⁶

In recent developments, the Chechen-Ingush Parliament decided last May to raise the republic to a full fledged "sovereign" status, dropping the "ASSR" designation from its name. In June President Mikhail Gorbachev sent a friendly but noncommittal message to the "First Congress" of peoples of the new republic. The Congress again called for an Ingush republic with its capital in Vladikavkaz, i.e., in the disputed territory.¹⁰⁷ In reply, a "First Congress" of North Ossetian peoples held in July condemned "extremist-minded Ingush" for this proposal and opposed "revision of borders and the territorial division of North Ossetia."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ The rally dispatched a USSR People's Deputy, Kh. Fargiev, evidently an Ingush, to address the North Ossetian Supreme Soviet. He appealed to the latter (1) to restore Vladikavkaz (capital of North Ossetia) as the administrative and cultural center of Ingushetia; (2) to rescind the ban on Ingush residence in Prigorodnyi Rayon and stop accepting refugees from South Ossetia there; (3) to set up a specially favored status for the Ingush; and (4) to create a commission on reimbursement for property confiscated during the deportation period. These efforts apparently met with a cold rebuff as "aggravating interethnic relations." (See Moscow TASS International Service in Russian [FBIS-SOV-91-055, March 21, 1991].)

¹⁰⁶ Moscow TASS in English 1659 GMT, March 19, 1991 [FBIS-SOV-91-054, March 20, 1991]; Moscow TASS in English 1804 GMT, March 24, 1991 [FBIS-SOV-91-057]; *Izvestiya* March 25, 1991 [FBIS-SOV-91-058, March 26, 1991].

¹⁰⁷ Moscow TASS in English 0818 GMT, June 21, 1991 [FBIS-SOV-91-1221].

¹⁰⁸ Moscow TASS in English 1650 GMT, July 6, 1991 [FBIS-SOV-91-130, July 8, 1991].

Meskhetian Turks

They tell us we're unwanted: in Uzbekistan the Uzbeks tell us, in Kazakhstan the Kazakhs tell us, and now there are whisperings in other republics.... Where can we live, if they won't even let us onto the land of our ancestors? We haven't made outer space habitable yet, so we have to live on this great earth, for which we Turks have also shed our blood. We were accepted as fighters for our country, but they won't let us live in peace....

**--Lament of Meskhetian Turkish
surgeon working in Kazakhstan¹⁰⁹**

The Meskhetian Turks regard themselves as doubly victimized for having had to undergo "two deportations." The first took place when they were rounded up by NKVD troops in November 1944 and transported from their homeland in the Meskhetia region of Georgia to Central Asia. The second happened in June 1989, when Meskhetians settled in their Ferghana Valley place of exile in Uzbekistan became targets of ethnic violence and were hastily evacuated to other parts of the USSR. The tortuous struggle of the Meskhetians to return to their Georgian homeland, which had begun soon after the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, was marked with new tragedy.

Deportation

Compared with the other deported peoples, the operation against the Meskhetian Turks is relatively poorly documented. Conquest gives the date as November 15, 1944. A Soviet source, citing figures obtained from the Meskhetians themselves, gives the number deported as 115,000, adding that, "thanks to the fact that practically the entire male population had been called to active army service... the action was carried out in a very short time."¹¹⁰

Unlike the Crimean Tatars and other deported nationalities, the Meskhetians were never publicly charged with crimes as a nation, although it emerged recently that they were suspected of ties with Turkish intelligence.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, Nov. 16, 1990.

¹¹⁰ E. Kh. Panesh and L. B. Ermolov, "Turki-Meskhetintsy," *Sovetskaya Etnografiya*, No. 1, 1990, p. 16.

¹¹¹ *Kommunist*, No. 3, 1991.

Historical Background

The question of the Meskhetians' ethnic origin is not merely an abstraction but weighs heavily on their current and future destiny. The refusal of most Meskhetians to consider themselves as anything but "Turks" is at least a complication in their drive to return to Georgia.

Two Soviet authors writing in the scholarly journal *Sovetskaya etnografiya* give this thumbnail description of the Meskhetians:

The Meskhetian Turks (who call themselves "Turks") are a little-studied group now undergoing a process of consolidation into a separate (*samostoyatel'nyy*) people distinct from the Anatolian Turks. Until November, 1944 they lived in southern and southwestern districts of Georgia located south of the Meskhetian ridge. They speak a Turkish language of the Oghuz sub-group of the Turkic group of the Altay family. In religion they are Sunni Muslims. The basis of their traditional economy is agriculture and livestock raising. The traditional culture of the Meskhetian Turks is close to the Turkish. At the same time, it should be noted that Georgian influence is clearly traceable (e.g. in clothing, food, housing and certain elements of spiritual culture).¹¹²

Elsewhere in their article, the same authors make the point that, "Whichever republic were to give land for permanent residence to the deported Turks it would unquestionably acquire a serious economic potential in the person of a hardworking people with highly developed agricultural skills."¹¹³

To a large extent, the national consciousness of the Meskhetians has been forged by the experience of exile. In 1969, the samizdat journal *Chronicle of Current Events* said of the Meskhetians: "The Meskhi are an ethnic mixture of Georgians, Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Kurds and Turkmenians. What they have in common has been created by their past experience of Turkish influence and their Muslim religion, and the persecutions they have suffered during the last twenty-five years have strengthened their unity as a nation."¹¹⁴

The ethnic identity of the Meskhetians today is the subject of a controversy which impinges on their chances of returning to Georgia. A nineteenth century writer traced their origins to Meshech in the Book of Genesis (10:2).¹¹⁵ It is certain that many are descended from Muslims of Georgia who in 1829 refused resettlement to Turkey after the Treaty of Adrianople, by which the Ottoman Empire ceded their land to the Russian Empire. Those Muslims are said to have been ethnic Georgians who were converted to

¹¹² Panesh and Ermolov, p. 16.

¹¹³ P. 23.

¹¹⁴ *Chronicle of Current Events*, No. 9, translation from Reddaway, *Uncensored Russia*.

¹¹⁵ A. Khakhanova, "Meskhi," *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie: Izdanie etnograficheskago otdela Imperatorskago Obshchestva Lyubiteley Estestvoznaniya, Antropologii i Etnografii* (Moscow), No. 3, 1891, p. 1. Helsinki Watch is indebted to Academician Guram Mamulia, a Georgian historian, for a photocopy of this article and for making the eleven-hour trip by car from Tbilisi to Baku in order to bring it to our representative.

Islam during more than two centuries of Turkish rule over the area.¹¹⁶ During the early days of the Soviet regime they were called "Turks" (*Tyurka*, then in the mid-1930s were officially reclassified as "Azerbaijanis" (a Soviet Turkic nationality), only to be redesignated as "Turks" (*Turka*) at the time of their deportation from Georgia. That deportation was apparently aimed at eliminating what Stalin believed to be a potential pro-Turkish fifth column along the Soviet border.

