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GENERAL ALEKSEEV'S "VOLUNTEER ARMY" AND THE ISSUE OF SOCHI REGION IN 1918



Before the departure of the guardsmen from Sochi to Sokhumi, Commander of the People's Guard Valiko Jugheli sits on the backseat of the car, 1918

The young democratic republic of Georgia, which had had to deal with numerous domestic and foreign challenges from the very day of its creation in order to protect its northwestern borders and meet economic needs, besides the Bolsheviks, had to confront the White Movement of Russia and its military force, the "Volunteer Army" ("Dobroarmia").

It must be said that, initially, the Georgian government and the Georgian command considered the "Volunteer Army," a force fighting against the Bolsheviks, as their natural ally. However, very soon, the real political goals and strategy of the White Movement vis-à-vis the former governorates of the former Russian Empire and, of course, Georgia, were revealed. For the political and military leadership of the "Dobroarmia," Georgia was considered a part of the same "united and indivis-

ible Great Russia," making it completely unacceptable as an independent republic. The interests of the parties clashed for the first time in relation to Sochi district.

In the summer of 1918, the unit of General Giorgi Mazniashvili, the commander of the Black Sea Coast Army of Georgia, marched through Abkhazia, expelled the Russian Bolshevik gangs from the region, and occupied Tuapse. On September 8, the Georgian garrison of Tuapse met the advanced units of the "Volunteer Army" under the command of General Mikhail Alekseev. After assessing the situation, in order to avoid complications and bloodshed, General Mazniashvili gave up his positions and moved his troops back to a safer location, near Loosa station. General Mazniashvili later recalled: "This is how control over Tuapse was passed into the hands of the Dobroarmia. Our troops took positions from



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1. Mikhail Alekseev 2. Gizo Anjaparidze
3. Georgian military subdivision at Tuapse, 1918



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Golovinsk to the banks of the Shakhi River. The Dobrovolets troops were deployed right in front of us. There was no hostility between the troops. Our headquarters in Sochi and Tuapse were connected by telephone... Both sides behaved modestly, and during the whole month that we were together, no incident took place between us."¹ The Volunteer Army and Georgian Garrison of Sochi went into standby mode until the relationship between them had been clarified. The Dobroarmia assigned General Evgeny Maslovsky as the liaison officer to the headquarters of the Georgian command.

Despite the seemingly calm situation, there was some tension between the armies facing each other. Naturally, the need for diplomatic intervention came up on the agenda; relations between the parties had to be officially defined. The special representative of the government, Gizo Anjaparidze, in a top-secret telegram dated September 3, 1918, informed the military minister of the Republic of Georgia from Sochi that, "The retreat of our units from Tuapse creates great complications for us in relation to the Sochi district. We lost Tuapse due to the intentional or unintentional treachery of the Cossacks. After it fell into the hands of the Bolsheviks, it was swept away by the rather powerful forces of General Alekseev. I don't know what our future relationship will be with Alekseev. I was not able to hold negotiations with the representatives of General Alekseev, as I arrived in Tuapse as a furious artillery and machine gun battle was raging between our fighters and the enemy, who had

already occupied the city heights. I came under such heavy fire, that I barely managed to transfer myself from the damaged boat to the destroyer and leave for Sochi. As stated by General Alekseev and the Kuban government together with him, the Black Sea Governorate as a whole, and Sochi along with it, are considered a part of Kuban. According to the verified information available to me, Colonel Kutatov has already been appointed governor by General Alekseev in Novorossiysk... Keep in mind that we may have big misunderstandings regarding General Alekseev, which may even end in conflict. The tactics of our actions now depend on the correct resolution of these issues – if we are to entrench ourselves here so firmly as to defend our platform in relation to the Sochi region with arms, we must dispatch our available forces in this direction, as well as several German battalions. And if we are to shift the center of attention to our historical borders, then in case of any kind of complications, we should slowly evacuate. For my part, everything is being done to get the population to take our side, and I think we will succeed... I am staying in Sochi. My presence here is a necessity. I am waiting for an urgent reply. Member of the National Council, Anjaparidze. P.S. Give this letter to I. Tsereteli. In case of his absence, to the chairman of the government. If anything, call me directly through the wire."²

In his second message, Gizo Anjaparidze informed the chairman of the government about the general political situation in Sochi district. The telegram ended with these words: "... All is being done on my part to make our

¹ Giorgi Mazniashvili, *mogonebani 1917-1925* (Memories 1917-1925), "Soviet Adjara" publishing house, Batumi, 1990, p. 79.

