

## **Anti-Armenian Sentiments in Abkhazia in the context of the Turkey–Russia Confrontation**

**ARVAK Center comment, 26.02.2025<sup>1</sup>**

On the eve of the second round of the snap presidential elections scheduled for March 1, 2025, the situation in Abkhazia has become extremely tense. The first round of the snap elections took place on February 15, 2025, with presidential candidates Badri Gunba and Adgur Ardzinba, who received the most votes (46.38% and 36.92% respectively), continuing their competition<sup>2</sup>.

According to news from Abkhazia, tensions in the republic have increased due to the opposition's fears, led by candidate Adgur Ardzinba, that Armenian votes will be decisive in the second round and ensure a confident victory for Badri Gunba, who has a pro-Russian position. In this regard, the opposition, positioning itself as the defender of the national interests of the titular Abkhaz ethnic group, has launched a campaign of blackmail and intimidation against representatives of the Armenian community in Abkhazia and the Armenian population as a whole<sup>3</sup>.

It should be emphasized that not all ethnic Armenians support the pro-Russian candidate Gunba, which is why his supporters among the Abkhaz sometimes resort to methods of intimidation and even beat Armenian supporters of Adgur Ardzinba<sup>4</sup>.

The facts indicate that the Armenian population of Abkhazia has come under pressure from the political forces of the republic, leading a fierce and not always constitutionally compliant struggle for power. The Armenian factor has already become a critical component of Abkhazia's domestic political agenda, but in a negative context. Essentially, it is about inciting ethnic hatred, fraught with grave consequences not only for the Armenian minority but also for the Abkhaz themselves and their fragile statehood.

It is to be hoped that the awareness of these threats is widespread in Abkhazian society, especially considering the role played by Armenians in the struggle for Abkhazia's independence in the 1990s. However, external interference in the political and social life of the republic threatens pragmatism and traditionally tolerant attitudes towards Armenians. At one time, the Abkhaz-Armenian civil alliance presented Abkhazia, striving for international recognition, in a positive light. However, it is now undergoing a serious test. It is about Turkey's blatant attempts to expand its presence in Abkhazia and, in essence, establish control over it, using the method of inciting ethnic hatred that is homed in its foreign policy.

---

<sup>1</sup> The original (in Rus.) was posted on our website on 24.02.2025.

<sup>2</sup> "The Central Election Commission of Abkhazia has scheduled the second round of the presidential elections for March 1". Известия (in Rus.), 18.02.2025, <https://iz.ru/1841273/2025-02-18/tcik-abkhazii-naznachil-vtoroi-tur-vyborov-prezidenta-na-1-marta/> (download date: 23.02.2025).

<sup>3</sup> "Threats against Armenians and dismissal of security officials: What's happening in Abkhazia after the first round of elections". Sputnik Armenia (in Rus.), 18.02.2025, <https://am.sputniknews.ru/20250218/ugrozy-v-adres-armyan-i-uvolnenie-silovikov-cto-proiskhodit-v-abkhazii-posle-i-tura-vyborov-85923881.html> (download date: 23.02.2025).

<sup>4</sup> "Media: Head of Gagra District administration organized attack on Adgur Ardzinba's supporter". Эхо Кавказа (in Rus.), 16.02.2025, <https://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/glava-administratsii-gagrskogo-rayona-organizoval-napadenie-na-storonnika-adgura-ardzinba/33316804.html/> (download date: 23.02.2025).

It is now openly recognized by Georgian, Russian, and many Abkhazian politicians and experts that Ankara is behind the recent events in Abkhazia. In one of its previous publications, the ARVAK Center has [highlighted](#) this topic, particularly noting the long-term efforts of Turkish intelligence services and other state structures to infiltrate Abkhazia's political, social, and economic life with the aim of changing its foreign policy orientation.

Moscow is aware of the activities of the Turkish structures, but it has not particularly hindered their steps in Abkhazia, possibly believing that it controls the situation on the ground and will prevent Ankara from crossing the “red lines”. However, a recently published secret letter from the leader of Turkey's Nationalist Movement Party, Devlet Bahçeli, a close ally of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, addressed to foreign minister Hakan Fidan, calling for support for the program of anti-Armenian demonstrations in Abkhazia, showed that Turkey has practically already crossed these “red lines”<sup>5</sup>.

In fact, this is direct and crude interference by Turkey in the zone of strategic interests and competence of Russia, attempting to destabilize the situation in Abkhazia by provoking ethnic hatred and pogroms against the Armenian population. The part of Abkhazian society sympathetic to the “nationalists” apparently believes that their anti-Armenian campaign is dictated by the interests of Sukhumi, which cannot free itself from the excessive “*destructive influence*” of Moscow and its “*marionettes*” in power due to the pro-Russian sentiments among the Armenians.

The Abkhazian society is indeed dissatisfied with the excessive influence of the Russian Federation on Sukhumi, which, however, over the years of “allied” Russian-Abkhazian relations has not contributed to the economic development of the republic, to the improvement of the living conditions of its population, or to the modernization of its management system<sup>6</sup>. Despite the available opportunities and the subsidies allocated to Sukhumi, Moscow has not “pulled” Abkhazia up to the level of development of the neighboring Russian regions, limiting itself to supporting certain local circles through which it tried to exert political control over Sukhumi. In recent years, the RF has initiated a policy of developing Abkhazia's resources (land, gas fields in the Black Sea, and the tourism cluster) by relying on local circles with political and financial ties to Moscow.