Exile

The Meskhetians seem to have derived a curious but short-lived benefit from the fact that they were not charged with specific wrongdoing: they were not placed under the stringent "spetsposelenie" regime until after the first six months of exile. However, many deaths occurred after their privileged status was changed. Conquest puts the figure at 50,000, nearly half the population deported.¹¹⁷ More recent data from official Soviet sources, which may be understated, give the number of deaths of all deportees from Georgia, of whom the Meskhetians were a large majority, as 14,895 during the first five years of exile, or 15.7 percent of that group.¹¹⁸

Rehabilitation

In Khrushchev's "secret speech" to the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, the Meskhetians were among those whom he passed over in silence when castigating Stalin for deportations. However, the relatively liberal climate after the Congress emboldened the Meskhetians to begin a struggle to return to their homeland, a struggle which continues to the present day. After the Congress, small groups of Meskhetians had begun attempts from time to time to enter the Meskhetian region of Georgia, only to be stopped at the republican border or arrested later and re-deported by the authorities. Despite these setbacks, the repatriation drive, evidently inspired in part by the earlier movement of the Crimean Tatars, kept on growing in intensity. Finally, on May 30, 1968, the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet issued a curious decree mentioning the Meskhetians as "Turks, Kurds, Khemshils and Azerbaijanis who are USSR citizens and who previously lived in the Adzhar ASSR and the Akhaltsikh, Akhalkalaki, Adigeni, Aspindza, and Bogdanovka districts of the Georgian SSR," i.e., their former homeland, but without mentioning their deportation. The decree asserted that they "enjoy the same right as do all citizens of the Soviet Union to live anywhere in the USSR," subject however, "to the legislation in force on labor and passport regulations." Ominously, the decree went on to claim that the Meskhetians "have settled permanently in the territory of the Uzbek SSR, the Kazakh SSR and other Union republics," thus consigning them to permanent exile. This point was driven home by the decree's instruction to authorities in jurisdictions "in which the above-mentioned citizens live *at present* to render them help and assistance."¹¹⁹ This dismissal of their

¹¹⁶ Photocopy of proof of book by Shota Lomsadze, *Meskheta i meskhi* (Meskhetia and the Meskhetians), Tbilisi (Izdatel'stvo tbilisskogo universiteta) 1989. Dr. Mamulia, who also kindly provided Helsinki Watch with this material, informed us that the book had never been published, having been banned by the Georgian authorities.

¹¹⁷ Conquest, p. 109.

¹¹⁸ Tolz, p. 19.

¹¹⁹ Conquest, pp. 188-89.

repatriation drive spurred the Meskhetians to new efforts. The authorities retaliated by arresting in Azerbaijan, on April 19, 1969, the President of the Temporary Organizing Committee for the Return of the Meskhi to their Homeland ("Vatan"), the historian Enver Odabashev. He was released after his people had demonstrated and telegrams had been sent to Leonid Brezhnev and the head of the Azerbaijan Communist Party.¹²⁰ However, continuing Meskhetian agitation led to his being arrested again in October of that year and in August, 1971. After the third arrest, Odashev was sentenced to two years' "deprivation of liberty."¹²¹ Meanwhile some Meskhetians, in despair, had given up the campaign to return to Georgia and began to agitate for emigration to Turkey.

Situation Today

With perestroika, the Meskhetians' focus is again on returning to their ancestral territory in Georgia: representatives told Helsinki Watch, "We're not interested in Turkey now; we want to go back to our 2400-year homeland."¹²² Yet as of January, 1989, after more than two decades of active struggle and numerous official appeals to the USSR Supreme Soviet,¹²³ the All-Union census recorded only 1,375 Meskhetians ("Turks")—fewer than one percent of the total—as resident in Georgia. Since then, under the newly independent government of Georgia, the Meskhetians' prospects of regaining their homeland appear to have become even bleaker than in the days when Soviet power prevailed. The President of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, addressed the Meskhetian question at a meeting held on February 27, 1990, at which he was reported by a Georgian newspaper to have "convincingly stated the impossibility of resettling the Meskhetian Turks in Georgia and expressed a sharp protest at the efforts being taken in that direction behind the back of the Georgian people."¹²⁴ The newspaper *Molodezh' Gruzii* (Youth of Georgia) has published an "appeal to the Georgian people" in the name of the "Helsinki Union of Georgia" and other organizations demanding that those who call themselves "Turks" be sent to Turkey and not allowed to enter Meskhetia, which the writers insist should be reserved for ethnic Georgians: "There is no such thing as 'Meskhetian Turks' anymore than there are 'Chinese Burgundians.' Meskhetia is a corner of Georgia, not of Turkey." (This declaration carried weight, since it happens that the "Helsinki Union of Georgia" is headed by President Gamsakhurdia.) Even those in Georgia who support the Meskhetians' claim to return to their homeland, such as the "League for Defense of the Rights of Muslim Georgians," which consists of opponents of Gamsakhurdia, take the position that the Meskhetians should be considered Georgians, not

¹²⁰ *Chronicle of Current Events*, No. 9, August 31, 1969. English translation from Peter Reddaway, *Uncensored Russia: Protest and Dissent in the Soviet Union*, New York (American Heritage Press) 1972, p. 276.

¹²¹ S. Enders Wimbush and Ronald Wixman, "The Meskhetian Turks: A New Voice in Soviet Central Asia," *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, Nos. 2 & 3, 1975.

¹²² Not all Meskhetians have given up the idea of emigration to Turkey. As recently as the last half of 1990, there were press reports of Meskhetians picketing the Turkish Embassy in Moscow with requests for resettlement, resulting in a promise from the Turkish Ambassador that 5,000 families would be accepted, but without details of the timing. See, for example, *Sobesednik* No. 36, 1990.

¹²³ The number of such appeals, as of early 1990, was put by one Meskhetian at 161. See *Novoe Russkoe Slovo*, April 17, 1990.

¹²⁴ *Zarya Vostoka*, March 1, 1990.

Turks.¹²⁵ The Soviet authors Panesh and Ermolov cite several statements by Georgian authors in which they find evidence of "biological racism," such as one to the effect that the high birthrate of such people as the Meskhetians "is no token of a civilized nation."¹²⁶

One of the arguments used by Georgians hostile to the Meskhetians' return is that there is no room for them. This claim is refuted by the Meskhetians, who say that of 220 villages from which they were exiled 84 no longer even exist, that the population of their territory has decreased by 150,000, and that 70 percent of the land is no longer cultivated.¹²⁷ On the other hand, even a Georgian writer who professes sympathy for the Meskhetian cause has cautioned that their immediate return to their ancestral land in Georgia could trigger violence, in part because many formerly Meskhetian homes are now occupied by Armenians who would be alarmed by an influx of Muslims.¹²⁸

