

The Soviet Renaming Revolution

🚩 Soviet Place Name Changes, 1917–1945 🚩



A larger-scale, more detailed version of this map is available at [Classic Europa](#)

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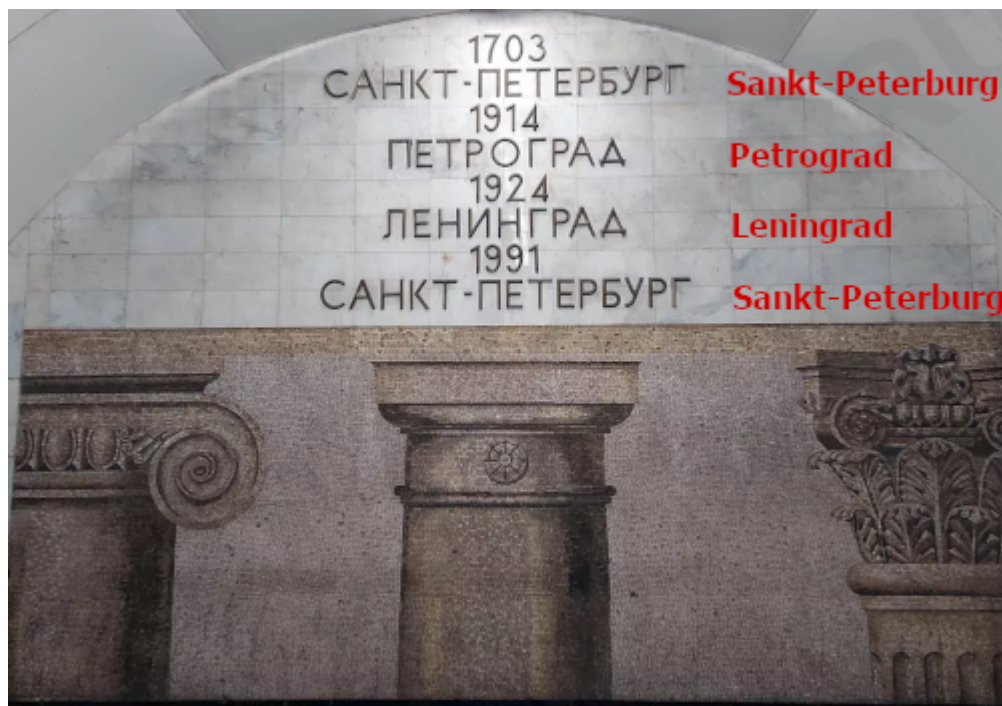
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Version Notes:

- Version 1.001; Original version, 2003.
- Version 1.002; 2004. Correction: The Polish city of Stanisławów in v1.001 was listed as becoming “Stanislavov (Ru)/ Stanislaviv (Ukr), UkrSSR, USSR” in 1939. This is incorrect, it became “Stanislav (Ru &Ukr), UkrSSR, USSR” in 1939. Stanislavov/Staniislaviv were earlier Russian/Ukrainian spellings for the city’s name.

1.A Introduction



The many names of Sankt-Peterburg ("St. Petersburg")¹

The Bolshevik Revolution in late 1917 saw the Soviets take over Russia, become the Communists, and attempt to remold the country and its multitudes to their repressive Marxist-Leninist agenda. Part of this molding entailed a renaming revolution. The names of many villages, towns, and cities were changed to get rid of reminders of the imperialist, religious past and to celebrate Communist ideas, heroes, and politicians.

Soviet name changes broadly fall into four categories: change of status, localization, political reasons, and annexations. This guidebook covers place name changes in the territory controlled by the Soviet state from 1917–1941. It covers name changes of all major cities, of most medium-sized cities, and of selected villages, towns, and small cities. The Soviets also changed many thousands of other names for regions, city districts, streets, squares, institutions, factories, and so on, which is outside the scope of this work.

The guidebook does not cover place name changes in regions outside the Soviet state, even in those areas than had been affected by the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. For example, the Finnish town of *Serdobol* became *Sortavala* when Finland achieved its independence in late 1917, but this not covered below.

¹ Picture adapted from a photograph of a Sankt-Peterburg subway station; <https://subway-spb.ru/en/line2/sennaya>.

This guidebook concentrates mainly on the official names of places. Due to Soviet language policies (see [Appendix A](#) for an overview), places in non-Russian ethnic areas could have two or more official versions of their names, one for each language in use. For example, the Belorussian SSR city of *Bobruysk* (Russian name) was also *Babruysk* in Belarusian. For most cases, I just cover the Russian version of the name, as this was the one used across the USSR. The other official names were mostly restricted only used in the place's union republic or in even smaller areas. Also, the different versions of an official name were usually quite minor, mostly minor spelling differences due to how the name was pronounced in various languages.

Places also had unofficial names, former names, and names used by foreign countries. These in almost all circumstances are not covered here. For example, when the USSR annexed eastern Poland in 1939, what had been the Polish city of *Lwów* became the Ukrainian city of *Lvov* (Russian spelling) and *Lviv* (Ukrainian spelling), Russian and Ukrainian being the two administrative languages of the Ukrainian SSR. Since Polish and Yiddish were recognized minority languages of the Ukrainian SSR, *Lwów* remained in official use for Polish-speaking Soviet citizens and *Lemberik* was in official use for Yiddish-speaking Soviet citizens. Outside of the USSR, the city was sometimes known as *Lemberg*, one of its historical names, in German, *Lavov* in Serbo-Croatian, *Leópolis* in Greek, and so on.

The Soviet Union was a huge country and thus had many places that had the same name, just like the United States has multiple places named "Portland". (These include the well-known Portland, Oregon, and Portland, Maine, as well as smaller cities and towns named Portland in Arkansas, Connecticut, New York, Tennessee, and other states.) The Soviet Union, for example, had at least two places named "Kirov", at least two places named "Kirovsk", and at least four villages named "Kirovskiy".

Russian is a gendered language, with three forms: feminine, masculine, and neuter. This increased the variety of possible place names. For example, *Leninskaya* (feminine), *Leninskiy* (masculine), and *Leninskoe* (neuter) derive their endings depending upon the gender of the type of rural village or small urban settlement they were, even though all the names commemorated the same person, Vladimir Lenin.

Some Terms and Abbreviations

USSR: The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, also known as the Soviet Union. The USSR pretended to be a democratic country with free elections and political rights like freedom of speech, but until the late 1980s it was a single-party state

dominated by the Communists. Elections were rigged, and rights guaranteed by the Soviet constitution were often highly restricted or, especially under Stalin, totally ignored.

Union Republic: The USSR was composed of a number of union republics, which were a bit like the states in the USA or the *Länder* in Germany. The term came about because the USSR was originally formed as a *union* of four supposedly-independent socialist *republics* (the Russian and Transcaucasian SFSRs, the Belorussian and Ukrainian SSRs). In fact, the leaders of Russian Communist Party actually controlled all four republics even before the union and created the USSR in 1922 after the Russian Civil War was won.

No union republic was truly a republic. As with the USSR overall, the union republics (and all lower-level political entities) were controlled by the Communists until the late 1980s, with rigged voting and minimal political rights.

The Soviet Union was formed with four union republics and grew through internal reorganizations and annexation of foreign territory in 16 union republics by the time Germany invaded in the USSR in 1941.

SFSR: A “**Soviet Federative Socialist Republic**” (early phrased as a “Socialist Federative Soviet Republic”) was a union republic that supposedly was a federation of various major ethnic groups. There were only two SFSR: the Russian SFSR and the Transcaucasian SFSR, but the latter was broken up into three separate union republics in 1936. The SFSRs were not really federations functioning on behalf of their member ethnic groups but were dominated by the Communists.

SSR: A “**Soviet Socialist Republic**” (early phrased as a “Socialist Soviet Republic”) was a union republic that was based on a major ethnic group. The number of SSRs changed over time as the USSR reorganized its territory and gained new territory. There had been just two upon the formation of the USSR, which grew to 14 by 1941.

Despite the different terminology of “SFSR” and “SSR”, there was no constitutional or legal difference between them in the Soviet government (like there is no difference in the USA between “states” and “commonwealths”). All union republics were officially equal. In actual practice, the Russian SFSR was the backbone of the USSR and unofficially treated differently. (For more on this

topic and on the USSR in general, see the Classic Europa Guidebook, *Soviet Russia and the USSR, 1917–1941*.)

ASSR: An “**Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic**” was a political entity for an important ethnic minority within a union republic. For example, the Mari ASSR was part of the Russian SFSR and contained many Mari people of the USSR, although other ethnic groups were also present there (1926: 51.4% Mari, 43.6% Russians, 4.2% Tatar). There were also lower-level autonomous entities for smaller ethnic groups, such as Autonomous Oblasts and National Okrugs/Autonomous Okrugs. All these entities were not really autonomous, especially in political matters, but were dominated by the Communists. They did have language rights and, at times, varying degrees of cultural rights.

