

## COMMUNIST AREA

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USSR: Nationalities

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### ARREST OF A MESHKHETIAN NATIONAL LEADER

Summary: Shortly after the "7th Peoples' Assembly of the Turkic Society for the Defense of the National Rights of the Turkic Peoples in Exile" had been held in defiance of the Soviet authorities in Uzbekistan this summer, the leader of its Main Organizing Committee of Liberation, Enver Odabashev, was arrested. The Assembly was held in an attempt to establish the right of the Meshkhetian people, deported in 1944, to return to their homes in Georgia. The charge against Odabashev is unknown, but a Crimean Tatar leader, recently sentenced for similar activity, was sent to a labor camp for 3 years.

Recent issues of the Chronicle of Current Events, the latest issue of which has just reached Munich, (1) have given a clear picture of the plight of the Meshkhetians, who were deported, lock, stock and barrel, in 1944 from their homes on the borders of Georgia to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. (2) At that time there were about 200,000 Meshkhetians, a people of Turkish origin and sympathies.

About 50,000 Meshkhetians perished in the NKVD special settlements to which they were sent in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan (3) before they were freed from MVD control by an unpublished decree in October 1956. However, like the Volga Germans and the Crimean Tatars, they were refused permission to return home, although some of them were sent to Azerbaidzhan, 300 miles from their original Georgian homes.

In February 1964, while Khrushchev was still in power, a general meeting of the Meshkhetians was held on a kolkhoz in Tashkent oblast. (4) A Main Organizing Committee for Liberation (Glavny Organizatsionny Komitet Osvobozhdeniya) was elected with the historian Enver Odabashev as its chairman. Delegations were sent by the Committee to Moscow and Tiflis, but the only result was a series of arrests. (5)

In June 1968 under Brezhnev, the Supreme Soviet publicly rehabilitated the Meshkhetian people, but reiterated that they "were permanently settled" on the territory of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. In July that year a large number of their leaders again visited Tiflis, and were told by Mzhavanadze, the first secretary of the Georgian CP, that not more than 100 families a year would be allowed to return to other parts of Georgia -- but not to their homes. (6)

In November 1968, another delegation went to Moscow and was told that they should be content to stay wherever they were sent. A request to forward to Brezhnev their application for repatriation was brusquely refused. (7)

In April 1970, their representatives, apparently despairing of any positive response from the Kremlin, decided to step up the pressure by asking the Turkish Embassy in Moscow for permission to emigrate to Turkey. (8) Thereby the Meshkhetians were following the pattern of the Jewish activists, whose pressure tactics have enabled more than 8,000 Jews already to leave the USSR during 1971.

In March 1971 the Meshkhetian leaders handed lists of names of those who wished to leave for Turkey to the Turkish Embassy, undoubtedly to the embarrassment of the Ambassador, who was then trying to restore Turkish-Soviet relations after the Turkish Supreme Court of Appeals had decided that two refugees who had hijacked a Soviet plane in 1970 need not be extradited. (9)

At this point the Meshkhetians also sent a public protest to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and on May 11-12 they conducted a sit-in in the reception room of the Supreme Soviet, demanding an interview with Podgorny himself. (10) Again they were refused permission to emigrate, although by that time in 1971 about 3,000 Jews had already left the USSR.

Issue No. 21 of the Chronicle of Current Events discloses that on July 18, the "7th Peoples' Assembly of the Turkic Society for the Defense of the National Rights of the Turkic People in Exile" was held at the Kirov State Farm in Tashkent oblast. Despite the resistance of the authorities, who went so far as to put the area in quarantine and who refused to allocate a hall for the meeting, several hundred delegates assembled from Kazakhstan, Kirgizia, Uzbekistan, Azerbaidzhan, Tadzhikistan and Kabardin-Balkaria.

The Assembly unanimously adopted an appeal to Brezhnev, Podgorny and Kosygin (with copies to U Thant and to the Parliament, President, Government and People of the Turkish Republic) which reads:

The Turkic-Meshketians, who were deported to Central Asia in 1944, demand the right to return to their homeland and to be reunited with their people.

Secondly, a protest was drawn up against the "provocative actions" of the authorities in trying to frustrate the Assembly and was adopted by the Assembly. On behalf of the delegates the protest was signed by Enver Odabashev, as chairman of the Main Organizing Committee of Liberation, and by Allah Issatov, the first deputy chairman.

The Chronicle reports drily that on 7 August 1971 Enver Odabashev was arrested. The charge against him is not yet known. He is now 59 years old.

Three weeks later it was learned in Moscow that two Crimean Tatars, one of them an historian like Odabashev, had been given 3 years and 2 years respectively in forced labor camps by a Tashkent court. (11) The historian, a woman named Aishev Muratova, received the 3-year sentence. She had previously served a one year prison term for her part in a Moscow demonstration calling for the right to return to the Crimea. The 3-year sentence was apparently passed for the same reason. The Crimean Tatars, like the Meshkhetians, also number 200,000 and were also deported in 1944. But unlike the Meshkhetians, a small number of them have been allowed to go home.

Whether they, too, will begin demanding emigration to Turkey (where there are more Crimean Tatars than in the USSR) is now an open question. The Turkic peoples are the second most numerous group in the USSR, after the Russians (12), and to judge by the large number of delegates reportedly at the

7th Assembly of the Society for the Defense of the Rights of the Turkic Peoples in Exile, and by the fact that the delegates were drawn from no less than six separate republics, it seems almost certain that as a reaction to the arrest of a Turkic national leader, these peoples will increase their pressure on Moscow.

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- (1) Chroricle of Current Events, No. 21, Russia.
  - (2) In the deportations of 1941-44 seven other nationalities were forcibly sent east.
  - (3) R. Conquest, The Times, 5 August 1971.
  - (4) Ibid.
  - (5) Ibid.
  - (6) Ibid.
  - (7) Ibid.
  - (8) Economist, 9 October 1971.
  - (9) Reuter, 8 March 1971.
  - (10) Economist, 9 October 1971.
  - (11) Reuter, 1 September 1971.
  - (12) Economist, 9 October 1971.