The present controversy hinges on the question of whether the Meskhetians are Turks or Georgians. This is no idle question, since Meskhetian insistence on retaining Turkish identity seems to be one of the chief obstacles to their return to Georgia. Panesh and Ermolov discuss the formation among the Meskhetians of "pro-Turkish" and "pro-Georgian" factions. They recount a debate which took place in August 1988 at a meeting of 250 Meskhetian delegates, each bearing the mandate of a certain number of electors. They say that under pressure from the "overwhelming majority" who represented the "pro-Turkish" faction, the leaders of the "Georgian" group were forced to recant their position as "erroneous." As a result, the meeting, which called itself a "Congress of Unity," adopted a decision on return to Georgia with obligatory recognition of the Meskhetians' identity as Turks.¹²⁹ Certainly, Meskhetians with whom Helsinki Watch spoke referred to themselves as Turks. Of the 208,000 Turks listed in the 1989 Soviet census, they claim all to be Meskhetians. On the other hand, the Meskhetians have been urged by Georgians to adopt Georgian nationality (if not the Christian religion) as a condition of return.¹³⁰ I was told during a visit to a Meskhetian community in Azerbaijan that a small group that had managed to return to Georgia a few years ago had been pressured to accept Georgian nationality; of these, 26 acquiesced but the rest were deported. Panesh and Ermolov make the point that, "The ethnogenesis of the Soviet Turks should not be a factor in considering their political situation."¹³¹

¹²⁵ See letter from Zurab Mamaladze, chairman of the League for Defense of the Rights of Muslim Georgians, *Novoe Vremya*, No. 37, 1990.

¹²⁶ Pp. 21-22.

¹²⁷ See interview with Meskhetian Turkish refugee Khalis Dadaev conducted in Moscow in June 1990, by Catherine Cosman of Helsinki Watch.

¹²⁸ *Novoe Russkoe Slovo*, August 10, 1990.

¹²⁹ Pp. 19-20.

¹³⁰ Panesh and Ermolov (page 19) write: "One of the stumbling-blocks to solving the problem of repatriation of the Meskhetian Turks is the condition set by the Georgian side, if only unofficially, that the Turks affirm their Georgian origin and change the Turkish form of their names to Georgian."

¹³¹ P. 20.

The anti-Meskhetian riots in Uzbekistan in June 1989, gave new urgency to the problem of finding a homeland. The scale of the disaster for the Meskhetians is reflected in the fact that the All-Union census taken at the beginning of that year showed 106,000 Meskhetians ("Turks"), more than half the total in the country, to be living in Uzbekistan.¹³² Another 21,000 were in neighboring Kirghizia, which was also affected by the disturbances. The riots began when busloads of Central Asian youths descended on Meskhetian homes, setting them on fire and assaulting the inhabitants. Before order could be restored by security forces brought in from other parts of the Soviet Union, scores of Meskhetians (and a few members of other nationalities) had been killed. Many others had been wounded, and all but about 30,000 were hastily evacuated from Uzbekistan.¹³³

If there were sinister forces behind this well-organized bloodshed and destruction, they have never been identified although, in a series of trials lasting for more than two years after the incidents, numerous individual perpetrators were convicted and some sentenced to death. By some accounts the trouble was motivated by jealousy over the Meskhetians' superior socioeconomic status in a region with a high incidence of indigenous unemployment. Others have speculated that it was staged by organized crime elements in Uzbekistan to "show muscle" to the authorities, and that the Meskhetians were only random victims (a hypothesis made unlikely by the fact that the rioters had maps in their possession showing Meskhetian homes). On the other hand, the Uzbek press has published the charge that the actions were the result of a conspiracy masterminded by high officials working in Moscow's interest to obtain manpower for labor-short rural areas of the RSFSR by frightening the Meskhetians away from their homes in Uzbekistan.¹³⁴ Indeed, a large number of the Meskhetian refugees were transported to the RSFSR.

In June 1991, Helsinki Watch visited a Meskhetian collective farm in the Saatli district of Azerbaijan, some 125 miles south of Baku. Our hosts asked us not to publicize the name of the farm.) The first Meskhetians had arrived there in the late 1950s, soon after the Twentieth Party Congress, in the hope that it would be a way-station for their return to Georgia. When that hope failed, they had set about reclaiming the land, which was swampy and overgrown with weeds. The results were impressive: neat one-family homes and tidy gardens, with well-kept fields. Still, everyone with whom Helsinki Watch spoke was dreaming only of going to the true homeland.

The 1989 Ferghana riots caused a crisis for the farm, as new refugees began to arrive, first directly from Uzbekistan and later from the RSFSR. The arrival of 2,300 new families swelled the farm's population to double with no increase in the amount of land. This accretion placed a heavy burden on the farm's housing and food resources. Today, two years later, "thousands" of the new arrivals are still living in damp tents, despite strong winter winds and cold that even in this southern climate drops well below freezing. (Despite these strains, the farmers said proudly that after a recent earthquake in Georgia, the republic which was refusing to accept them back from exile, they had sent in 12,000 kilograms of food by truck.)

¹³² Here and elsewhere in this report, data for settlement of ethnic groups by republic are taken from a table published in *Soyuz* No. 32, August 1990.

¹³³ Figure given at Meskhetian press-conference in Moscow, March 11, 1990. See Radio Moscow-1 broadcast transcribed in Radio Liberty Soviet Media News Budget of that date.

¹³⁴ *Ozbekistan adabiyati va san'ati* (Tashkent), October 5, 1990.

Difficult as conditions might be for the Meskhetian refugees in Azerbaijan, they were said to be better off than their co-ethnics in the other ten Soviet republics in which members of the group now live. Helsinki Watch's informants in Azerbaijan told us that the Ferghana disaster had swollen the Meskhetian population of Kazakhstan, which borders Uzbekistan on the north, to 74,000, compared with a pre-disaster population there of 50,000. They spoke particularly scathingly of the treatment of Meskhetians in the RSFSR, where the bulk of the refugees had been taken at the time of the 1989 riots. (The year before Helsinki Watch's visit, at a press-conference in Moscow, the chairman of the Meskhetian "Vatan" Society, Yusuf Sarvarov, had complained that the Meskhetian refugees were really welcome only in five labor-short oblasts of the RSFSR's Black Earth Region, but that on arrival there 16,000 people had been dispersed to 3,000 farms in 156 different districts: "Tell me," he asked, "what kind of national culture and language can there be if 12,000 people are spread over 156 districts?"¹³⁵) At the end of June 1989, the month in which the riots had taken place, the USSR Minister of the Interior, Vadim V. Bakatin, gave permission to Meskhetian representatives to visit some of the refugees in that republic. The latter were found, according to our interlocutors, to be living in "broken-down, remote huts without roads, stores or schools." They had been given rags to wear and decrepit used mattresses to sleep on. They were unaccustomed to the harshness of the winters. Moreover, the surrounding Russian rank-and-file were perceived as disliking Muslims. One of the worst causes of dissatisfaction of the Meskhetians was the lack of mosques and the fact that they must bury their dead in Russian cemeteries or transport the bodies to the North Caucasus for burial. As a result, many fled to Azerbaijan, increasing the pressures on Meskhetian communities there. Others fled to more southerly parts of the RSFSR: to Chechnia-Ingushetia and Kabardinia-Balkaria in the North Caucasus, and to Krasnodar and Stavropol *krais* (territories) in southern Russia.

