

Revealing Unknown Facts About the History of the Deportation of the Chechens and the Ingush to Middle Asia and Kazakhstan

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Abstract: This article is devoted to the detection of unknown facts about the deportation of Chechens and Ingush from the territory of their residence in Chechen Republic to Middle Asia and Kazakhstan. The relevance of the topic of deported peoples is important for the world community as a whole, because an in-depth study of the mistakes made in those years, will make it possible not to make them in the future. At the moment the topic of the deportations of the Caucasian peoples has not yet been thoroughly studied, the whole range of problems that the deported peoples had to face has not yet been fully elucidated. Until recently, the study of this issue was seriously hampered by the extreme narrowness of the source base. It is important to note the fact that there are quite different approaches to the study of the topic of deportations, and the works devoted to this problem are quite diverse in their methodological essence. During the research I tried to reveal unknown facts about the deportation. As a result of the conducted studies, based on historical facts and archival data, I have identified various versions of the reasons for the deportation and the expulsion of peoples to Central Asia and Kazakhstan. The actual data as well as the versions proposed by the Soviet leadership have been studied.

Keywords: Deportation, Chechens, Ingushs, USSR, Soviet Russia, Stalin

1. Introduction

Nowadays the problem of deportation processes in the Soviet Union is one of the most popular research topics. Some researchers claim that only internal deportations in the USSR covered more than 6 million people. The deportations of ethnic groups to Kazakhstan were carried out in several stages in the period of the 1930s - 1940s. At the present historical stage, it is extremely important to study the ethnic processes in the countries of the former Soviet Union, since many indigenous and deported peoples after the collapse of the country became citizens of other sovereign states. This situation requires increased attention to the ongoing ethno-cultural processes, as well as a critical reassessment of a number of generalizations and conclusions in previous publications on these problems. However, it would be a serious mistake to consider modern ethno-cultural processes without a deep analysis of their genesis, ways and conditions for the formation of an ethnos. This and other very complex

and in our time especially relevant phenomena and processes are discussed in this article.

It is now quite reasonably recognized that one of the main reasons for the aggravation of interethnic relations in the North Caucasus was Stalin's national policy, in particular, the deportation of entire peoples from their places of historical residence to the eastern regions of the country. After all, as is known, this not only does not contribute to the strengthening of friendship and fraternal relations between nationalities, but on the contrary, generates a sense of hopelessness and alienation, causes resentment and mutual rejection, as a rule, with a national color, with all the ensuing negative consequences.

As it is known, from the 1920s to the end of the 1940s, the Soviet Union's authorities used forced migration/ deportation as a repressive measure to control and intimidate the populations of the multiethnic soviet state. About 6 million people were deported from their native lands during this period, including 8 entire ethnic groups who were exiled to Central Asia, Siberia and Russia's Far East. The peak of these

ethnically-based deportations occurred during the Second World War (specifically between 1943-1944) when the Soviet Union used German collaborators to deport almost 2 million people total from several ethnic groups including the Crimean Tatars, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Karachay, Kalmyks, Meskhetian Turks, and Volga Germans. In addition to these groups, Soviet authorities pursued a policy of deporting natives from land that they took over including Finns, Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, and Romanians. [15]

The deportation of the Chechens and the Ingush, which in fact was a true repression, a kind of ethnic cleansing, caused irreparable damage to the culture and development of peoples. In my opinion, an objective and truthful reflection and comprehension of the deportation process, identification of the causes of deportations will contribute not only to the development of historical science as a whole, but also help prevent such repressions of peoples in the future.

Some historians may find similarities between the inner policies of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, but what is definitely different in these two regimes is that "unlike the violence practiced by the Nazis, essentially directed outwards (95% of the victims in the Nazi era were foreigners), as part of a powerful, expansionist and imperialist thrust aimed at establishing the Third Reich rule over the whole of Europe, or indeed the world, Stalinist violence was directed mainly inwards, at the Soviet society itself." [2] Here we can name such disastrous fact as Great Purge or Great Terror, and, moreover, the deportations. [3]

Soviet regime's control of the diffusion of information explains most of the silence surrounding massive deportations. The official propaganda that depicted the deportees as both traitors and dangerous bandits played the greatest role. Many victims' testimonies recall the local populations' reaction to the deportees' arrival in their places of exile. These reactions are mixed with curiosity, fears and aggression. Special settlers were typically regarded with suspicion and were largely unwelcome, at least in regions with a Slavic majority. After some time, relationships generally smoothed out and a certain *modus vivendi* was established. [11].