² Central Historical Archive of Georgia (CHAG), Fund 1864, ref. 1, case 16, fol. 8.



Georgian artillerists at the
Sochi front

work productive, but I cannot do everything; it is beyond my power. Evgeni should come immediately (here he is talking about Evgeni Gegechkori - A. Ch.). Moreover, Jugheli's detachment should immediately move here without any delay. Each day is important."³

The extraordinary representative of the government was indeed precise in his assessment of the difficult military-political situation in Sochi district, as well as in assessing his own abilities to solve the problems. The document illustrates that Anjaparidze approached the issue with great responsibility and considered it necessary to bring a more experienced politician to Sochi. On the basis of this request, it was decided to dispatch immediately to Sochi the Deputy Chairman of the Government of Georgia, Evgeni Gegechkori, and send an additional detachment of the People's Guard to the Sochi front, under the command of Aleksandre Maisuradze, a member of the general staff.

The unnumbered minutes of the meeting of the general staff of the People's Guard on September 10, 1918, contain the following information: "Attended: Maisuradze, Saghirashvili, Aushtrovi, Shengelia, Oragvelidze, Glakhoyan, Kartsivadze, from the district representatives: Station, District of Unity, Vera, Railway, Ortachala, Muslim Bureau, and Avlabari. The issue under discussion: Comrade Maisuradze's report on the situation on the Samegrelo and Sukhumi fronts. Our arrival had a great moral impact on the Samegrelo population. The population declared full allegiance to us and began to surrender their weapons. At the beginning of the opera-

tion, we received the government's order to immediately advance in the direction of Sukhumi and Tuapse, with the main forces, to the aid of Mazniev. The field headquarters discussed the current situation, and, in order to fulfill the order, decided to mobilize an additional 300-400 National Guardsmen and move to the Sukhumi front. It was decided to mobilize: 150 people in Gori County; in Kakheti – 60 people; in Tiflis – 150 people; in Nadzaladevi – 40; in the Station – 20; in Unity District – 20; in Avlabari (quantity not shown - A. Ch.); in Railways – 20; in Navtlughi - 10; in the Bureau of Muslims - 11 people; in Vera - 15 people."⁴

At the beginning of September 1918, the Deputy Chairman of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, Evgeni Gegechkori, arrived in Sochi. He studied and assessed the overall political situation there, and on September 15, sent a telegram to Noe Zhordania with the following content: "The local socialist type parties consider it possible and necessary to officially unite Sochi district with Georgia. It was an unforgivable mistake on our part not to take advantage of a favorable situation when the entire population of the district greeted our troops with admiration. The attitude towards us has since changed for the worse... In my deep belief, we should take advantage of the only card at our disposal – the favorable attitude of the local Social-Democrats and Socialist-Revolutionaries towards us, and announce the annexation of the district by decree. It would be a crime if we also missed this moment. The annexation of the district will put the command

³ CHAG, Fund 1864, ref. 1, case 16, fol. 5.

⁴ CHAG, Harvard and Leuville Foundations, Fund 1970, ref. 3, case 39, fol. 7-8.



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1. The population of Sochi
greet the Georgian army,
July 1918

2. Evgeni Gegechkori

of Alekseev's Volunteer Army on the spot... I consider myself obliged to declare that if we do not take a number of energetic measures to organize the Sochi district, we may lose it... For your notice, I am informing you about the first point of the order signed by General Denikin: "Until the unification of the Russian state and the creation of its supreme authority, the Black Sea Governorate is governed by the Command of the Volunteer Army."⁵

On September 19, Gegechkori sent a second telegram from Sochi to the chairman of the government: "In response to the request sent by General Vashakidze to General Alekseev, on the abolishment of the authority installed by the headquarters of the Volunteer Army, a telegram with the following content was received today from General Alekseev: 'The Volunteer Army is the su-

preme administrator of the territories occupied by it in the Black Sea Governorate. ... You can negotiate with the leadership of the Volunteer Army, but you must remove your government immediately. Having two owners is not acceptable. Failure to comply with this request will force me to radically change my attitude towards the issue of food supply to the population of Georgia.' We have already sent a telegram to General Alekseev about beginning negotiations, and we are waiting for a response. General Alekseev's excessive ignoring of the Kuban government made me wonder. I will try to get in touch with him. I will deliver a general report on the 20th. I am sure we will adopt the appropriate resolution. Articles sympathetic to the accession are being published in the local press."⁶