In Stavropol kray, President Gorbachev's birthplace and early springboard as Party leader, things were said to be very bad for the Meskhetians. Our informants maintained that their co-ethnics there could find very little housing, and even if they did could not receive a *propiska*, police permission to reside. With no *propiska*, they could not get jobs, nor could their children go to school. Furthermore, the local authorities and members of the general public were demanding "every day" that they leave the area.

Conditions were described as similar in neighboring Krasnodar kray, where 10,000 Meskhetians were said to have taken refuge after having drifted down from the northern RSFSR. They too were unable to work for lack of a *propiska*. This also deprived them, Helsinki Watch was told, of the right to have commodity coupons in use the area.¹³⁶

During a brief stopover in Tashkent, Helsinki Watch was informed by an Uzbek government official that some Meskhetians, possibly driven by desperation, are now attempting to return to the homes from which they were evacuated in the Ferghana Valley. He admitted candidly that they face considerable difficulties, since at the time of the evacuation many had sold their houses at disaster prices, and are now having trouble reclaiming them from the legal owners, who are naturally asking market prices. The Meskhetians with whom Helsinki Watch spoke in Azerbaijan condemned the attitude of the Uzbek government, saying that it "falsified" the true state of affairs. They recounted that, after refugees from

¹³⁵ See Radio Moscow-1 broadcast of March 11, 1990, transcribed in Radio Liberty Soviet Media News Budget of that date.

¹³⁶ Conditions in these two *krais* were mentioned at a Meskhetian press-conference in Moscow reported in *Izvestiya* of February 20, 1990.

Uzbekistan had settled in Azerbaijan in the wake of the riots, "Uzbek agitators" had come there and persuaded some Meskhetians to return. Those who did so, however, were said to have been beaten and stabbed by Uzbeks. An incident in the Uzbek town of Parkent, fifty kilometers from Tashkent, was mentioned. (Radio Moscow-1 reported that on March 3, 1990 there had been an "unsanctioned meeting" in Parkent in which 5,000 people had participated, that the mob had tried to seize the building of the district committee of the Party and had occupied the militia building. Thereupon, the radio reported, the forces of law and order had been "forced" to open fire, resulting in serious injury to 17 civilians, of whom two had died. The broadcast report did not mention Meskhetians, but a later newspaper report was explicit about their involvement.¹³⁷)

A recurring complaint of the Meskhetians is that their peripatetic existence has forced their young to switch from school to school in different languages (Uzbek, Kazakh, Kirghiz, Russian, Azeri etc.).¹³⁸ In consequence, they have been unable to receive a consistent education in a single language. The worst thing about this, the Meskhetians said, is that they have been unable to produce spokesmen of genuine stature who could represent them effectively in national and international fora.

In the face of this gloomy picture, there are a few developments which seemed to offer at least a ray of hope for amelioration of the Meskhetians' straits. On February 25, 1991, they were given permission by the USSR Justice Ministry to register their "Vatan" (Fatherland) Society, giving them a legal basis to agitate publicly for return to their homeland, something for which they had previously been subject to arrest. (It is possible that Georgia's declaration of independence has helped to persuade the Moscow Ministry to authorize activities that would be disruptive mainly in Georgia, not in other republics; indeed, the draft charter for the Society was prepared for the Meskhetians by the Institute of State and Law of the USSR Academy of Sciences.) The Society's seat is in a Moscow hotel, "Vostok-2," at Gostinyyny proezd 6, but its President, Yusuf Sarvarov, resides in Nalchik, North Caucasus. Permission has also been granted for a newspaper, *Vatan eski*, which appears irregularly in Russian and with no fixed place of publication, although it carries the same address as the "Vatan" Society. Finally, just before Helsinki Watch's representative left the Soviet Union, there appeared to be one slender ray of hope for the Meskhetians' return to Georgia. The Meskhetian representative at the Congress of Repressed Peoples of the RSFSR announced in his speech that President Zviad Gamzakhurdia of Georgia had promised to meet later in the month with a commission that would include Meskhetian representatives. While cautioning against optimism ("we are counting on nothing"), the representative said that his fellow Meskhetians had been cheered by the prospect. If it failed, he added, they would try another "peaceful crusade" from Batumi to "our lands."

¹³⁷ See Radio Moscow-1 broadcast of March 5, 1990 transcribed in Radio Liberty Soviet Media News Budget of that date, also *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, March 7, 1990.

¹³⁸ Panesh and Ermolov (p. 17) express this same thought in more scholarly language: "The constantly growing dispersion of settlement is complicating still further the process of ethnic consolidation and consequently attenuating the biostability of the ethnic group."

Kalmyks

The Kalmyks are a traditionally Buddhist people who live in the arid, sandy steppe west of the mouth of the Volga and speak a language closely resembling Mongolian. The present-day Soviet Kalmyks are a remnant of a much larger Kalmyk nation most of whose members fled eastward in the eighteenth century to escape Russian rule. Of all the deported nationalities treated in this report, the Kalmyks may be said to have perhaps the most trouble-free existence since their rehabilitation after Stalin's death, but that is only relative: they suffered severe hardships during the period of deportation and exile, and have never received compensation from the state.

Deportation

Removal of the Kalmyks from their homeland took four days. Freight trains carried them to Siberia and Central Asia. Nekrich recalls, in addition, that:

On all fronts, Kalmyk soldiers and officers were summoned from their units, gathered at certain assembly points, and shipped off to work battalions. The only exceptions made were in the cases of Colonel-General O. I. Gorodovikov, general inspector of cavalry of the Red Army and a hero of the civil war, and his nephew, Major-General B. B. Gorodovikov, commander of the 184th Dukhovishchinskaya Rifle Division.¹³⁹

Nekrich devotes an entire chapter to consideration of the situation in the Kalmyk ASSR and the behavior of the Kalmyks during World War II. He concludes that, although there were some Kalmyk collaborators, notably the Kalmyk Cavalry Corps formed in 1942 by the Germans, "the majority of Kalmyks not only remained loyal to the system but fought to defend it, arms in hand..."¹⁴⁰ This was not enough to save the entire nationality from reprisals.

Following the deportation, the Kalmyk ASSR, with an area of 28,641 square-miles, disappeared from the map, liquidated by a decree of December 27, 1943.¹⁴¹

Historical Background

The Kalmyks led a semi-nomadic existence in their homeland west of the Volga for three centuries. Despite occasional flare-ups against the Russians, especially over persecution of their Buddhist religion, the Kalmyks seem to have led a fairly peaceful existence before the Revolution. Their leaders were active in the Imperial Duma on the eve of the Revolution over such issues as national autonomy and representation, irrigation and land rights, but they do not seem to have taken an active part in revolutionary

¹³⁹ Nekrich, p. 83.

¹⁴⁰ Nekrich, pp. 66-85.

¹⁴¹ Conquest, p. 66 and 101-02.

movements.