Oblast: An *oblast* was a political entity within a union republic equivalent to a large **region** or province. Some were autonomous oblasts for ethnic groups judged to small to qualify for an ASSR.

Okrug: An *okrug* was political entity, smaller than an oblast (and often part of an oblast) equivalent to a **district** or province. Some were national okrugs/autonomous okrugs for ethnic groups judged to small to qualify for an ASSR or an autonomous oblast.

The Soviets also had other political entities, like the *kray* and the *rayon*, but neither of these show up in this guidebook.

All-Union: “All-union” was the Soviets’ preferred way to refer to institutions and organizations that applied across the entire USSR. For example, the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik) was the country-wide party of the USSR. Unlike other countries, the Soviets did not use “national” to refer to country-wide matters. This was so because the Soviets used “national” (*natsionalnyy*) and “nationalities” (*natsionalnosti*) to refer to ethnic groups. In the Soviet system, something that was national was in reference to an ethnic group, not the country as a whole. This can be seen in the term “national okrug”: the Nenets National Okrug was the autonomous district in the region populated by the Nenets people.

1.B Change of Status



A map of the Tikhvin region, showing Boksitogorsk, formerly Boksity²

The Soviets had a hierarchy of place names based on a location's status and the size of its population: villages, other types of rural settlements, various urban-type settlements including workers' settlements, towns, and cities. Sometimes, a change of status was an occasion to change a place's name. For example, when the village of *Boksity* ("Bauxite", as the settlement housed the workers for the nearby bauxite mine) was upgraded to a workers' settlement, it was renamed *Boksitogorsk* ("Bauxite Town"). It later was upgraded to city status, but without a name change. Some changes were minimal, such as when the village of *Batalpashinskaya* became the town of *Batalpashinsk*.

² The full map is available at http://img-fotki.yandex.ru/get/6840/2118499.94/0_d3650_4457ec25_orig (in Russian).

1.C Localization



Undated photo of Alma-Ata, showing the mountains in the background, with ox-drawn and horse-drawn wagons in the foreground³

The Russian Empire had preceded the Soviet Union. Russian had been the official language of the empire, so the names of places were in Russian, written down in Cyrillic. The empire was a huge place with over 100 different languages, so many official place names were Russian versions of the local name. Some Russian names matched the local names such as Narva (Нарва in Cyrillic) being the same in Estonian and Russian. Some were just minor adaptations. For example, the ancient city of Samarqand in Central Asia was Samarkand (Самарканд) in Russian: the locals had two “k” sounds (shown in modern English as “k” and “q”), while Russian had just one “k” sound⁴. Sometimes, the Russian name diverged

3 From “Old Photos of Almaty (Zailiyskiy, Verny, Alma-Ata)”; <https://world.nailizakon.com/page/kazakhstan/alma-ata/alma-ata.html>.

4 When the Soviets devised a Cyrillic alphabet for Uzbek in the 1930s, it received two separate letters for the two different “K” sounds: Uzbek Cyrillic “K”, which transliterates to “K” in English, and Uzbek Cyrillic “Q”, which now transliterates to “Q”. Thus, the city’s name is written Самарқанд in Uzbek Cyrillic. Russian Cyrillic only has one “K” letter, so it is used for both Uzbek letters. After Uzbekistan became independent, the country in 1992 adopted the Latin script in addition to its Cyrillic script. In the Uzbek alphabet of the Latin script, the two letters are “K” and “Q”; hence the city is Samarqand in Uzbek Latin script. Some English works accordingly use “Samarqand” while others use the traditional “Samarkand”, a spelling from the times when the difference in the two “k” sounds were ignored in English. (And, the story of the Uzbek alphabets is even more complicated than this summary!)

considerably from the local name, and sometimes the Russians used their own name completely different from the local one.

When the Soviets took over Russia, they promised better treatment of ethnic minorities than the Russian Empire had done, and this resulted in some Russian-version place names being changed to the local language. The capital of the Georgian SSR, for example, went from *Tiflis* (Тифлис, which came into Russian from the Persian version of the name) to *Tbilisi* (Тбилиси), which better matched the local Georgian pronunciation.

Name changes could be considerable, such as when Russian *Vernyy* (“Loyal”, stemming from its days as Imperial Russian Army outpost “Fort Loyal”) was localized to Kazakh *Alma-Ata* (from a local name perhaps originally meaning “Apple Mountain”). The Soviets called this process *korenizatsiya*, which is usually translated as “indigenization”, but I prefer the more modern term “localization”.



Kransokokshaysk, spring floods of 1926⁵

Kransokokshaysk, formerly Tsarevokokshaysk, would become Yoshkar-Ola in 1928.

Localization was not required to be political, as the name changes did not need to reflect Soviet ideology. It could certainly become entwined with politics. For example, *Tsarevokokshaysk* (“Tsar’s Kokshaga Town”, Kokshaga being for the Little Kokshaga River) became *Kransokokshaysk* (“Red Kokshaga Town”) in 1919 for political reasons, to change its imperial connection to a Soviet one, red being the color of communism. The new name was later localized from Russian to the Mari language, becoming *Yoshkar-Ola* (Red-City).

⁵ <https://runivers.ru/lib/reader/144503/> (in Russian).

1.D Political Reasons

By far the most significant name changes were made for political reasons. This process actually started in 1914 during World War I, years before the Soviets came to power. *Sankt-Peterburg* (“St. Peter’s City”), the capital of the Russian Empire, became too Germanic-sounding once Russia was at war with Germany and Austria-Hungary. It was russified to *Petrograd* (“Peter’s City”). Most other Germanic place names in Russia remained unchanged, but a few were changed. *Ekaterinenshtadt* (the Russian spelling of the German *Katharinenstadt*, meaning “Catherine’s City”) in the Volga German region of Russia was russified to *Ekaterinograd* (“Ekaterina’s City”). In contrast, the city of *Ekaterinburg* in the Urals was not renamed, despite its Germanic “-burg” ending.

A new wave of renamings occurred in 1917, still before the Soviet takeover. Tsar Nikolay II, his Romanov dynasty, and his family had become deeply unpopular among many segments of the Russian population during World War I. A revolution in March 1917 caused the Tsar to abdicate, and a liberal Russian Provisional Government replaced the conservative Imperial Russian Government. The new government changed some place names associated with Nikolay II. *Romanov-na-Murmane*, a new port being built in the Russian far north, was renamed *Murmansk*. The Siberian town of *Alekseevsk*, named in honor of Crown Prince Aleksey, son of the Tsar, was renamed *Svobodnyy*, the Russian word for “free”⁶.

The Soviets came to power in the October Revolution of late 1917. They wanted to quickly remake Russia into a socialist and then communist state and to erase its feudal, imperial, and capitalist past. By 1918, they would accordingly begin to rename many places under their control. This process actually started somewhat slowly at first, as the Soviets were much more concerned about winning the Russian Civil War. At this time, rather than the Soviet central government, local Soviets on their own initiative renamed some locations, mostly villages and small towns at first. Some changes were to erase the imperial past, and others were to celebrate Soviet civil war leaders. The most politically significant change at this early stage was that *Ivashchenko* (named for a general of the Imperial Russian Army) became *Trotsky*, in honor of Lev Trotskiy (“Leon Trotsky”), the head of the Red Army.

The Soviets were not completely against all imperial references. In particular, many place names related to Pyotr I (“Peter the Great”) were left intact. The Soviets regarded Pyotr I as a

⁶ As fate would have it, *Svobodnyy* in the 1930s became one of the largest forced-labor camps in Stalin’s GULag, with over 190,000 inmates in 1935.

forward-looking tsar who for his time modernized Russia. The analogy with the Soviets was obvious: the Soviets were now modernizing Russia for the new socialist times.



The Siege of Sergiev Posad in 1610⁷

The Soviets claimed that they allowed freedom of religion, but their atheist Communist ideology caused them to restrict and try to suppress religion without totally banning it. This led them to change place names with religious connections. The first religion-based change I have so far found occurred in 1919. *Sergiev Posad*, a Russian Orthodox religious center about 70 km (about 45 miles) from Moskva, became just *Sergiev*. Sergiev Posad was a major religious center associated with 14th Century Saint Sergiy of Radonezh. Sergiy built a church there that grew into a large monastery, the Trinity Lavra of Sergiy (often called the “Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius” in English). It became a key pilgrimage destination for Russian Orthodox believers and also developed into an economic center. It also became renown for its many toy crafters, as buying a toy outside the walls of the monastery became a tradition good deed for pilgrims⁸. Tsar Ivan IV (“Ivan the Terrifying”) was baptized at Sergiev Posad in 1530 and during his reign had the wooden-walled monastery’s rebuilt into a major stone-walled fortress. This was a good move, as the monastery withstood a Polish siege in 1608–

7 1856 colorized lithograph; unknown artist. See “Сергиев Посад” (“Sergiev Posad”); 2022; <https://городок-ок.рф/sergiev-posad/> (in Russian).