2. The Process of Deportation

This operation, that was called "Chechevitsa" (or Lentil) was being planned since at least October 1943, and two of Beria's most trusted NKVD officers - Ivan Serov and Bogdan Kobulov – were involved into the preparation of the operation. The Chechen-Ingush massive deportation was well-prepared. It occurred during the Second World War, while the Red Army engaged in hard fighting against Germany, suffered heavy losses and material shortages. Yet, about 120,000 NKVD soldiers were in the Republic at the time and participated in the forced resettlement. The NKVD commandant, Lavrenti Beria, personally supervised the operation. [1] On February 17, 1944, Beria arrived in the capital city of Grozny. He regularly reported to Stalin on the

progress made by his armed forces. The correspondence, which records each step of the deportation in its preparation and realization, attests to the highest central authorities' involvement. [11]

But before discussing this case I want to mention the fact, that the main reason for deportation and the main charge implemented to Chechens and Ingush is mass desertion and evasion of conscription into the Red Army. While we know that Chechens and Ingush could not physically join the German formations, since during the entire existence of Checheno-Ingushetia there was no mandatory mobilization. The decision to deport Chechens and Ingush was motivated by the real and potential danger of resistance in the conditions of war. [8]

Some researchers claim that «among the deserters in the republic were also enrolled people who ran from mobilization in the so-called labor army or work columns. It is known that in September 1941, at the request of the North Caucasus Military District, at the request of the North Caucasus Military District, during a real military roundup of the civilian population, 13,000 non-military residents of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, including teenagers, the sick, the elderly, the disabled and pregnant women, who, being taken to the Rostov region, without reaching the trench line, were scattered by German aviation and crushed by the troops fleeing in panic. No more than 2,000 distraught people reached Rostov-on-Don alive, who were taken to Grozny by a special state commission from Checheno-Ingushetia.» [8]

Thus, on February 11, 1943, at a joint meeting of the Politburo and the State Committee, a resolution was adopted on the liquidation of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR and on the total eviction of all mountaineers to the East for reasons primarily for the alleged refusal of the Chechens and Ingush to obey the orders of the Supreme Command of the Red Army. Also, Chechens and Ingush were accused of trying to create their own special national army to fight against Soviet power together with the Germans. [10] As mentioned above, among other things, they were accused of fighting together with the Germans in the rear of the Red Army, as well as for forgetting their patriotic duty to the motherland. However, this does not mean that the Chechens massively collaborated with the Germans. The 1943-1944 official documents disclose quite the contrary. These documents assess the local population's role in stopping the German advance and resistance to the invaders, who occupied during approximately twelve weeks the North-West of the Republic. [12]

Several people, namely Molotov, Zhdanov (who was in Leningrad), Voznesensky, Andreev and Kosygin (then - the chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR) believed that the CHIASSR should be liquidated: arrested and exiled immediately and publicly, in order to prevent by precedent possible organized resistance of Ukrainians, Belarusians, Moldovans, Crimean Tatars, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians and Karelian-Finns to the return of the Red Army.

The witnesses of that campaign remember the time when

the deportation started: «We lived in the village of Ekazhevo, Chechen-Ingush ASSR. At the end of 1943, representatives of the NKVD began to come to our village, soldiers walked in uniform. A rumor spread through the village that the process of deportation of the Ingush was being prepared.

Although everyone knew perfectly well that in 1943 the Karachays were deported, but everyone believed in the best and thought that our people would not suffer this fate. But then February 23, 1944 came. We were told to gather, and we were given 24 hours for packing up.» [9]



Figure 1. Preparing for the deportation.

