
The alteration of place names and construction of national identity in Soviet Armenia

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The reason for these renamings is clearly stated in an official decree on renamings of 1935:

Resolution of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the SSRA
Taking into consideration that names of many populated places of the SSRA reflect relict religious, feudal-landowner relations and are alien to the Soviet consciousness, and [moreover] some have unstable and even derogative meaning, as well as that many place-names are repeated in two or more areas which creates postal and other inconveniences, the Presidium of TsIK [Central Executive Committee] SSRA complies with the opinion of workers and local organisations and has decided: 1. to change names of populated places, according to the following list: [list of place-names]
Secretary of TsIK SSRA — R. Dashtorian
January 3, 1935²⁵

During the period 1941-1945 of the Great Patriotic War, there were no renamings in the Armenian SSR. The only exception was one renaming of a Russian village Yudenovskaya into Leninovskaya, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Russian poet Leninovskiy's death in 1941. This particular renaming also allowed the authorities to get rid of an undesirable religious toponym (Yudenovskaya means Resurrection). The place name renamings of 1945 occurred after the capitulation of Nazi Germany. The significant increase in the number of renamings between 1946 and 1950 was a product of both social and political processes. One of these was the mass repatriation of Armenians in the aftermath of the war. The Soviet government adopted a decision to repatriate Armenians into Soviet Armenia in November 1945.²⁶ The returning Armenians became Soviet citizens the moment they arrived in the USSR.²⁷ In the period 1946-1948 some 80,000 Armenians arrived from the Middle East, North and South America and Western Europe.²⁸ Another social-political process that apparently affected place naming in Armenia was the migration of Azerbaijanis from the Armenian SSR that occurred in that period. On March 10, 1948, the Council of Ministers of the USSR adopted a resolution

25. *Armenian Journal*, 1935, no. 1945. The comparison of the list of renamings published in the *Armenian Journal* (1945 renamings) with the list of renamings that appeared in the 1948 edition of the Administrative-territorial division of the Armenian SSR (1948 renamings) shows that several place names had disappeared from the map of Armenia between 1945 and 1948.

26. According to the decree of the Council of the USSR of November 15, 1945 the Armenian government received significant assets for the repatriation of repatriates and for offering help to the repatriates. The plenum of the Armenian Communist Party held in February 1946 had discussed "Measures in preparation for assistance and settlement of Armenians returning from abroad" (*Armenian Soviet Communist Party Journal* "Armenia," 1947, no. 10).

27. *Monthly column USSR* / *Armenian Republic* Yudenovskaya Soviet 1946-1948 (Moscow, 1947). "In parallel publication publication USSR shows renamings national level, renamings/territorialization is no greater in volume + renamings Armenia," *Journal of October 10, 1948*, p. 95.

28. Barbara A. Hovhannesian and Bruce D. Wilson, "Repatriation and the ethnic balance in Transcaucasia," in Ronald G. Sney, ed., *Transcaucasia, nationalism, and social change: essays in the history of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1986), 488.