In 1919, a Kalmyk uprising which co-operated with the White Russian movement seems to have sowed distrust of them in the minds of the Bolshevik authorities, an attitude which may have sowed the seeds of their later deportation. Nevertheless, a Kalmyk Autonomous Oblast was organized which in 1933 became an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. As semi-nomads, the Kalmyks suffered particularly from collectivization and from efforts to force them to give up their traditional customs.¹⁴²

Exile

Conquest reports that the Kalmyks bore their deportation stoically, perhaps buoyed by their Buddhist principles.¹⁴³ This is in keeping with recent information showing that the Kalmyks sustained fewer deaths in transit than did other nationalities: 1,220 or 1.3 percent of the contingent being transported.¹⁴⁴ While in exile, the Kalmyks were also subject to the "special settlement" regime. Nekrich describes their condition as follows:

The work which special settlers obtained was, more often than not, heavy labor. The Kalmyks, for example, were sent to commercial fishing districts in Omsk region; in Krasnoyarsk territory, where they also did logging work; in Khanty-Mansiysk district; and in the Taymyr. In these areas, the climate was cold and severe, quite different from the baking hot climate of the Caspian region. And the Kalmyks died in droves.¹⁴⁵

Rehabilitation

Khrushchev's exculpation of the Kalmyks at the Party congress was followed on January 9, 1957 by a decree restoring their national autonomy, and on July 29, 1958 by another which raised the level of their autonomous oblast, making it the "Kalmyk Soviet Socialist Republic."

Return of the Kalmyks to their homeland was relatively prompt. By 1958 their presence there was already being reflected by publication of books in the Kalmyk language in the capital, Elista.¹⁴⁶

Situation Today

¹⁴² For more on the history of the Kalmyks, see Conquest pp. 50-55 and Nekrich, pp. 66-85, from which this account is adapted.

¹⁴³ Conquest, pp. 101-02.

¹⁴⁴ Tolz, p. 19.

¹⁴⁵ Nekrich, p. 122.

¹⁴⁶ See catalogue of New York Public Library.

All but a few thousand of the 174,000 Kalmyks reported in the 1989 census are now living in the RSFSR, most of them presumably in their autonomous homeland.¹⁴⁷ They are the largest nationality there, outnumbering the second-place Russians by 45.4 percent to 37.7 percent.¹⁴⁸

This report suffers from a lack of direct information about the current status of the Kalmyks for two reasons: 1) There was not sufficient time for Helsinki Watch's representatives to reach the Kalmyk ASSR from Rostov-na-Donu, the closest point where the authorities would have allowed us to stay, and 2) there were no Kalmyk representatives at the Congress of Repressed Peoples of the RSFSR, although some had been expected. The Kalmyks were the only major group not to attend. When Helsinki Watch suggested to one of the participants that the Kalmyks might have chosen not to come because they had fewer problems than the others, he commented, "Possibly, but remember that, like everybody else, the Kalmyks have never received compensation for their ordeal."

There was recent mention of the Kalmyk ASSR in *Pravda*, which printed the text of a message from President Gorbachev congratulating the Kalmyk people on the 550th anniversary of their national epic, "Jangar."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ *Soyuz* No. 32, August, 1990.

¹⁴⁸ *Argumenty i fakty*, No. 13, March 1991. Translation from *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, Vol. XLIII, No. 31 (1991).

¹⁴⁹ *Pravda*, August 25, 1990.

Karachays

The Karachays, like other peoples deported from the northern slopes of the Caucasus, were "rehabilitated" by Khrushchev in his speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956. Most of them were able to return soon afterward from Central Asian exile to their homeland. However, their lost autonomy has never been fully restored, and they have been continuing targets of abuse by regional and local officialdom.

Deportation

In November 1943, the Karachays were celebrating the liberation of their homeland from German occupation when, without warning, all of them were placed under arrest and shipped off to exile in Central Asia and Kazakhstan. Conquest describes the scene:

In the case of the Karachay and the Kalmyks the decree was formally read in the villages and each family was allowed 100 kilograms of property, including food. The inhabitants were then assembled in fields or other convenient places (this was late fall) where they remained, often for a day and night, before the transport columns appeared to take them to the railhead.

According to Anne Sheehy, the Karachays had particularly high losses because they had been singled out to be the first of the North Caucasian nationalities to be deported.¹⁵⁰ Conquest writes that the deportation was "exceptionally brutal" because of the Karachays' continuing resistance to Soviet rule, causing high losses.¹⁵¹

The Karachay Autonomous Oblast was abolished, and part of its territory was ceded to Stalin's native Georgia. Nekrich notes that "the deportation of the Karachays occurred while the overwhelming majority of the male population was serving in the Red Army."¹⁵² In his 1956 speech, Khrushchev pointedly scoffed at the idea that actions like this one were prompted by military considerations, observing that the Karachays were deported only after the tide of war had turned decisively in the Soviet Union's favor.

¹⁵⁰ Anne Sheehy, "Justice at Last for the Karachay?" *Radio Liberty Report on the USSR*, December 28, 1990, p. 17. Throughout this section, we have drawn liberally on the article by Miss Sheehy, a leading Western authority on Soviet nationalities.

¹⁵¹ Conquest, p. 103.

¹⁵² Nekrich, p. 42.

Historical Background

The Karachays are Turkic Muslims whose ancestors settled in the North Caucasus some five centuries ago. After their territory came under Russian hegemony in 1828, they "had a record of revolt against Tsarist rule."¹⁵³ In 1917 they enjoyed a brief period of "virtual independence" until Soviet rule was imposed by force in fighting that lasted one and a half months.¹⁵⁴ This did not end resistance to Soviet rule: about 3,000 Karachays and Balkars were reportedly shot as a result of an uprising in 1929-30.¹⁵⁵

The Karachay Autonomous Region was established in 1922 as part of Stavropol Kray (territory).

Exile

In 1939, only a few years before the deportation, the Soviet census showed 75,737 Karachays. By the census of 1959, the Karachay population had grown to only 81,403, despite a high rate of natural increase in normal times. Conquest attributes this to losses suffered during deportation and exile.¹⁵⁶ Since Conquest wrote, it has been revealed that in a period of less than five years after the deportation, the Caucasian group of which the Karachays were members sustained a death rate of 24.7 percent.

Rehabilitation

Shortly after his 1956 speech, Khrushchev promised the Karachays that justice would be done to their people.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, they were included in a decree of November 24, 1956 which restored the national autonomy of the five peoples singled out for exoneration by Khrushchev in his speech. However, in what may have been a sign of lingering distrust of the Karachays, the government, instead of restoring the "Karachay Autonomous Oblast," merged them together with the Cherkess (who had not been deported) into a "Karachay-Cherkess Autonomous Oblast."¹⁵⁸ The Karachays were allowed to return to their native land, but the local Party leadership seems to have regarded them with continuing suspicion.¹⁵⁹

According to Kazbek Iskhakovich Chomaev, a Karachay spokesman whom Helsinki Watch interviewed at the "First Congress of Repressed Peoples of the USSR" held in Moscow at the beginning of

¹⁵³ Sheehy, p. 17.

