

**სომხური, ბერძნული, ესტონური და  
გერმანული ენები  
აფხაზეთში (1864-1939 წწ.)  
ARMENIAN, GREEK, ESTONIAN,  
AND GERMAN LANGUAGES  
IN ABKHAZIA (1864-1939)**

**გვანცა გვანცელაძე**

სოხუმის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი  
თბილისი, საქართველო

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**ABSTRACT**

Beginning in 1864, the Russian Empire initiated a mass influx of colonists from various nationalities into Abkhazia which radically changed the ethnic and linguistic situation of the region. None of the languages of those diasporas enjoyed any privilege except Russian, the knowledge of which was mandatory for the population of every nationality. Among other languages, schools and churches were sometimes allowed to use the Georgian, Abkhazian, Armenian, Greek, German, and Estonian languages. However, studying and conducting religious services in these languages were frequently prohibited.

Prior to the end of the 19th century, no school books, fiction, religious literature, or study materials were printed in languages other than Russian in Abkhazia; no national press or theatres existed. The regime's fear of knowledge and progress led to the prohibition of any expression of nationality. It was only at the beginning of the 20th century that the establishment of Abkhazian national schools and the creation of theatrical troupes became possible, although these developments were still insufficient.

The policy of the communist regime towards minority languages in Abkhazia in 1921-1939 was rather peculiar. Minority languages were divided into two groups. The Greek, Armenian, Estonian, German, and Turkish languages were granted more rights. This included the opening of national schools where the studying process was conducted in those languages, the issuance of newspapers in Greek and Armenian languages, the establishment of Greek and Armenian sections in the Writers Union, and the operation of Greek and Armenian theatres, among other initiatives.

The prevailing background highlighted the complete absence of rights for languages such as Ukrainian, Belarusian, Abaza, Polish, the Karaim language, Kazan Tatar, and others primarily spoken at home. These languages were destined to perish in favor of the Russian language.

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Such differentiation persisted until 1938, when the languages of all ethnic groups lacking autonomy in the Soviet Union faced sudden and widespread assaults. During these attacks, Greek, German, Estonian, and Turkish schools were closed in Abkhazia. Additionally, Greek and Armenian sections in the Writers Union of Abkhazia were shut down, and the actors, directors, and other personnel of Sokhumi's Greek and Armenian theatres were dismissed. Under the January 24, 1938 regulation of the Organizational Bureau of the Communist Party Central Committee, all Greek, Estonian, and German schools were closed, and Russian and Georgian schools were established in their place. During these repression acts, the population got the impression that they were planned and implemented under the Tbilisi initiative. However, linguistic repression was ongoing throughout the USSR, with the real objective being the acceleration of the Russification process among minorities whose languages were suppressed. After achieving their ultimate strategic goal of establishing socialism worldwide, the plan was to merge different ethnicities and languages and ensure the dominance of one or two languages.

**საკვანძო სიტყვები:** ენობრივი პოლიტიკა აფხაზეთში XIX საუკუნის II ნახევარში; ენობრივი პოლიტიკა აფხაზეთში XX საუკუნის 30-იან წლებში; ეთნიკურ-ენობრივი უმცირესობები აფხაზეთში 1864-1939 წლებში.

**Keywords:** The Russian language policy in Abkhazia during the second half of the 19th century and the 1930s, ethnic-linguistic minorities in Abkhazia in 1864-1939.