8 “Istoriya Sergiyeva Posada” (“History of Sergiev Posad”); undated; <https://сергиев-посад.рф/%D1%81%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%BA%D0%B8/%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%8F/> (in Russian).

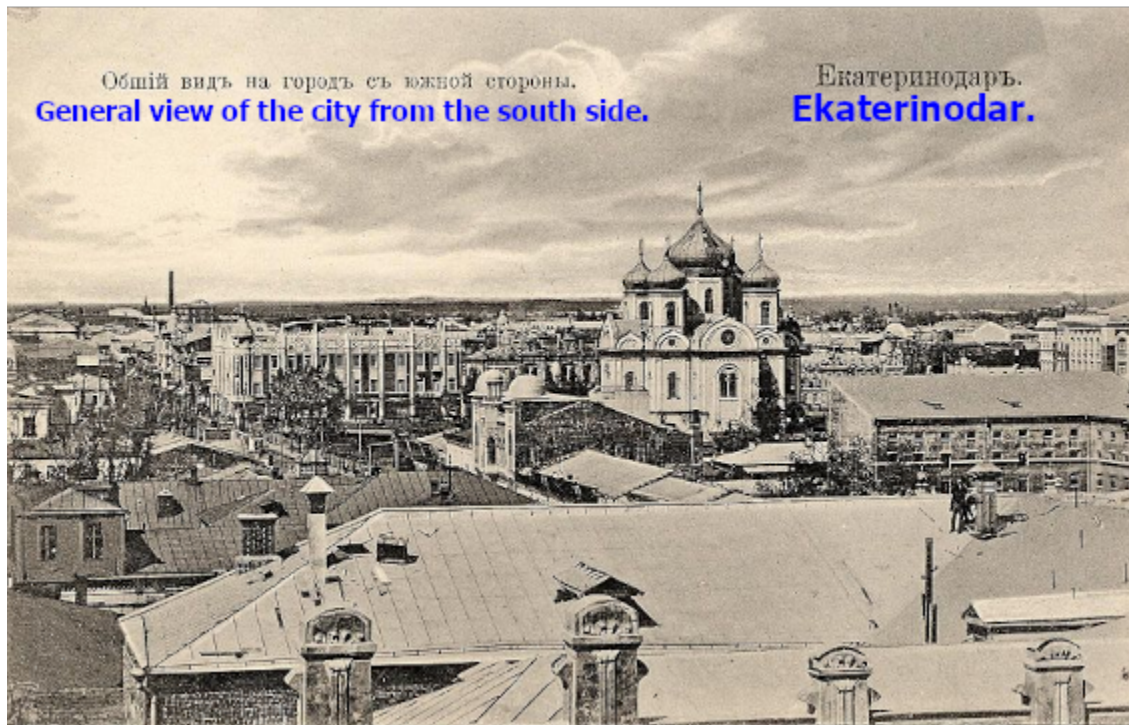
1610. Pyotr I (“Peter the Great”) took refuge there in 1698 when the Streltsy uprising in Moskva unsuccessfully attempted to dethrone him.

In 1919, the Soviets closed Trinity Lavra of Sergiy and changed the place’s name to *Sergiev*. In 1930, the name lost all connection the Orthodox saint and received the name of a Communist “hero”: *Sergiev* became *Zagorsk*, for V.M. Zagorskiy who had been killed in a 1919 anarchist bombing. Renaming a place more than once for political reasons was actually a common practice throughout Soviet history. It became almost notorious under Stalin, as his purges of Communist leaders forced places named for disgraced Communists to rename themselves.

Not all religious place names were changed. One big exception was the White Sea port and city of *Arkhangelsk* (sometimes given as “Archangel” in English, its name deriving from the local *Mikhailo-Arkhangelskiy Monastyr*, the Archangel Michael Monastery). Several failed attempts were made to rename the city, including one in 1929 to change it to *Stalinoport* (“Stalin’s Port”, Russian *port* meaning the same as English port)⁹.

Some religious names associated with Pyotr I were left untouched, particular references to the saints Pyotr and Pavlov (Peter and Paul). Thus, many towns and cities retained names like *Petropavlovsk*, “[St.] Pyotr and Pavel’s Town”. Nevertheless, many religious names were changed, even those not necessarily obviously religious. For example, the Volga-region town of *Sarepta* seemingly had been named for the nearby Sarpa lakes. Actually, the Protestant Germans who founded the settlement were struck by the similarity of “Sarpa” to “Sarepta”, an ancient city mentioned in the Bible. Religion-inspired *Sarepta* became Soviet-themed *Krasnoarmeysk* (“Red Army Town”, from *Krasnaya Armiya*, Red Army). This town disappeared as a separate entity in 1931 when it became the Krasnoarmeysk district of Stalingrad. However, place names honoring the Red army would live on, with two Russian *Krasnoarmeysk* towns, one near Moskva and the other near Saratov, and one Ukrainian *Chervonoarmiysk* (Ukrainian for “Red Army Town”).

9 Some works opine the Soviets decided it was too much bother to change the name since “Arkhangelsk” was used on many navigation charts. More likely, in my opinion, “Arkhangelsk” was too popular among the local inhabitants to bother changing. In support of this idea, I note the locals managed to reattach “Arkhangelsk” to regional names. For example, the region around the city had been the Arkhangelsk Governorate of the Russian Empire, which after several reorganizations and name changes under the Soviets became the blandly geographical “Northern Region” (*Severnaya Oblast*). The Soviets in 1937 renamed the Northern Region as the Arkhangelsk Region (*Arkhangelskaya Oblast*), which some Russians claim was the result of a petition by the local inhabitants to restore the Arkhangelsk name to the region.



A Russian postcard of Ekaterinodar in the early 20th Century¹⁰

By 1920, the Soviets were winning the Russian Civil War and began renaming important cities. The first large city to have its name changed was *Ekaterinodar*. This meant “Gift of Ekaterina” and had both imperial and religious connotations, as Ekaterina stood for both the city’s founder, Empress Ekaterina II (“Catherine the Great”), and St. Ekaterina, the patron saint of Ekaterina and the city. The new name was *Krasnodar* (“Gift of the Reds”). Even this change was not mandated by the Soviet central government. Ekaterinodar had been the southern capital of the White Movement, and the local Soviets renamed it after the Red Army captured the city in 1920.

“We consider the name Ekaterinodar to be reminiscent of slave times, completely meaningless in the republic of labor forever freed from the descendants of Ekaterina and their henchmen”¹¹.

—Yan Vasilyevich Poluyan, local Soviet leader

Similarly, Volga-German *Ekaterinograd* (formerly Ekaterinenshtadt) in 1920 became *Marksshtadt* (the Russian spelling of the German *Marxstadt*, which honored Karl Marx). The

10 From <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yekaterinodar-from-south.jpg>. The Russian word “Общій” is the old spelling of what is now “Общий”. A 1918 reform of the Russian alphabet dropped four letters, with other existing letters being used in their place.

11 Russian Wikipedia entry on “Poluyan, Yan Vasilyevich”, as of 2022; https://ru.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%9F%D0%BE%D0%BB%D1%83%D1%8F%D0%BD_%D0%AF%D0%BD_%D0%92%D0%B0%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%87 (in Russian).

Soviets would later honor the other 19th Century giant of Marxism, Friedrich Engels, by renaming a town in his name, as well as two places for Pyotr Kropotkin, an advocate of anarcho-socialism who had been very popular among Russian leftists¹².

Lenin was personally opposed to be honored, which mostly inhibited the Soviets from naming places after him or, by extension, other Communist leaders. This did not stop locals in southern Russian from renaming their village of *Prishib* to *Leninsk* in 1919, but this was an exception. Trotskiy and S.M. Budyonnyy, a fearless Red cavalry commander, also had villages named after them during the civil war. Lenin's death in January 1924 ended this inhibition against honoring him, with *Petrograd*, the former capital and second largest city in the USSR, becoming *Leningrad* later that month. Lenin had been born Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov¹³, and *Simbirsk*, Lenin's birth place along the Volga River, soon became *Ulyanovsk*. *Leninabad*, *Leninakan*, *Leninaul*, *Leninavin*, *Leningor/Leningori*¹⁴, *Leninkent*, *Lenino*, *Leninogorsk*, *Leninsk*, *Leninskaya*, *Leninskie*, and *Leninskoe* all made they ways onto Soviet maps.

With Lenin being honored in this way, other Communist leaders soon were similarly celebrated. For example, *Yuzovka* (named for John Hughes, the British industrialist who founded the city) became *Stalin* in April 1924; *Ekaterinburg* was renamed *Sverdlovsk* in October 1924 (for Yakov Sverdlov, who had died in 1919). In 1925, *Tsaritsyn* became *Stalingrad*. Stalin had been in charge of Tsaritsyn's successful defense against the White Army in 1918, which Soviet propaganda turned into a Russian Civil War legend.

12 Kropotkin besides advocating revolutionary anarchism was a scientist who wrote *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*. This showcased cooperation in nature and human societies and was a counterpoint to the social Darwinism prevalent at the time, which excessively emphasized competition and survival of the fittest. Kropotkin's idea later influenced biological studies of mutualism and altruism.