¹⁵⁴ Conquest, p. 44-46.

¹⁵⁵ Conquest, p. 97.

¹⁵⁶ Conquest, p. 160.

¹⁵⁷ Sheehy, pp. 17-18.

¹⁵⁸ Nekrich, p. 136.

¹⁵⁹ Sheehy, p. 18.

July, 1991, they were at first forbidden to build their own homes and forced to live in huts ("vremyanki") because the local authorities "did not want us to take root on our own native land." In time, he said, the Karachays overcame this opposition and are now getting their houses built. Chomaev stressed that the various decrees and laws on rehabilitation had contained no provisions for compensation. (Like many others with whom Helsinki Watch spoke, he contrasted this unfavorably with the action of the U.S. Congress in providing compensation for Japanese-Americans deported during World War II.)

Situation Today

In the Karachay-Cherkess Oblast (or republic), Karachays with 31.2 percent of the population outnumber the Cherkess who have only 9.7 percent, but both are outnumbered by Russians with 42.4 percent.¹⁶⁰ During the July 1991 Congress, Chomaev, who is a member of the Karachay "Jamaghat" (Russian spelling "Dzhamagat") Party, told Helsinki Watch bitterly of continuing defamation of his people by local officials at both the Oblast (now Republic) and Kray (territory) levels. He charged that incorporation of the Karachays into the Karachay-Cherkess Autonomous Oblast after their rehabilitation merely added "one more ring of coercion" and deprived them of their rights. This, he stressed, was done without consultation with the Karachays and solely for the sake of the "administrative-command system." He said that at Oblast Party committee plenums in both 1974 and 1981, the charge had been repeated (in the presence of officials from the Central Committee in Moscow and the Party Committee of Stavropol Kray, President Gorbachev's old fief) that the Karachays were guilty and had deserved deportation. In Chomaev's words, this "cancelled the rehabilitation." A campaign of persecuting Karachay cadres had begun, he added, and Karachays were taken to task for using their own language in public. Such actions, he maintained, were aimed at robbing the Karachays of their resources and their autonomous rights, and were the work of "a small group of privileged people in the Oblast and Kray Party committees." He called this a "second genocide," while admitting that in the present case one that is mainly "moral and political."

Chomaev asserted that neither the 1990 decree of the USSR Supreme Soviet aimed at improving the situation of the deported nationalities, nor a similar April 1991 decree of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet, had had practical effects, whether for his own people or for other victims of deportation.

According to the 1989 census, some 6,000 Karachays (of a total of 156,000) were still living in Kazakhstan and Central Asia. To Helsinki Watch's question about whether there were barriers to their return, Chomaev said that there were no formal obstacles but the returnees receive little assistance, causing some who had previously returned to go back to their land of exile. He felt that the leaders of the Karachay-Cherkess territorial unit were interested in "preventing" their return to the homeland.

Chomaev stressed his people's economic grievances, especially in employment, where the "black hand" of deportation is still being felt. For example, he said that although the Karachays occupy about 80 percent of agricultural occupations in the republic, they "have three times less than their share of jobs in the Party and public organizations."

Cultural grievances are apparently less of an issue. There had not been much encouragement for native-language schools by the authorities, but the parents themselves were apt to feel that their children

¹⁶⁰ *Argumenty i fakty*, No. 13, March 1991. Translation from *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, Vol. XLIII, No. 31 (1991).

obtained better advantages by attending Russian-language schools. However, during perestroika there had been a renewal of interest in adding Karachay courses to the curriculum. The Karachays have their own native-language newspaper, *Lenin Bayraghi*, which is perceived as an organ of the "partocrats" although lately it has published a few "democratic" articles. There are no journals in Karachay, and the state of book publishing is "very poor." There is radio broadcasting in the language, but no television.

Chomaev's account of mistreatment of the Karachays by local and regional officials is borne out by other sources. Sheehy cites a long list of instances in which the Karachays have been subjected to official "slander."¹⁶¹ She mentions speculation that the late Politburo member Mikhail Suslov, who was a local Party leader when the Karachays were deported, may have had an interest in justifying their deportation. Noting President Gorbachev's former position as head of Stavropol Kray, of which the "Karachay-Cherkess Autonomous Oblast" was part, she writes that "it might be asked whether Gorbachev was in any way party to the unfair treatment of the Karachay."¹⁶²

Sheehy also details efforts to improve conditions for the Karachays, including recent articles in the central press. However, when the newspaper *Sovetskaya Rossiya* published one such article it received letters complaining that most of the Karachays were guilty of treachery, an indication of the extent to which the spurious accusations against them have persisted in the public mind.

The "Jamaghat" party, which was founded about three years ago in order to advance the interests of the Karachays, has been active in their cause. It held its first congress in October 1989, adopting a resolution on restoration of their liquidated autonomy. On that occasion the authorities nervously deployed extra law enforcement contingents, but did not take action to prevent the meeting. Jamaghat was instrumental in organizing, on October 28, 1989, a commemorative meeting of mourning at which 40,000 Karachays marked the anniversary of their deportation 45 years earlier.

In recent developments, a "war of republics" seems to have erupted between the Karachays and the authorities of Karachayevo-Cherkessia. Chomaev described to Helsinki Watch the Jamaghat congress held on November 17, 1990—the date observed as the 70th anniversary of Karachay autonomy—which unilaterally proclaimed the "Karachay Soviet Socialist Republic" as a sovereign state within the USSR. This was done within the Constitution, Chomaev insisted, and all documentation was turned over to the higher organs of power. However, shortly thereafter, a competing "Karachay-Cherkess Soviet Socialist Republic" was established "by those in the power structure." Chomaev expressed hope that, given the new legislation of the USSR and RSFSR Supreme Soviets on behalf of the deported nationalities, his own people's republic would prevail.

Like other North Caucasian nationalities, the Karachays have been concerned by a "reactivation" of the local Cossacks.

¹⁶¹ For example, Sheehy refers to a monument unveiled in 1979, long after the Karachays' official "exoneration," which portrayed them as wartime murderers of children, an accusation which has now been acknowledged to be false.

¹⁶² Sheehy, pp. 18-19.

Kurds

Of the various groups interviewed for this report, none was more insistent about its fears for the future than the Kurds. Briefly stated, the Kurds are worried that there is only one Soviet republic left, Kazakhstan, in which they still feel welcome. "What will happen," they ask, "if Kazakhstan suddenly changes its policy?" If their last refuge in the Soviet Union should prove untenable, they do not see emigration abroad as an option, given the problems of Kurds in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and other countries,

Deportation

The Kurds were ousted from their Transcaucasian homeland by the NKVD and transported to Central Asia in two waves, the first in 1937 involving those who lived along the Turkish border, the second in 1944 affecting Kurds in other parts of the western USSR.¹⁶³ In between these two waves, there was reportedly a purge of Kurdish households in Central Asia when in 1938 all heads of household were rounded up by the authorities and never reappeared. The conditions of deportation were the familiar story of three days in cattle cars, with many deaths, especially of children.