As we can see, without any unnecessary ceremonies or explanations, General Alekseev declared the Sochi region "subservient to the Command of the Volunteer Army." This situation had a corresponding impact on the further development of political events and the subsequent decision of the Georgian side. Processes were accelerated. In the middle of September, the Samegrelo and Tbilisi detachments of the People's Guard arrived in Sochi under the command of General Aleksandre Koniashvili, as did members of the general staff of the People's Guard, Valiko Jugheli, Aleksandre Dgebuadze, Aleksandre Maisuradze, and Iakob Kharaishi. On September 20, they met with Gizo Anjaparidze, Evgeni Gegechkori, and General Mazniashvili. On the same day, September 20, 1918, in order to avoid

⁵ Дж. Гамахария, Б. Гогия, *Абхазия – историческая область Грузии (Историография, документы и материалы, комментарии), С древнейших времен до 30-х годов XX века*, Тбилиси 1997, стр. 756; CHAG, Fund 1861, ref. 2, case 26, fol. 38-40.

⁶ CHAG, Fund 1864, ref. 1, case 16, fol. 15.



1. Aleksandre Koniashvili 2. Aleksandre Dgebuadze
3. Aleksandre Maisuradze 4. Iakob Kharashi

tension and uncertainty, to prevent the threat from the White Guards and the expected use of force on the population of Sochi District, the general assembly of citizens of Sochi, which was brought together on the initiative of the United Council of Socialist Parties, the Councils of Workers' Deputies, the Workers' Union, and the city council, made a decision on the temporary accession of Sochi District to the Democratic Republic of Georgia.⁷ The adopted resolution consisted of four points:

"1. The part of the former Russian state where a democratic system was not only obtained at the cost of blood but also strengthened by law is the Republic of Georgia;

"2. Aiming to unite the separate parts of Russia into a single and strong democratic republic, democracy should try to strengthen the rights of the people in every way;

"3. We believe that it is necessary and urgent to establish proper trade relations with Kuban district. We believe that by joining Sochi district with Kuban, the influence of military dictatorship will spread upon the population of the district, depriving the population of all democratic rights;

"4. The development of the life of the district with the

existence of actual freedom, the right to people's governance, carrying out land reform, establishing democratic forms of self-government, and introducing cultural forms for the class struggle is possible only by uniting the district with the Democratic Republic of Georgia.

"Based on the decisions of the aforementioned meeting of citizens, the population expresses the desire that the Government of Georgia approve the temporary annexation of Sochi district into the Republic of Georgia.

"September 20, 1918. Sochi. Pyotr Izmailov, Chairman of the Assembly."⁸

This act adopted at the joint meeting of representatives of the population of Sochi was a "temporary measure" to protect the population of Sochi and its district from the expected aggression of the Bolsheviks and White Guards. This action was immediately followed by a strong protest from General Alekseev and the Dobroarmia command. They demanded the evacuation of Georgian troops not only from Sochi but also from Sukhumi district...

Despite the fact that an additional detachment of the Guard was brought into Sochi, the situation of the Georgian garrison at that moment was still poor. There were not enough personnel to stand up to such a powerful military organization as Alekseev's Volunteer Army: A certain part of the local Abkhazian population and Abkhazian cavalry had already left General Mazniashvili's detachment and returned to their homes, while the Cossacks had joined the Volunteer Army. The armored vehicles belonging to Mazniashvili's unit had been handed over to the Volunteer Army, and the combat equipment and artillery were in need of replenishment. But the main issue was that the personnel of the Georgian garrison were very tired due to the long, non-stop combat marches and intensive combat operations. It seemed clear that the expected aggression of the Volunteer Army could not be prevented by the existing forces; it was necessary to consolidate additional forces and resources. The image of the re-escalation of the Georgian-Russian armed conflict was clearly visible to the military-political leadership of Georgia. In this regard, telegram No. 409 (without date) sent to Tbilisi from the headquarters of Sochi, addressed to the military minister, chairman of the government, and the main headquarters of the People's Guard, read: "According to the decision of the headquarters, the session of which was attended by Isidore Ramishvili, Gerasime Makharadze, Benia Chkhikvishvili, and Gizo Anjaparidze, we are immediately requesting to send to Sochi 500 bayonets and one mountain gun. General Konyev; Vladimir Jugeli; Al. Dgebuadze."⁹

⁷ Zurab Papaskiri, *narkvevbi tanamedrove apkhazetis istoriuli tsarsulidan, nakveti II, 1917-1993* (Essays from the Historical Past of Modern Abkhazia Section II, 1917-1993; Ekvtime Takaishvili Georgian Historical Society Abkhazia Organization, Ivane Javakhishvili TSU Sukhumi Branch Publishing House. Tbilisi, 2007, p. 20.