Kropotkin was a Russian whose public views landed him in trouble with the Russian Empire. He ended up spending decades in exile in Europe before returning to Russia after the Tsar abdicated in 1917. He was at first enthusiastic for the Bolsheviks when they took over later that year but by 1918 was publicly critical of them for their dictatorial ways. He died of pneumonia in 1921, and his funeral procession was attended by thousands of anarchists, some bearing anti-Soviet signs. It is claimed this was the last public gathering of anarchists the Soviets allowed. Nonetheless, the Soviets renamed a town for him in 1921 and a workers' settlement for him in 1930.

13 When the Bolsheviks were an illegal revolutionary party, Ulyanov adopted very many pseudonyms to hide his identity, even publishing one of his major books as "Vladimir Ilin" (it had poor sales). He was arrested, convicted of sedition in 1897, and spent three years in internal exile in Siberia. After his release in 1900, he resumed his revolutionary activities and in 1901 began publishing revolution material under the name "N. Lenin" to hide his identity. Thereafter, even after the Soviets came to power, he would sometimes sign his writings N. Lenin, although he became widely known as Vladimir Lenin. As a high Soviet governmental official, he would also use his birth name when signing decrees. For example, the 1918 decree that established the Red Army was signed "V. Ulyanov (Lenin)".

14 The village was in an Ossetian area of Georgia and was known as Leningori in Georgian and Leningor in Ossetian.



Stalino train station¹⁵

Sidetrip: The City of Stalin Becomes Stalino

The city of Stalin had a slight problem: its train station was named Stalino, not Stalin. This ended up causing no end of confusion: almost everyone from outside the region traveled by train to the city and saw “Stalino” on their arrival. In 1929, this was resolved by renaming the city *Stalino* to match the station, although the name change took until 1931 to go into widespread use.

After Stalin achieved dictatorial power in the late 1920s, his vanity and need for adoration led to many places being named for him: *Stalinabad*, *Stalindorf*, *Staliniri*, *Stalinogorsk*, *Stalinsk*, and so on¹⁶. Stalin also renamed many places for his cronies, Soviet heroes, and even conveniently-dead rivals. *Examples*:

- *Nizhniy Novgorod* (“New Novgorod”) became *Gorkiy* in 1932 honor of Russian socialist author Maksim Gorkiy.

¹⁵ 1950s photograph, from <http://donjetsk.com/retro/3284-zabytoe-kladbische.html> (in Russian).

¹⁶ Stalinabad, Stalindorf, and Staliniri also reflected localizations. For example, the “-abad” in Stalinabad was a common ending for place names in Soviet Central Asia (as well as Iran and southern Asia). It derived from the Persian language, meaning “cultivated place” or a settlement. Stalindorf was “Stalin’s Village” in Yiddish. There were at least three Stalindorfs in the USSR, all founded as new farming villages by Jewish citizens of the USSR.

- *Vyatka* became *Kirov* in 1934, for the extremely-popular Communist leader Sergei Kirov who died under suspicious circumstances¹⁷.
- *Orenburg* ("Fortress on the Or [River]") became *Chkalov* in 1938, for famed test pilot Valeriy Chkalov who died when the I-180 fighter prototype he was testing crashed.
- *Perm* became *Molotov* in March 1940, a 50th birthday present for Stalin crony V.M. Molotov.



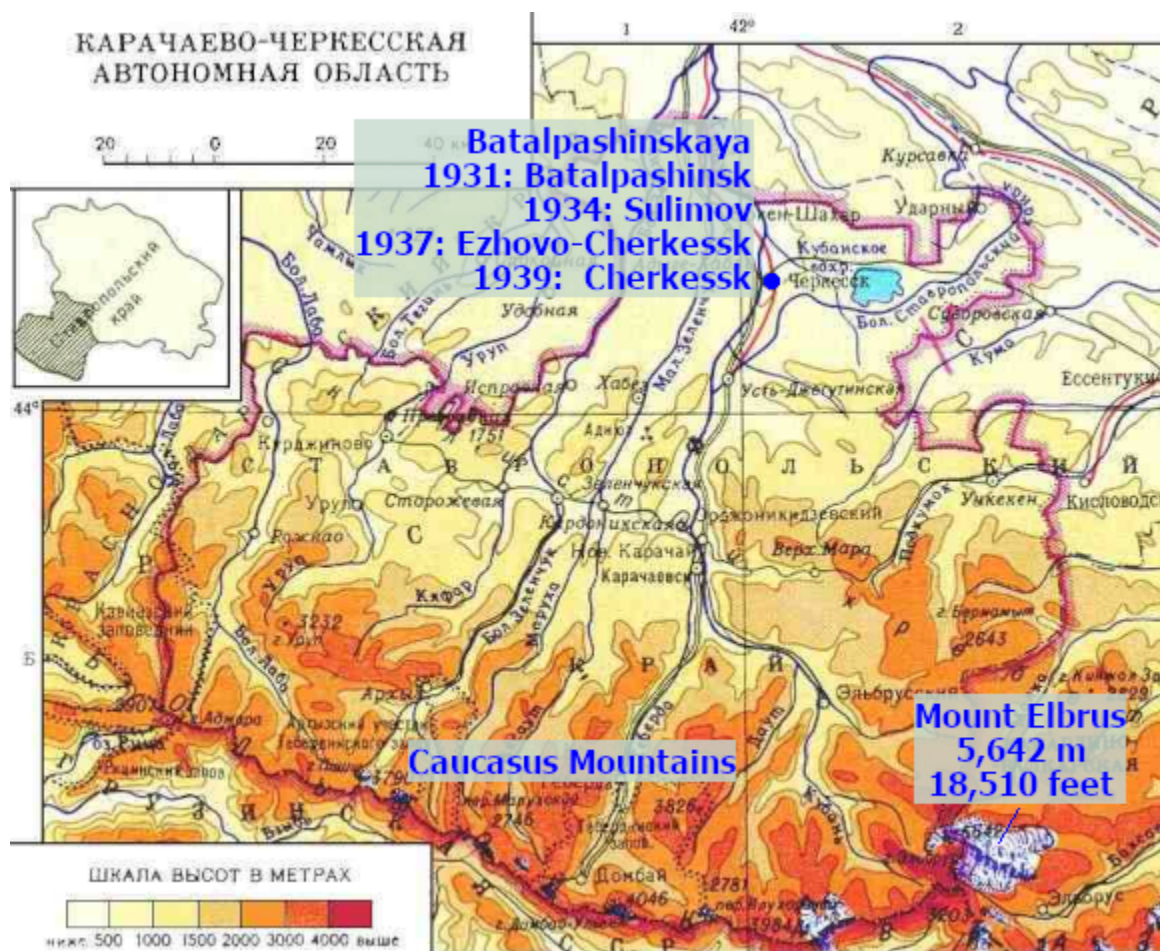
The Palace of Culture in Chapaevsk in 1936, featuring a movie about the Soviet Navy¹⁸

Living rivals, however, were not so fortunate. *Ivashchenko* had become *Trotsk* in honor of Lev Trotskiy. Trotskiy was the Communist who did the most to win the civil war for the Soviets but incurred Stalin's hatred. Once Stalin had the power, he had Trotskiy exiled from the USSR in 1929. *Trotsk* was renamed *Chapaevsk*, in honor of the fallen civil war hero, V.I. Chapaev¹⁹. Stalin's purges of the Communist Party leadership in the 1930s required yet more changes: *Elisavetgrad* had earlier become *Zinovevsk* (for Communist Grigoriy Zinovev) but was changed to *Kirovo* in 1934 when Stalin had Zinovev arrested.

17 It is still disputed to this day whether a crazed madman actually managed on his own to evade NKVD security and kill Kirov or whether Stalin order the assassination. While Kirov praised Stalin in public, there were many rumors that Kirov would stand up to Stalin in private over policy disagreements. Kirov's popularity in the Party was such that is was claimed he received more votes than Stalin himself for membership in the Party's Central Committee in 1934. Kirov died later that year under suspicious circumstances, and Stalin used the assassination to get rid of other Communist leaders who had once opposed him, including Grigoriy Zinovev and Lev Kamenev, both of whom were arrested, tried, and executed for being "morally responsible" for Kirov's death. Neither were involved in any way with the assassination.

18 From https://nailizakon.com/fotogalereya/city24_ch/chapaevsk/chapaevsk.html (in Russian).

19 The small city of Gatchina was also renamed Trotsk, in 1923, so there were two Trotsk places until 1929. Gatchina resumed its traditional name in 1929.