Despite the weak resistance of its local *protégés*, who realized that Moscow's demands would turn the republic's population against it, the RF increased pressure on Sukhumi starting in 2020, forcing it to ratify an agreement in the fall of 2024 that practically monopolized Russian investments in the Abkhaz state real estate market<sup>7</sup>. This agreement triggered anti-government protests in Abkhazia in November 2024, which were ostensibly

---

<sup>5</sup> “Bahçeli's Letter to Fidan: ‘The Influence of the Armenian Community in Abkhazia on Political Processes and the Use of the Armenian Genocide Issue Hinder Support for Ankara's Initiatives’”. Aravot (in Rus.), 27.01.2025, <https://ru.aravot.am/2025/01/27/445976/> (download date: 24.02.2025).

<sup>6</sup> “With Russia, but without. How will the political crisis in Abkhazia end?” Carnegie Endowment (in Rus.), 21.11.2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2024/11/russia-abkhazia-relationships-future?lang=ru/> (download date: 24.02.2025).

<sup>7</sup> “Russia and Abkhazia have signed a mutually beneficial investment agreement”. Ministry of economic development of the Russian Federation (in Rus.), 30.10.2024, [https://www.economy.gov.ru/material/news/rossiya\\_i\\_abhaziya\\_podpisali\\_vzaimovыgodnoe\\_investicionnoe\\_soglashenie.html](https://www.economy.gov.ru/material/news/rossiya_i_abhaziya_podpisali_vzaimovыgodnoe_investicionnoe_soglashenie.html) (download date: 24.02.2025).

led by opposition Abkhaz nationalists but, as evidence suggests, were overseen by Turkish centers. As a result, the pro-Russian authorities in the republic resigned, and the temporary leadership elected after negotiations with the protesters, in accordance with the republic's constitution, scheduled snap presidential elections.

The scale and specificity of the events unfolding in Abkhazia since the fall of 2024 indicate that the problem has gone beyond the internal political framework and no longer fits into the paradigm of Russian-Abkhaz relations. Turkey is practically openly demonstrating its involvement in the ongoing processes and is transforming the Abkhaz direction into a “hot” front of geopolitical confrontation with the RF. Abkhaz nationalists may consider the combination involving Ankara as a successful move, aimed at either freeing themselves completely from strong Russian oversight or, at the very least, balancing it with Turkish support. However, given Abkhazia's ambiguous international status and the fragility of the republic's internal political balance, playing on the contradictions between the two powers could be fatal for Sukhumi, especially if the anti-Armenian sentiments fueled by Turkey in the Abkhaz environment reach the “point of no return”.

The pressure on the local Armenians, the second-largest ethnic group in modern Abkhazia, already threatens to undermine the integrity of the unique Abkhaz society and degrade the institution of Abkhaz statehood, which aspires to democracy and tolerance. Armenians, who were at the origins of modern Abkhaz statehood and its sovereignty, have essentially never claimed the right to representation in Abkhazia's political elite corresponding to their numbers and contribution. However, their very presence in the life of the republic has allowed it to build its own model of a multinational state and society. A blow to the Armenian stratum of Abkhazian society will be a blow to the very history of the formation of the Abkhazian state, to the moral and ethical foundations of its the struggle for independence and justice.

The Turkish proposal, which essentially implies the political reformatting of Abkhazia into a mono-ethnic republic with a subsequent change in its demographic composition due to the return of Abkhazian *Muhajirs* from Turkey, is an extremely dangerous project. Ankara aims to turn Abkhazia into a convenient foothold on the Black Sea coast for its future political and ideological expansion into the Islamic North Caucasus.

Russia cannot ignore such threats to its national security and sovereignty and may resort to radical countermeasures, including the use of force and the withdrawal of its declaration recognizing Abkhazia's independence — the only international legal act legitimizing the existence of the Abkhaz statehood. It is noteworthy that Turkey, which provokes Abkhazian society to radically distance itself from the Russian Federation, has not recognized Abkhazia's independence, despite promises to do so since 2008. In this context, the opinion of experts who claim that Ankara wants to achieve the formal reintegration of Abkhazia into Georgia, with the intention of turning the region into a “second Adjara” under Turkish protectorate, seems quite logical.

One way or another, the further development of events around Abkhazia can be judged after the second round of the elections. Official Moscow remains restrained in its rhetoric and does not consider the events in Abkhazia in the paradigm of a global Russian-Turkish confrontation. Russia is waiting. Its only reaction to the recent events in Abkhazia has been

the order of the head of the Investigative Committee of the RF, Alexander Bastrykin, to organize a “*procedural check on the fact of threats and violations of the rights of Russian citizens*” in Abkhazia<sup>8</sup>. This refers to the Abkhaz Armenians, the overwhelming majority of whom, like the Abkhaz themselves, hold Russian passports and citizenship.

---

<sup>8</sup> “Bastrykin ordered an investigation into the violation of the rights of Russians in Abkhazia”. Ведомости, (in Rus.), 17.02.2025, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/society/articles/2025/02/17/1092728-bastrikin-proverku-abhazii/> (download date: 24.02.2025).