⁸ CHAG, Fund 1864, ref. 1, case 16, fol. 17.

⁹ CHAG, Fund 1864, ref. 1, case 16, fol. 21.



Valiko Jugheli among the people's guardsmen

On September 25, 1918, the Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Noe Ramishvili, upon receiving the report on the project of dividing Georgia into districts, made a proposal to incorporate the "coastline of Gagra" into the Sochi district, then unite with the Republic of Georgia.¹⁰ In Sochi district itself, although the elections of local self-government bodies had been held in August, the date for new national elections was set for the beginning of 1919.¹¹

On September 23, 1918, the advanced units of the Volunteer Army occupied Lazarevskaya. Guard units of Lomtadze and Tsitaishvili were deployed in front of them. The Chukhutki River was established as the dividing line. Along with everything else, this day turned out to be unlucky for the Georgian garrison. Due to a big storm that started that night, the Georgian side lost a large part of its floating means, and "St. Mikheil" was washed ashore.¹² It seemed ever clearer that relations with the leadership of the Volunteer Army would have to be regulated through political negotiations: the positions had to be reconciled firmly, determining the expectations of the Georgian side on how realistic import of the Kuban government's promised bread and oil was to Georgia.

Initially, Gizo Anjaparidze, the Georgian government envoy, was envisaged as the head of the Georgian delegation at the meeting with the Volunteers and the government of Kuban, and the place of the meeting was set as Tuapse.¹³ On August 28, Noe Zhordania wrote to Gizo

Anjaparidze: "You are entitled to immediately dispatch to Tuapse and take part in the political and civil discussions with the representatives of Kuban district together with General Mazniev. Moreover, the Abkhaz People's Council and national elections should be held prior to that. I am sending you money and military clothing. The government has decided to immediately allocate goods to the Abkhazian People's Council worth of half a million. Send it to the recipient. Has the new council issued a certificate for Chkhotua's mandate? The Tiflis Guard will be dispatched to Samegrelo to solve issues, and from there it will arrive in Tuapse via Kodori. You have to find flour, keep that in mind."¹⁴

General Alekseev refused to hold the meeting in Tuapse and named Ekaterinodar as the place for the discussions. The Georgian side agreed to the request of the general to hold the conference in Ekaterinodar, but the composition of the Georgian delegation underwent a change. Due to the tense situation in Sochi, the Chairman of the Government of Georgia made a decision to keep Gizo Anjaparidze in Sochi to maintain overall stability, while Evgeni Gegechkori and General Mazniashvili were assigned to conduct negotiations with the Volunteers. On September 12, 1918, the personal secretary of the chairman of the government sent a telegram (No. 26) to Sochi with the following contents: "To Gizo Anjaparidze. Evgeni Gegechkori has already left for Sochi to negotiate with representatives of the Kuban government. Inform the Kuban government about this and set up the time and place of the meeting. Preferably, as soon as possible. We consider Tuapse to be the best place for the meeting."¹⁵

¹⁰ CHAG, Fund 1863, ref. 1, case 628, fol. 17.

¹¹ CHAG, Fund 1861, ref. 2, case 26, fol. 25-27.

¹² Валико Джугели, *Тяжёлый крестъ (Записки народногвардейца)*, Съ предисловіемъ Е. П. Гегечкори, Тифлисъ, Топографоя Правительства, 1920 г., стр. 78.

¹³ CHAG, Fund 1864, ref. 1, case 16, fol. 12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 6.