The many incarnations of Cherkessk²⁰

Perhaps the unluckiest case of name changing was for the city that eventually became Cherkessk, the capital of the Cherkess Autonomous Oblast. It originally was *Batalpashinskaya*, becoming *Batalpashinsk* in 1931 when the village became a town. In 1934, the locals changed its name to *Sulimov* to honor Communist politician D.E. Sulimov. This was an unfortunate choice, as the NKVD soon arrested Sulimov and executed him during the purges. The next choice, in 1937, was *Ezhovo-Cherkessk*. The *Ezhovo* part honored N.I. Ezhov, the head of NKVD. This seemingly-safe choice failed, as Ezhov himself was soon purged. This necessitated another name change: in 1939 *Ezhovo* was dropped, leaving just *Cherkessk*. Without a political connection in the name, Cherkessk has so far managed to retain its name ever since, despite the Germans occupying the place during World War II and the Soviet Union breaking up in 1991.

²⁰ Map adapted from

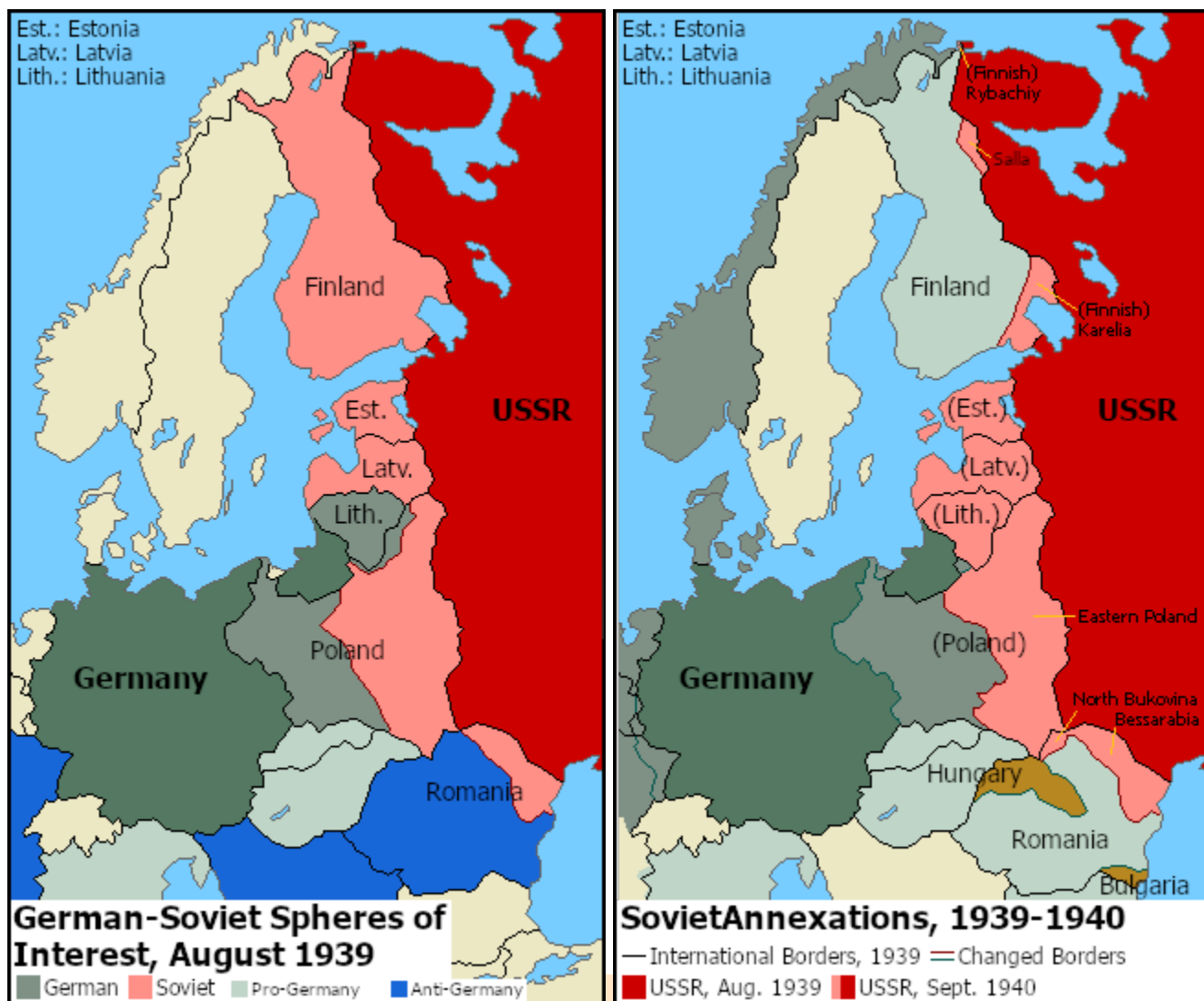
https://gufo.me/dict/bse/%D0%9A%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%87%D0%B0%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%BE-%D0%A7%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%BA%D0%B5%D1%81%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%8F_%D0%B0%D0%B2%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%BC%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%8F_%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%82%D1%8C (in Russian).

Revolutionary enthusiasm led to many towns and villages being named “October” for the October Revolution (*Oktyabrskaya Revolyutsiya*): *Oktyabr*, *Oktyabrsk*, *Oktyabrskaya*, *Oktyabrskie*, *Oktyabrskoe*²¹. Variations of “Soviet” were also obviously popular: *Sovetabad*, *Sovetsk*, *Sovetskaya*, *Sovetskie*, *Sovetskoe*, as were variations of “Proletariat” such as *Proletarskaya*, *Proletarsk*. Communist organizations also became popular names, including versions of *Bolshevik* (for the Bolsheviks), *Komintern* (Comintern, the Communist International), and *Komsomol* (the Communist Youth League). Like with Krasnodar, various towns and cities had their names modified to add “red” (“*krasnyy*”), the color of international socialism and communism. However, not all red city names were due to the Soviets; a number of traditional place names used “red”, usually due to local red-colored features. Krasnoyarsk in Siberia, for example, got its name in the 17th Century from the local reddish river banks.

Past rebellions against the Tsarist state were also celebrated, with the ideological spin that they were forerunners of proletarian revolutions. Pugachyov’s massive rebellion of peasants and Cossacks in 1773–1775 was a favorite, with several places being named *Pugachyov*, *Pugachyovo*, *Pugachyovskaya*, and so on. The fact that in the Russian Civil War many Cossacks and peasants had actually rebelled against the Soviets themselves did not deter them from honoring Pugachyov.

21 G. R. F. Bursa; “Political Changes of Names of Soviet Towns”; *The Slavonic and East European Review*; Vol. 63, No. 2; 1985; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4209080>. Bursa is used extensively in this guidebook.

1.E Annexations



In 1939–1940, Stalin expanded Soviet borders westwards due to his secret deal with Hitler that divided eastern Europe in German and Soviet spheres of influence. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, eastern Poland, parts of Finland, and parts of Romania (the province of Bessarabia and the northern part of Bukovina) were all annexed. A few annexed places were renamed for political reasons. For example, the former Polish town of *Jezupol* (“Jesus’s City”; *Yezupol* in Russian and *Yezupil* in Ukrainian) became part of the Ukrainian SSR, but the Soviets of course did not use this religious name. The town was renamed *Zhovten* (Ukrainian for “October”, in honor of the October Revolution).

Some places returned to their traditional Russian names. Vyborg had become Viipuri (Finnish) and Viborg (Swedish) when Finland achieved its independence in 1918; it resumed Vyborg, its Russian name, in 1940 when it was annexed into the USSR. (“Viipuri” did

continue to be used by Finnish and Karelian speakers in the region, per Soviet language policies.)

Other annexed places received Russian versions of their names, adapted for Russian pronunciation and Cyrillic spelling. For example, Estonian *Tallinn* became Russian *Tallin* (“Таллин” in Cyrillic). Polish *Białystok* went into the Belorussian SSR and became Russian *Belostok* and Belarusian *Belastok*. (Per Soviet language policies, “Tallinn” continued to be used by Estonian speakers, and “*Białystok*” by Soviet citizens who spoke Polish.)

1.F List of Selected Soviet Place Name Changes, 1917–1941

This list covers the names of selected cities, towns, and villages the Soviets changed once they came into power in 1917, up to the start of the war with Germany in June 1941. All name changes of important cities are included, plus a selection of other changes. Places annexed into the USSR are listed like “Białystok, Poland”, showing the country of origin:

- **Estonia** was annexed into the USSR in 1940, becoming the Estonian SSR.
- Part of eastern **Finland** were annexed into the USSR in 1940, some into the Russian SFSR and some being merged with the Karelian ASSR to form the Karelo-Finnish SSR.
- **Latvia** was annexed into the USSR in 1940, becoming the Latvian SSR.
- **Lithuania** was annexed into the USSR in 1940, becoming the Lithuanian SSR.
- **Romania** lost its province of **Bessarabia** to the USSR in 1940, part of it going into the Ukrainian SSR and the rest being merged with most of the Moldavian ASSR to form the Moldavian SSR. The Soviets tried to weak the connection between Romania and the Moldavian ASSR/SSR by insisting that Moldovan was a separate language from Romanian, rather than a dialect of Romanian (as is mostly the view today). To further increase the separation, they required Moldovan in the USSR to use the Cyrillic script, since Romanian used the Latin script²².