Historical Background

Before the deportation, there were about 80,000 Soviet Kurds. The majority lived in Azerbaijan, the rest principally in Armenia. In the 1920s and 30s they had their own schools, teacher colleges, newspapers, magazines and national units in the Red Army—all of which were lost on deportation and have never been regained.¹⁶⁴ The Soviet Kurds consider themselves to be an integral part of the Kurdish people dispersed in parts of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria speak the same western Iranian language, and identify with their problems. A casual reference made in conversation with some Soviet Kurds to television footage of a Kurdish leader in Iraq embracing Saddam Hussein triggered a heated defensive response and the argument that Kurdish leaders in that country had to make the best of a bad situation.

Exile

Like other deported groups, the Kurds were subject to the "special settlement" regime. They were not authorized to leave their villages in Central Asia until 1957.

¹⁶³ Some turkicized Kurds deported in the second wave appear to have adopted the identity of Meskhetian Turks. See section on that nationality.

¹⁶⁴ "Kurdy," *Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya*, Vol. 35, Moscow (Ogiz) 1937, pp. 534-35.

Rehabilitation

The Kurds were released from the "special settlement" restrictions after Stalin's death. However, they were another deported nationality ignored by Khrushchev in his 1956 speech mentioning the deportations. As far as Helsinki Watch has been able to learn, they have never been publicly exculpated of wrongdoing. In any case, they have not been allowed to return to their former home region.

Situation Today

Helsinki Watch had an opportunity to hear about the problems of the Soviet Kurds from a group of that nationality assembled at a state farm some twelve kilometers from Alma-Ata. The occasion was an outdoor feast held in an orchard in the shadow of the snowcapped Ala-Too Mountains to honor two Kurdish visitors from Syria, one of whom was identified as a member of the "Politburo" of the Syrian Communist Party. Our volunteer driver for the occasion was a Kurdish detective on the Alma-Ata police force. The master of ceremonies was Nadir Karimovich Nadirov, a scientist who belongs to the Kazakhstan Academy of Sciences. This was clearly an elite group: all were well educated (and spoke flawless, unaccented Russian). As an indication of the Kurds' ability to achieve, Helsinki Watch was proudly informed that more than half the group were members of the Communist Party. Some had arrived recently in Kazakhstan as refugees from Armenia, where the Muslim Kurds are said to be no longer welcome since the eruption of fighting with Azerbaijan. Those present told us that the Kurds have also been pressured out of homes in Azerbaijan, Kirghizia and the RSFSR. Although they show no interest in leaving the Soviet Union at this point, they spoke with passionate concern about the wretched situation of their fellow Kurds in other countries.

These Kurdish spokesmen claimed that the figure of 153,000 Soviet Kurds given in the 1989 census is much too low, that many Kurds have given in to pressure to adopt other national identities (such as Azerbaijani).¹⁶⁵ Yet it was admitted that assimilation is a serious problem. In the republics of Armenia and Georgia, Helsinki Watch was told, Kurds are forced to adopt the identity of Christian Yazids for protective coloration to escape persecution. The problems of the Kurds are compounded by a lack of Soviet schools, media and other cultural facilities using Kurdish. Apparently language classes set up by the Kurds with their own resources after a 1990 law authorized formation of cultural groups has so far done little to solve the problem.

Since emigration is perceived as out of the question, the Kurdish goal is autonomy within the USSR, preferably in the general area of the Soviet border with Turkey. The Kurds complain that without their own autonomous region they will continue to face assimilation and to suffer discrimination from host nationalities in the places where they reside. They fear that someday there may be an explosion of ethnic violence against them like the one unleashed against the Meskhetian Turks in Uzbekistan's Ferghana Valley in 1989.

¹⁶⁵ By some estimates there are as many as 300,000 to 500,000 Soviet Kurds. See Catherine Cosman, letter to the editor, *New York Times*, June 2, 1991.

Balkars

The Balkars are by tradition a people of herdsmen, one of the Caucasian nationalities whose deportations were denounced by Khrushchev in his anti-Stalin speech to the Party Congress in 1956. Like the others in this category, they were allowed within a few years to return to their homeland and to attempt to rebuild their national existence. However, although funds were allocated to assist the group in this, individuals have never received compensation for their suffering at the hands of the state. Moreover, the Balkars complain that developments that occurred during their absence in exile have prevented them from fully regaining their territorial autonomy, which they are forced to share uneasily with the larger Kabardinian nation.

Deportation

The Balkars, numbering an estimated 42,666 at the time, were deported after their settlements were surrounded on March 8, 1944¹⁶⁶ and they were driven away in trucks to be loaded onto cattle-cars for shipment to Central Asia and Kazakhstan. This was not reported at the time, but on April 16 a local newspaper that had been called *Socialist Kabardino-Balkaria* began to appear under the name *Kabardinian Truth*.¹⁶⁷ This was the signal that the Balkars' autonomy had been suppressed. One heartrending detail of the Balkars' deportation has been recorded for posterity: "Russian, Ukrainian and Georgian women married to Balkar men were offered the choice of breaking their marital ties and remaining in their homes or sharing the fate of their husbands and children."¹⁶⁸ Of those deported, 3,494 (8 percent) are presumed to have died in transit.¹⁶⁹

Of charges that the Balkars collaborated with the Germans during occupation of their territory, the Balkar historian Khanafiy Iskhakovich Khutuev observes that every fourth Balkar fought at the front, and that half of those who did perished. In one settlement alone, he notes, more than 700 were killed at the front.¹⁷⁰

Historical Background

¹⁶⁶ Khrushchev gave the date as April 1944. See Conquest, pp. 100 and 144.

¹⁶⁷ Nekrich, p. 63. Estimate from Conquest, p. 64.

¹⁶⁸ Nekrich, p. 109.

¹⁶⁹ Tolz, p. 19.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Khutuev conducted in Moscow, July 1991. Professor Khutuev was also a major source of information used by Nekrich in *Punished Peoples*. Nekrich identifies Khutuev as a "trailblazer" in publicizing conditions in the "special settlements." He identifies Khutuev further as a "well-known historian and philologist from Kabardino-Balkaria... secretary of the regional committee of the CPSU (Communist Party) and deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Kabardino-Balkar Autonomous Republic." Helsinki Watch is grateful to Professor Khutuev for the additional material which he provided for this report during our interview.

The ancestral grazing land of the Balkars is on the northern slopes of the Caucasus range, in the shadow of the 18,000-foot Mount Elbruz, highest peak in the range. (For more information on this habitat, see the section of this report on the Chechens.) The Turkic Balkars speak a language closely related to that of the kindred Karachays, from whom they are separated by a mountain range. Like other Muslim peoples of this region, the Balkars resisted both Tsarist occupation and the later advent of Soviet rule with its challenge to their traditional way of life. In 1921, the Balkars were merged with the considerably larger neighboring nationality of Kabardinians into the Kabardino-Balkar Autonomous Oblast, later the Kabardino-Balkar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. Sporadic resistance against Soviet rule continued for another ten years. In 1942, advancing German troops occupied the territory of Kabardino-Balkaria, and "a local administration was formed in which three emigres played an active role." By January 11, 1943, however, the Germans had been ousted from the territory.