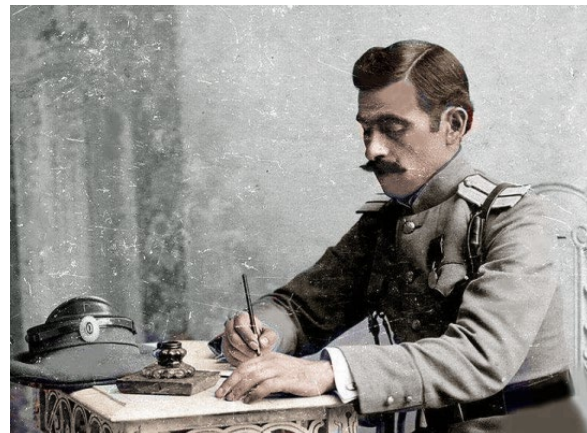
¹⁵ *Ibid.*, fol. 13.

Gegechkori and General Mazniashvili left Sochi for Ekaterinodar at 9 am on the morning of September 22, their route passing through Novorossiysk.¹⁶ On September 25-26, 1918, a two-round meeting was held in Ekaterinodar to regulate relations, discuss political and economic issues, and, most importantly, to determine the lines of division between the Government of Georgia and the leadership of the Volunteer Army. The meeting was held between the representatives of the Georgian delegation (E. Gegechkori and General G. Mazniashvili), Volunteer Army (Generals: M. Alekseev, A. Denikin, V. Shulgin, N. Stepanov, I. Romanovsky, A. Dragomirov, A. Lukomsky), and the so-called "People's Government of Kuban" (N. Vorobyov, L. Bichi).

The two-member Georgian delegation was confronted by a significant group of "Whites" – Alekseev's nine generals and two members of the so-called "People's Government of Kuban." In the course of their work, the delegations touched upon a number of issues to present and reconcile their positions. The main topic, of course, was possession of the Sochi district. The parties could not reach an agreement on the issue. The Georgian delegation was also skeptical in relation to other issues. Both Gegechkori and Mazniashvili knew very well that the positions of the Volunteer leaders would be firm. At the meeting, Gegechkori tried to convince General Alekseev that the Georgian government treated his fight against Bolshevism with respect (which is why the communists accused the Georgian social democrats of connection with Alekseev and Denikin), and assured him that both he and they, for various subjective reasons, were currently hitting the same point, which in that moment represented a common force.¹⁷

On the second day of discussions, Evgeni Gegechkori raised an important issue: that of the credentials and competence of the Russian delegation. Moreover, the head of the Georgian delegation questioned the legitimacy of the "Dobroarmia" as an organization: "I stated that we hold the Sochi district temporarily, that we will discuss its final fate at another, more competent meeting, because here, at this meeting, it is completely unacceptable to decide the fate of nations; no-one has given us such a task, and we have no right to do so. All relations are organized here temporarily, because the Dobroarmia itself is still a temporary organization. We have captured the Sochi district temporarily, similarly, the Dobroarmia holds, as you yourself stated yesterday, the Stavropol Governorate and Kuban by right of war. Dobroarmia is still a private organization and not a public-state one."

Such framing of the issue by the Georgian side angered the Volunteer leader, General Alekseev, and he shouted



Giorgi Mazniashvili

– "But it will be a public-state!"¹⁸ The Russian delegation entered a deadlock, and it became clear that there were fundamental differences in the statuses and visions of the delegations, and their resolution, at least at that stage, was not possible. The Russian delegation called a halt to the negotiation process, and its leader, General Alekseev, closed the session with these words: "Our and Georgia's points of view differ so much that we should not even try to discuss the remainder of the issues. Since the military-political situation has not been resolved and we are not eager to concede in this matter, it is not necessary to start discussing trade and industrial issues... It is very difficult for me to say this, but since we could not make a positive decision on the main issue, I declare the session closed."¹⁹

The negotiations yielded no results. The parties could not reach an agreement on any issue, but this did not prevent the Volunteer Army from implementing the plan to "liberate" Abkhazia from the "Georgian invaders."²⁰ After the failed negotiations with the Georgian delegation, communication lines with Sochi were immediately blocked by the Volunteers, and its food supply was also cut. At the same time, Denikin's spies launched extensive agitation among the local population.²¹ All this contributed to the aggravation of the political and economic situation in the region.

According to Noe Zhordania, "Russia... was not allowing bread to pass, the whole ship of wheat sent by the

¹⁶ CHAG, Fund 1864, ref. 1, case 16, fol. 17.

¹⁷ *Документы и материалы по внешней политике Закавказья и Грузии*, Тбилиси, 1919, стр. 400.

¹⁸ *Документы и материалы по внешней политике Закавказья и Грузии*, стр. 406.