Romania also lost the northern half of its province of Bukovina to the USSR, all of its going into the Ukrainian SSR.

- The eastern regions of **Poland** were annexed into the USSR in 1939, with the northern portion going into the Belorussian SSR and the rest into the Ukrainian SSR.

All these annexations resulted in Russian versions of the place names, plus Belarusian and Ukrainian names for territory annexed into those SSRs.

Cities on the existing maps of Fire in the East, Scorched Earth, and the Urals have their map numbers after the names. For example, “Batumi [9A] is Batumi on Map 9A.

²² As the USSR began to break up in 1989–1991, the Moldavian SSR declared its official language was Romanian, using the Latin script. In 1991, the Moldavian SSR declared its independence as Moldova, reaffirming its official language was Romanian, written with the Latin script. However, the 1994 Moldovan constitution stated the state’s official language was Moldovan, written with the Latin script. In 2013, the Constitutional Court of Moldova ruled that the declaration of independence prevailed over the constitution. In 2023, Moldova adopted a law confirming this decision.

Table 1: Selected Name Changes, 1917 to 1941

This table covers place name changes from when the Soviets came into power (1917) up to the start of the Great Patriotic War (22 June 1941). It does not cover minor spelling changes resulting from the Soviet annexation of parts of eastern Europe and Finland in 1939–1940 (see [Table 2](#) for those) or name changes during the war (see [Table 3](#)).

Renaming Codes

<i>Code</i>	<i>Expanded</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
ANX-COM	Annexed-Communist	The place was annexed into the USSR from a foreign country. The Soviets changed its name for political reasons to commemorate a Communist leader.
ANX-HIST	Annexed-Historical	The place was annexed into the USSR from a foreign country. The Soviets used its historical Russian name rather than its foreign-language name.
ANX-REL	Annexed-Religion	The place was annexed into the USSR from a foreign country. Its foreign name was changed because it was religious in origin.
IMP	Imperial Name	The place name was changed because it related to Imperial Russia (like the use of a tsar’s name).
LOC	Localization	The place name was changed to the language of the local non-Russian ethnic group.
OTHER	Other Reason	The name was changed for some other reason.
PURGE	Stalin’s Purges	The place name was changed because it commemorated a Communist who had been purged by Stalin.
REL	Religion	The place name was changed because it related to religion.
SOV-COM	Soviet-Communist	The place name was changed for political reasons: to commemorate a Communist leader.
SOV-HERO	Soviet-Hero	The place name was changed for political reasons: to commemorate a person the Soviets celebrated as a hero.
SOV-HIST	Soviet-Historical	The place name was changed for political reasons: to commemorate a historical person relating to Communism.
SOV-IDEO	Soviet-	The place name was changed for ideological reasons, like using “Red” since red was the color of

	Ideological	Communism or naming a place after its industry during Stalin's industrial drive.
STATUS	Status Change	The place name was modified due to a status change, such as a village being upgraded to a town. Since Russian is a gendered language, a status change sometimes required the name's ending to be modified. Only a few of very many status changes are included in this list to illustrate this process.

Red highlighted names are shown on the [map](#) in this document. Tan highlighted names are shown on the separate larger-scale, [more-detailed map](#).

Language Abbreviations: Fin: Finnish, Ka: Karelian; Mol: Moldovan (dialect of Romanian); Ru: Russian, Ukr: Ukrainian.

Geographical Abbreviations: KFSSR: Karelo-Finnish SSR.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Reason for Renaming</i>	<i>Year Renamed</i>	<i>New Name</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Other Notes</i>
Belotsarsk	"White Tsar's Town"	IMP	1918	Khem-Beldir	see note below	renamed again, see 1926
<p>What is now the Republic of Tuva in the Russian Federation had been part of the Chinese Empire, administered as part of Outer Mongolia. The Chinese Revolution of 1911 overthrew the empire's ruling Qing dynasty and created the Republic of China. With Russian assistance and protection, Outer Mongolia broke away from China at this time and divided into what is now Mongolia and Tuva. The territory of Tuva had a number of Russian colonists and a pro-Russian faction among the indigenous Tuvan princes. In 1914, the Tsar made Tuva a protectorate of the Russian Empire. A capital for Tuva was built at this time and named Belotsarsk, "White Tsar's Town". (White Tsar was a traditional, unofficial title of the Tsars of Russia dating back to Ivan III in the 15th Century. Ivan freed Russia from having to pay tribute to the Golden Horde, and "white" in Russian often was used to mean free from having to pay taxes or tribute.)</p> <p>The Soviets came to power in Russia in late 1917. Local Soviets took over Tuva in early 1918, declaring the protectorate ended and Tuva independent. They soon renamed Belotsarsk as Khem-Beldir. This was a descriptive name meaning a place at the confluence of two rivers. Tuva was then fought over during the Russian Civil War and at times partly or fully occupied by the anti-Soviet White Army, the Chinese, the Mongolians, and the Red Army. The Reds won, and the Soviets recognized Tuva as a supposedly-independent people's republic, but in reality it was a Soviet puppet state. All this means that Belotsarsk/Khem-Beldir was technically not part of the Soviet state, but I include it in this list since the Soviets were in control.</p>						
Elisavetpol	"Elisavet's City", for the wife of	IMP	1918	Gyandzha	Russian version of Ganja	renamed again, see 1935

	Tsar Aleksandr I				("Treasure"), historical name	
Ivashchenko	for General V.P. Ivashchenko	SOV-COM	1918	Trotsk	for Lev Trotskiy	renamed again, see 1929
Nikolaevsk	for Tsar Nikolay I	IMP, SOV-HIST	1918	Pugachyov	for leader of 18th Century rebellion	now Pugachyov, Russia
Pavlovsk	for Tsar Pavel	IMP, SOV-HERO	1918	Slutsk	for Vera Slutskaya	renamed in 1944; see Table 3
Porokhovoy Zavod	"Gunpowder Factory"; see note below	STATUS	1918	Udarnyy	"Percussion" or "Shock"; see note below	renamed again, see 1919

This settlement had been created in 1914 as Porokhovoy Zavod ("Gunpowder Factory") and quickly put into operation in World War I to make gunpowder for the Imperial Russian Army. Under the Soviets, it became the village of Udarnyy ("Percussion" or "Shock"), a name inspired from its most famous product.

Shcheglovo	?	STATUS	1918	Shcheglovsk	upgraded from village to city	renamed again, see 1932
Tsarskoe Selo	"Tsar's Village"	IMP	1918	Detskoe Selo	"Children's Village"	renamed again, see 1937
Askhabad	Russian version of Persian, possibly meaning "City of Devotion"	SOV-COM	1919	Poltoratsk	for P.G. Poltoratskiy, killed in Central Asia in 1918	renamed again, see 1927
Biryuch	claimed to be an old Slavic word for "herald"	SOV-COM	1919	Budyonnyy	for S.M. Budyonny	now Biryuch, Russia

Biryuch was a small village in Russia near Ukraine. During the 1918 Central Powers occupation of Ukraine, the village came under control of the pro-German Ukrainian Hetmanate. Germany began withdrawing its troops when it lost World War I in November, with the Hetmanate collapsing in December. Biryuch passed to control of the Soviets and several sources claim the village was renamed Budyonnyy on 27 January 1919, in honor of S.M. Budyonny. Budyonny had created the Red Cavalry but as far as I can tell was not in the Biryuch area in late 1918 or early 1919, as he was operating a bit farther east in the Tsaritsyn region. However, it is possible a Red Cavalry unit could have taken Biryuch, hence the renaming. Other sources do not mention the 27 January 1919 renaming. The village was captured by the White Army in the summer of 1919 and then recaptured again by Budyonny's cavalry in the autumn.