Exile

A single statistic speaks eloquently of the hardships of deportation and exile: almost fifteen years after the Balkars' had been seized and shipped off by the NKVD, the census of 1959 gave their number as 42,408, almost exactly the number who had been deported. Yet in a shorter period, the thirteen years between the censuses of 1926 and 1939, the Balkars had grown in number by 28 percent. Somehow, the Balkar population in 1959 was more than 10,000 below what it might have been expected to be.¹⁷¹

Rehabilitation

Following Khrushchev's 1956 speech, the USSR Supreme Soviet issued a decree exempting the Balkars, together with other nationalities, from "special settlement" regulations. Next, a decree of January 9, 1957 called for "reorganization of the Kabardinian ASSR into the Kabardino-Balkar ASSR." The relatively small number of the Balkars seems to have helped them be one of the first deported nationalities to be substantially relocated to their homeland. However, the returnees found their homes and farms pillaged and in a state of destruction; only a few places had been spared.¹⁷² The state appropriated 64 million rubles to build housing, and state and collective farms were newly organized.¹⁷³ The Balkar historian Professor Khutuev estimates that all but 10,000 Balkars (of the 1989 total of 85,000) have returned.¹⁷⁴

Situation Today

Despite the Balkars' progress toward resettlement, according to Professor Khutuev, "the basic

¹⁷¹ Conquest, p. 160.

¹⁷² Khutuev interview.

¹⁷³ Khutuev interview.

¹⁷⁴ Khutuev interview.

questions of autonomy are still not solved." Although the equality of the Balkars with Russians, Kabardinians and other nationalities in the Kabardino-Balkar Soviet Socialist Republic has been "formally restored," he charges that implementation has been thwarted by Kabardinian leaders (not by the Kabardinian people, however). He also blames the lack of a mechanism to implement the decrees on rehabilitation issued by the USSR and RSFSR Supreme Soviet. One of his concrete objections is to the fact that four former "Balkar" rayons (districts) have not been re-established. He says that the inequality of the Balkars is particularly reflected in cadre matters; that although at the time of the Balkars' reunion with the Kabardinians it was agreed that there should be "parity," this principle has been flouted, and that there is "not a single Balkar" at upper levels of the administration.¹⁷⁵ The Balkars are now said officially to comprise 9.4 percent of the republic's population, compared with 48.2 percent Kabardinians and 32.0 percent Russians.¹⁷⁶ Professor Khutuev puts the Balkar share of the population at 17 percent.¹⁷⁷

Professor Khutuev complained about the economic situation of the Balkars. Before the war, he said, they represented only 10 percent of the Kabardino-Balkar population but raised 40 percent of the livestock, even underselling the state stores. Now, according to Khutuev, they have "lost" this profession because their pasturage has not been returned. The authorities, he explained, told the Balkars on their return from exile that, "When you have livestock, you'll get land." But without land it is impossible to replenish the livestock herds, a vicious circle. Moreover, the Balkars have difficulty in finding other employment. Khutuev charged that not a single industrial enterprise has been built at a Balkar population point, even though deposits of raw materials (tungsten, molybdenum, gold, silver, tin and coal) in the mountains are on traditional Balkar land. In consequence, the Balkars have to "go all over the republic and beyond" to find work.

Balkars who protest these conditions do not suffer direct repression, but are apt to face such subtle retribution as dismissal from work on various pretexts.

Khutuev blamed his people's problems mainly on an attitude of nationalism that has developed, he says, among the Kabardinian leadership, saying that the Balkars and Kabardinians have lived peacefully side by side for a long time. He also accused the wartime Kabardinian leadership of having conspired in the Balkars' deportation so as not to have to share the territory with them.

¹⁷⁵ Khutuev interview.

¹⁷⁶ *Argumenty i fakty*, No. 13, March 1991, citing the RSFSR State Statistics Committee as having certified these figures for the beginning of 1991. Translation from *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, Vol. XLIII, No. 31 (1991).

¹⁷⁷ Khutuev interview.

As for cultural matters, there are at present no native-language schools, but this is apparently not a burning issue, since Balkar parents had themselves requested Russian instruction for their children. The Balkars are said to accept the idea of bilingualism (as reflected in the fact that nearly four-fifths are fluent in Russian, one of the highest rankings in the 1989 census), but there is apparently now a movement to re-establish native-language schools. The Balkars have a newspaper in their own language, *Zaman*, and a national theater dance company which recently won first prize at a competition in Turkey. (The Balkars speak a language resembling Turkish.) There is radio and television broadcasting in Balkar, and a publishing house in the capital city of Nalchik which publishes books in Kabardinian, Balkar and Russian.¹⁷⁸

On February 2, 1991, *Izvestiya* reported that the Kabardino-Balkarian Supreme Soviet had adopted a declaration of sovereignty which raised the territory to the level of a full fledged "Soviet Socialist Republic." Whether this will lead the majority Kabardinians to commit excesses against the minority Balkars remains to be seen. A later report in the same newspaper, on April 9, indicated that there was continuing friction between the two peoples.

¹⁷⁸ Data from this and preceding two paragraphs also from Khutuev interview.

Bibliography and Acknowledgments by the Author, James Critchlow

The Conquest and Nekrich books cited many times in the text were an indispensable resource for the earlier period of time covered in this study. I continue to be awed by Aleksandr Nekrich's feat in completing his work in the Soviet Union and smuggling it to the West under the nose of the KGB.

I have also relied on certain specialized works dealing with individual nationalities, all of them cited in the footnotes: Professor Alan Fisher's book on the Crimean Tatars, Professor Sidney Heitman's study of the Soviet Germans, the article by Panesh and Ermolov in *Sovetskaya Etnografiya* (No. 1, 1990) on the Meskhetians, and the article by Dr. Youn-Cha Shin Chey of the Korean Center at the University of California, Berkeley were particularly useful.

The *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* and the Foreign Broadcast Information Service daily report on the Soviet Union were also valuable sources, thanks especially to their up-to-date indexes. The Radio Liberty *Report on the Soviet Union* contained a number of relevant items.

In addition, I should like to express appreciation to the following:

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Some additional notes:

The dimensions of this study were affected by certain constraints. I have alluded in the introduction to the problem of time. I was also limited because my request for inclusion of Makhachkala and Elista in my visa was denied on the ground that there were "no hotel rooms." (Makhachkala was also under a state of siege because of disturbances reportedly caused by Muslims unhappy about the price being exacted by the Soviet government for travel to the *hajj* in Mecca.) I was able to interview members of the mountain peoples in other locations, but elimination of Elista from the itinerary kept me from interviewing Kalmyks. Finally, another problem of this study: nearly all members of the various groups with whom I spoke were identifiable as members of the national elite, leaving some question in my mind about the extent to which they were representative of the rank-and-file of their nationality.