¹⁹ *Документы и материалы по внешней политике Закавказья и Грузии*, стр. 408.

²⁰ А. Ментешавили, *Исторические предпосылки современного сепаратизма в Грузии*, Тбилиси, 1998, стр. 26-27.

²¹ Н. Е. Герасимова, *Гражданская война 1918-1920 гг. Часть 1, „Сочи: страницы прошлого и настоящего“*, *Иллюстрированный сборник статей* (2003 год), http://sochionline.3dn.ru/blog/sochi_stranicy_proshlogo_i_nastojashhego_illjustrirovannyj_sbornik_statej_2003_god/ 2011-08 31-66.



1. A. Denikin 2. I. Romanovsky
3. A. Dragomirov 4. A. Lukomsky
5. N. Baratov



Kuban democratic government was detained by Denikin's people and returned to Tuapse. We could not receive it from abroad because of the blockade... sometimes we somehow managed to sneak bread in from abroad through Istanbul..."²² The main message of the Dobroarmia leaders to Georgia and Transcaucasia as a whole was the following: "The entire Transcaucasia must be recognized as an integral part of the Russian state within the borders of 1914..." and in relation to Georgia, the message was that "if it (Georgia - A.Ch.) recognizes its belonging to the Russian state and stops persecuting the Russians in Georgia for various reasons, then it is very possible to establish friendly relations by restoring the free circulation of goods and removing customs restrictions."²³

The first official notice about the Russian White Movement, and the threat it represented, was printed as a front page article under the title "Reaction from the North," in the October 13, 1918 issue of the *Ertoba* newspaper: "The greatest danger that hangs over the Democratic Republic of Georgia today is the Russian reactionary force of General Alekseev's army coming from the north. It is busy fighting the Bolsheviks, but it has eyes on the Republic of Georgia, looking to destroy the freedom won with fire and sword by

the people's struggle and to enthrone the Gendarmerie of Nicholay. The negotiations between Ev. Gegechkori and the Kuban government revealed the motivations of the Black Hundreds generals of the former station of the Russian commander-in-chief: Alekseev, Lukomsky, Denikin, Filimonov, and the pillar of autocracy, the hero of the Third Duma, Shulgin. Besides the Ottoman Empire, no force is as dangerous and destructive for the freedom of the Georgian people as the reactionary Russian army, which is gradually gaining strength in the south due to domestic anarchy, and it is obvious that the first attack will be directed against us, since only Georgia is left on the territory of the old Great Russia, where democracy is strong and the freedom gained through revolution is being strengthened."²⁴

In order to outline the attitude of the military-political leaders of the White Movement of Russia toward the Democratic Republic of Georgia, we will note one more important fact. In 1919, General Denikin appointed as his chief military-diplomatic representative in Transcaucasia one of the most distinguished generals of the Caucasus Front of World War I, Commander-in Chief General Nikolay Baratov. Although General Baratov was of Georgian origin, as a man born in Russia with a military upbringing, he had lost everything patriotic and national. He was a loyal representative of the Russian monarchy in both his personal beliefs and his creed. Denikin provided General Baratov with secret instructions with the following content: "The entire Transcaucasia should be considered an integral part of the Russian state within the 1914 borders. It is your duty to prepare the ground for the painless annexation of these districts to the united and indivisible Russia, under the supreme rule of the Russian state government."²⁵

In 1918, the unsuccessful negotiations between Georgia and the "Dobroarmia" regarding the issue of Sochi district clearly showed that the young Georgian Republic, and its state sovereignty and territorial integrity, were facing a new formidable threat...

²² Dodo Pertaia, "sakartvelos demokratiuli respublikis ekonomikuri mdgomareoba (1918-1921)" (Economic Situation of the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921), *Historical Researches*, Ekvtime Takaishvili Historical Society, Abkhazia Organization, 2000. N3. p. 142; N. Zhordania, *chemi tsarsuli* (My Past).

²³ Антон Иванович Деникин, *Очерки русской смуты, Вооружённые силы юга России, Воспоминания, Мемуары*, Минск, 2002, стр. 248.

²⁴ Newspaper *Ertoba* (Unity), "Bolsheviks in Bandza", 1918, October 13, No. 220.

²⁵ Антон Иванович Деникин, *Очерки русской смуты, Вооружённые силы юга России, Воспоминания, Мемуары*, стр. 248.