Multiple sources claim Biryuch was renamed as Budyonny on 19 November 1919 in honor of their liberators. Some sources state the village was renamed Budyonny in January 1919 and in November 1919 without explaining how this was possible. If the January renaming did occur, the village likely resumed its Biryuch name when the Whites captured it, but would the Soviets have recognized this change?						
In 1958, Budyonny became Krasnogvardeyskoe ("Red Guards' [Village]"), as a consequence of the 1956 law forbidding places in the USSR from being named after living persons. It resumed its historic name of Biryuch in 2005.						
Sergiev Posad	"[St.] Sergiy's Settlement"	REL	1919	Sergiev	attempt to downgrade religious association	renamed again, see 1930
Tsarevokokshaysk	"Tsar's Kokshaga Town"	IMP, SOV-IDEO	1919	Kransokokshaysk	"Red Kokshaga Town"	renamed again, see 1927
Udarnyy	see 1918	SOV-IDEO	1919	Krasnyy Boevik	"Red Fighter"	renamed again, see 1940
Ekaterinodar	"Gift of Ekaterina"; see note below	IMP, SOV-IDEO	1920	Krasnodar [4A]	"Gift of the Reds"	now Krasnodar, Russia
The Ekaterina in Ekaterinodar stood for Empress Ekaterina II, "Catherine the Great", and St. Ekaterina, the patron saint of the city.						
Ekaterinograd	"[Empress] Ekaterina's City"	IMP, SOV-HIST	1920	Marksshtadt	"Marx's City"	renamed in 1942; see Table 3
Marksshtadt was a German-language place name using Russian spelling. It was inhabited by ethnic Germans (over 90% of the population in 1926) of the Volga German region of the Russian SFSR. Its local German name in the Latin script was "Marxstadt". However, outside ethnic German regions, it was known by the Russian version of its name Marksshtadt. In Cyrillic, this was Марксштадт, as Cyrillic had no letter equivalent of the Latin "x" and thus used "кс" ("ks") to reproduce the correct pronunciation. Similarly, German "stadt" became Russian "shtadt" ("штадт") to preserve how "stadt" was pronounced in German.						
Sarepta	from an ancient city mentioned in the Bible	REL, SOV-IDEO	1920	Krasnoarmeysk	"Red Army Town"	in 1931 became the Krasnoarmeysk district of Stalingrad
Aleksandrovsk	uncertain if name derived from an 18th Century Russian general or prince	IMP	1921	Zaporozhe	derived from "[place] beyond the rapids", see below	now Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine

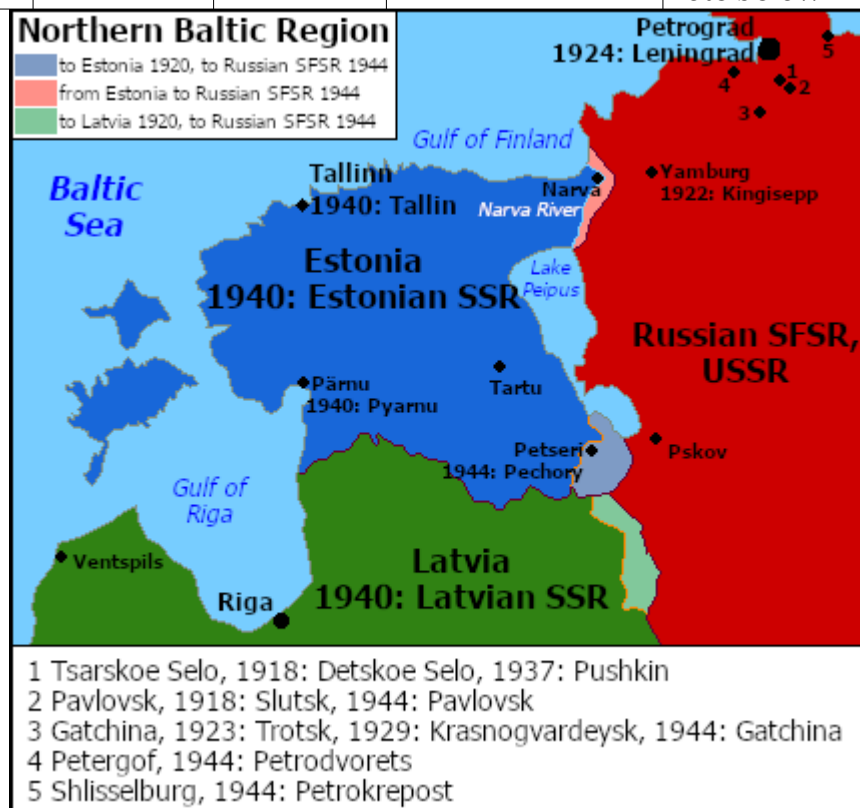
The city was on the Dnepr River at the southern, downstream end of a long series of rapids on the Dnepr. Zaporozhe later became the site of a huge dam that flooded the rapids and established a reservoir for a huge hydropower station.

Aleksandrovsk-Grushyovsky	believed to be for Tsar Aleksandr I	IMP	1921	Shakhty [4A]	“Mines”, for its coal mines	now Shakhty, Russia
Ekaterinenfeld	“Ekaterina’s Field”; see note below	IMP, SOV-COM	1921	Lyuksemburg	for Rosa Luxemburg; see note below	renamed in 1943; see Table 3

19th Century German colonists settled in the Russian Empire in what is now the country of Georgia. They named their village *Katharinenfeld* (Katharinen’s Field) for the sister of Tsar Aleksandr I, Ekaterina Pavlovna. The settlement was mostly known by the Russian version of its name, *Ekaterinenfeld*. In 1921, the Soviets renamed the place *Lyuksemburg*, in honor of Rosa Luxemburg, a leader of the Communist Part of Germany who was summarily executed for attempting to overthrow the German state in 1919. I wonder if the name change was done on local initiative, as Rosa Luxemburg, despite being a Communist heroine, had been highly critical of the authoritarian Soviets in general, Lenin in particular, and also the Soviet the secret police. Bursa claims the place was renamed from *Lyuksemburg* to *Lyuksemburgi* in 1936. I have not been able to confirm this; my other sources are not particularly detailed about the place. If this is correct, it perhaps relates to some status change of the settlement, although it was not upgraded to a city until 1967.

Petrovsk-Port	“Peter’s Port”	SOV-COM	1921	Makhachkala	“Makhach’s City”, for Makhach Dakhadaev	now Makhachkala, Russia
Romanovskiy Khutor	“Romanov’s Farm”	IMP, SOV-HERO	1921	Kropotkin	For Pyotr Kropotkin	now Kropotkin, Russia
Vernyy	Russian for “Loyal”	LOC	1921	Alma-Ata	Kazakh place name, perhaps originally meaning “Apple Mountain”	now Almaty (spelling change), Kazakhstan
Yalta	from an ancient Greek name?	SOV-IDEO	1921	Krasnoarmeysk	“Red Army Town”	renamed again, see 1922
Imperatorskaya Gavan	“Emperor’s Harbor” or “Imperial Harbor”	IMP, SOV-IDEO	1922	Sovetskaya Gavan	“Soviet Harbor”	now Sovetskaya Gavan, Russia
Kolchugino	possible reference to chain mail	SOV-COM	1922	Lenino	for Lenin	renamed again, see 1925

Krasnoarmeysk	see 1921	OTHER	1922	Yalta	returned to traditional name	now Yalta, Crimea, Ukraine (illegally annexed by Russia)
Perovsk	after Russian general V.A. Perovskiy	IMP, LOC	1922	Ak-Mechet	from Kazakh Almeshit, “White Mosque”	renamed again, see 1925
Przhevalsk	after N.M. Przhevalskiy, Russian explorer of Central Asia	IMP, LOC	1922	Karakol	historical name was restored	renamed again, see 1939
Yamburg	“Yam Fortress”	SOV-COM	1922	Kingisepp	for Viktor Kingissepp; see note below	now Kingisepp, Russia



Viktor Kingissepp (spelled *Kingisepp* in Russian) was a Communist from Estonia who worked for the Soviet secret police. He became

famous for arresting Fanni Efimovna Kaplan, the anti-communist socialist who wounded Lenin in 1918. Kingissepp then returned to Estonia, which was fighting for its independence from the Soviets, and ran the underground Estonian Communist Party. Estonia achieved independence in 1920, arrested Kingissepp in 1922 for trying to incite an uprising, and executed him. The Soviets renamed Yamburg, a Russian town close to the border with Estonia, as Kingisepp, using the Russian spelling of his name.

Gatchina	uncertain origin of name	IMP, SOV-COM	1923	Trotsk	for Lev Trotskiy	renamed again, see 1929
Gatchina was the location of the Great Gatchina Palace, a favorite residence of the Tsars of Russia about 45 km (28 miles) from the imperial capital, Sankt-Peterburg. Since it was outside the densely-populated capital, in times of domestic unrest it was considered a safer residence than the Tsar's Winter Palace in the city, earning it the nickname the "Citadel of Autocracy". Gatchina grew into a small city and through the tsars' patronage became the model of a modern, tidy imperial city, being the first place in Russia with outdoor electric lighting and a military airfield. After the first Russian Revolution of 1917, the resulting Russian Provisional Government turned the palace into a museum open to the public, which the Soviet government continued when it came to power after the second Russian Revolution of 1917. The name "Gatchina" had imperial associations due to the palace and was changed in 1923.						
Khankendi	Azerbaijani for "Khan's Village"	SOV-COM	1923	Stepanakert	for Armenian revolutionary Stepan Shaumyan	now, officially Xankəndi (Khankendi), Azerbaijan, but is in Armenian-controlled territory of Ngorno-Karabakh, where it is called Stepanakert
Aleksandropol	"[Tsar] Aleksandr's City"	SOV-COM, LOC	1924	Leninakan [9A]	for Lenin, with Armenian place name ending	now Gyumri, Armenia
Bakhmut	?	SOV-COM	1924	Artyomovsk	for "Comrade Artyom" (Party name of F.A. Sergeev)	now Bakhmut, Ukraine
Chardzhou	Russian version of Turkman/Persian name meaning "four brooks"	SOV-COM	1924	Leninsk, see note below	for Lenin	renamed again, see 1927

Since several cities had names incorporating Leninsk, this Leninsk was informally called Leninsk-Turmenskiy (roughly, Leninsk in Turkmenistan) to clarify which city was meant.