The road to exile was a very difficult ordeal. Winter, cold, crowded wagons designed for livestock. As eyewitnesses recall, the doors remained closed day and night, apparently afraid of escape. [4] Endless strings of cars loaded with people drove up to railway stations, and at gunpoint the cars were tightly packed with men, women, children, old people. The period of unloading trains and transporting special settlers to the places of settlement, oddly enough, passed quietly without any excesses. It is important to note here that such an almost complete absence of any forms of resistance of the freedom-loving ethnic group testified to the shock experienced by people. For example, witnesses say that unhealthy persons and those who opposed the expulsion were systematically shot on the spot. Testimonies also confirm the existence of mass killings in the mountains. To meet the objectives, soldiers were ordered to eliminate persons considered “unfit to travel”. About 700 persons originating from Khaibakh, a small mountain village and the surrounding farms, were killed. They were locked in a stable and burnt alive. It would have taken too much time to transport them to the valley on the snowy roads. The transport conditions were equally fatal to many Chechens: disease (like typhus), starvation and the cold took the most vulnerable persons. The non-respect of some traditions also caused the deaths of some Chechen women who refused to relieve themselves in front of men. [12]

According to available information, 110,000 military units were equipped to escort the deportees. Five deportees were supposed to have one policeman who would escort them, and this was a completely insane proportion, and no other

deportation campaign had this. It is also necessary to recall that almost all wartime deportations are deportations of women, children and the elderly for natural reasons, because men are at the front.

A huge number of deportees died during the period of relocation, as the conditions were very difficult. In fact, the Chechen deportation, the most massive of all Soviet deportations, took place over the course of only a few days. [13]

3. Life in Exile

To answer the question of how the deportees were employed after arriving at their destination: the NKVD dealt with the employment of special immigrants. Since most of them were previously engaged in agriculture, the main employer for them was the People's Committee of Agriculture. [7] Several thousand people were sent to coal mines and non-ferrous metal mines, ferrous and non-ferrous metallurgy enterprises, transport, and other sectors of the economy. Specialists in oil production and refining were sent to the oil fields of the Guryev region of Kazakhstan. But in general, deportees were not hired, as the NKVD considered them incapable of productive activities, and this was reinforced by the fact that the resettled Chechens and Ingush had no rights. [2] A contingent classified as 'socially dangerous' could only work where the commandant's office had sent them. The management of enterprises had to ensure constant supervision of such employees. Those who did not belong to this category could look for work on their own. In

some cases, they were allowed to work outside the settlement. However, according to eyewitnesses, the Chechens and Ingush themselves were loyal to the local population, and there is even evidence that the Chechens taught the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz to build houses, bake bread in stone ovens, grow vegetables and many other useful things that the local population did not know about before. [6]

4. Rehabilitation

It is important to note that if during the Great Patriotic War the country's leadership was able to carry out deportation in a few days, the rehabilitation process dragged on for many years. This process was prolonged due to many reasons. One of the most important reasons was that there was no firm decision on the return of Chechens and Ingush to their homeland until 1956. And that is why, after the XX Congress of the CPSU, meetings of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the CPSU, meetings with employees of central bodies, heads of republics, territories and regions, meetings with famous people became regular. [5] All thirteen years of exile these people forcibly evicted from their homes and abandoned in remote cities, towns and villages of the Central Asian republics never lost hope of restoring justice to their long-suffering people. They believed that the Chechen and Ingush peoples were innocent and that the time would come when the Chechens and Ingush would return to their homeland. Real hope appeared after the 20th Communist Party Congress, when N. S. Khrushchev, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR made a report "On the personality cult and its consequences" at a closed meeting on February 25, 1956. Exposing the personality cult of Stalin and his despotism, N. S. Khrushchev named one more his crime being the repressions against peoples. [16]

Almost fifty years later, on February 24, 2004, the European Parliament suggested that the "deportation of the whole of the Chechen nation into Central Asia on February 23, 1944, as ordered by Joseph Stalin, was an act of genocide" [14]

5. Conclusion

The deportation of Chechens and Ingush, which in fact was a repression, a kind of ethnic cleansing, caused irreparable damage to the culture and development of peoples. In the author's opinion, an objective and truthful reflection and comprehension of the deportation process, identification of the causes of deportations will contribute not only to the development of historical science as a whole, but also help prevent such repressions of peoples in the future.

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