Dushanbe	Tajik “Monday”, deriving from “Monday’s Bazaar”	OTHER	1924	Dyushambe	see note below	renamed again, see 1929
<p>Dushanbe Bozor (Tajik for “Monday’s Bazaar”) was a centuries-old market town that grew up around a weekly bazaar in what is now Tajikistan. It went through several names changes over time, becoming known as Dushanbe, a fortified city in the Emirate of Bukhara. The 19th Century Russian Empire conquered most of the emirate’s territory and reduced the remaining rump state to a Russian protectorate with no real independence. The Soviets took over the emirate and converted it into the Bukharan People’s Republic, a supposedly independent country that was actually a Soviet puppet state. In 1924, the region was broken up and incorporated into Soviet union republics in Central Asia. Dushanbe became the capital of the Tajik ASSR of the Uzbek SSR and so had official names in Tajik (Dushanbe), Uzbek (Dushanbe), and Russian (Dyushambe [Дюшамбе]). The Russian name was the widely-used version in the USSR and internationally.</p>						
Ekaterinburg	“[Empress] Ekaterina’s Fort”	IMP, SOV-COM	1924	Sverdlovsk [29]	for Yakov Sverdlov	now Ekaterinburg, Russia
Elisavetgrad	“[St.] Elisaveta's City”, Elisaveta being the patron saint of Empress Elizaveta	REL, IMP, SOV-COM	1924	Zinovevsk	for Grigoriy Zinovev	renamed again, see 1934
Fort- Aleksandrovskiy	for Aleksandr Bekovich- Cherkassky	IMP, SOV-COM	1924	Fort-Uritskiy	for M.S. Uritskiy (assassinated 1918)	renamed again, see 1939
Petrograd	“Peter’s City”	SOV-COM	1924	Leningrad [2A]	for Lenin	now Sankt-Peterburg, Russia
<p>Pyotr I (“Peter the Great”) conquered the eastern end of the Gulf of Finland from Sweden and decided to build a new capital city there, his “window on the west” since it had easy sea communications with central and western Europe. Pyotr had spent time in western and central Europe and particularly admired the Dutch. He named the city what in English is “St. Peter’s City” after his patron saint, the Apostle Pyotr (“Saint Peter”). This by no coincidence was also a way to commemorate his own name. Rather than using a Russian version of the city’s name, Pyotr used the Germanic Sankt-Peterburg. “Sankt-Peterburg” was actually a bit difficult for many Russians to pronounce, so over time they informally came to call the city “Peterburg” and then “Piter”.</p> <p>Once World War I began in July 1914, Russia was at war with Germany and Austria-Hungary. <i>Sankt-Peterburg</i> was now too Germanic-sounding to be the capital of the Russian Empire, and in August 1914 the Russians changed the city’s name to <i>Petrograd</i> (“Peter’s City”). Many locals continued to informally call their city Piter.</p>						

The Soviets took over Sankt-Peterburg in November 1917 and then Russia in 1917–1920 under the forceful leadership of Vladimir Lenin, who died in January 1924. Later that month, the Soviets renamed Petrograd as Leningrad (“Lenin’s City”). Many locals of course continued to informally call their city Piter. <i>Leningrad</i> would resume its historic name of <i>Sankt-Peterburg</i> in September 1991 and is still of course informally called Piter.						
Petropavlovsk	“Pyotr and Pavel’s Town”	OTHER	1924	Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy	see note below	now Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, Russia
“Petropavlovsk” was a popular town and city in the Russian Empire, for the saints Pyotr and Pavlov (Peter and Paul). Since the name also had Pyotr I connection, one of the few tsars somewhat approved of, the Soviets usually did not change these names to get rid of the imperial and religious connotations. In 1924, the town of Petropavlovsk, located on the remote Kamchatka Peninsula, had its name changed to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy (roughly, “Petropavlovsk in Kamchatka”) to distinguish it from other places named Petropavlovsk. However, the Soviets were often quite casual about official names, and a few Soviets maps simply continued to show it as “Petropavlovsk”, at least as late as 1941.						
Simbirsk	“[Prince] Sinbar’s Town”, see note below	SOV-COM	1924	Ulyanovsk [7A]	for Lenin (his birth name was Vladimir Ulyanov)	now Ulyanovsk, Russia
The original name was Simbirsk but pronunciation shifted over time to Simbirsk.						
Skobelev	for Russian general M.D. Skobelev	LOC	1924	Fergana	for its location in the Fergana Valley of Central Asia	now Fargona, Uzbekistan
Yuzovka	for John Hughes, see note below	IMP, SOV-COM	1924	Stalin	for Stalin	renamed again, see 1929
John Hughes came from Britain to build an ironworks in the Donetsk Basin of the Russian Empire. His factory and workers’ settlement grew into the city of Yuzovka, <i>Yuz</i> being the Russian pronunciation and spelling of his last name.						
Ak-Mechet	see 1922	SOV-IDEO	1925	Kzyl-Orda	“Red City”	now Kyzylorda, Kazakhstan
Lenino	see 1922	STATUS	1925	Leninsk-Kuznetskiy	see note below	now Leninsk-Kuznetskiy, Russia
When Lenino was upgraded to city status, its name would have become Leninsk. Since there was already at least one Leninsk already in existence, “-Kuznetskiy” (for the Kuznets coal basin it was located in) was added to the name.						
Tsaritsyn	see note below	IMP, SOV-COM	1925	Stalingrad [4A]	for Stalin	now Volgograd (“Volga City”), Russia
“Tsaritsyn” likely derived from Turkic words meaning “yellow water”. The name in Russian resembled “tsarina”, giving it an imperial connotation.						

Ekaterinoslav	"Glory to [St.] Ekaterina", patron saint of Empress Ekaterina II	REL, IMP, SOV-COM	1926	Dnepropetrovsk [4A]	for the Dnepr River and for G.I. Petrovskiy	now Dnipro, Ukraine
Khem-Beldir	see 1918	LOC	1926	Kyzyl	Tuvan for "Red"	now Kyzyl, Russia
Novonikolaevsk	"New Nikolay's Town", for Tsar Nilolay II	IMP	1926	Novosibirsk	"New Siberia Town"	now Novosibirsk, Russia
Pishpek	see note below	SOV-COM	1926	Frunze	for M.V. Frunze	now Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan
<p>The Khanate of Kokand had a fortress in what is now Kyrgyzstan. Various sources claim it was called the Bishkek fortress, which the Russians misunderstood as "Pishpek", while others claim it was indeed the Pishpek fortress. In any event, the Russian Empire destroyed the fortress during the Russian conquest of the region. Russian colonists soon settled the site, which they continued to call "Pishpek". <i>Pishpek</i> became <i>Frunze</i> in 1926, after Red Army commander and Communist official M.V. Frunze, who had been born there. "Frunze" was too difficult to pronounce by the local Kyrgyz population, as Kyrgyz had no "F" sound and did not allow two consonants at the start of a word. They unofficially used versions of the name like "Purunze", "Burunsa", etc. In 1991, as the USSR was breaking up, the Kyrgyz changed its name to <i>Bishkek</i>.</p>						
Veliko-knyazheskaya	"Grand Prince's Village", Cossack settlement	SOV-IDEO	1926	Proletarskaya	"Proletariat Village"	now Proletarsk, Russia
Chyornoe	"Black", from the Chornoe River	OTHER	1927	Rastyapino	see note below	renamed again, see 1929
<p>Chyornoe (also spelled Chornoe) was the traditional name of the location. Industrial development occurred at the nearby village of Rastyapino, so the Soviet changed the growing center's name to Rastyapino. (I have not discovered the origin of Rastyapino, but it is possibly related to a surname.)</p>						
Kransokokshaysk	see 1918	LOC	1927	Yoshkar-Ola	Mari for "Red-City"	now Yoshkar-Ola, Mari El, Russia
Leninsk (also as Leninsk-Turmenskiy)	see 1924	LOC(?)	1927	Novyy Chardzhuy	"New Four Brooks [Town or City]"	renamed again, see 1940
Poltoratsk	see 1919	LOC	1927	Ashgabat	resumed traditional name, with improved	now Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

					Russian spelling	
Ridderskoe	named for explorer F.F. Ridder	STATUS	1927	Ridder	upgraded from village to workers' settlement	renamed again, see 1941
Enakievo	for F.E. Enakiev, railway engineer	SOV-COM	1928	Rykovo	for A.I. Rykov	renamed again, see 1937
Novaya Pokrovka	"New Pokrovka"; see note below	REL, SOV-IDEO	1928	Svoboda	"Freedom" or "Liberty"; see note below	renamed in 1943; see Table 3
Pokrovka was a very popular village name in the Russian Empire, relating to the Intercession in Christianity. There were many Russian Orthodox churches with names like Church of the Intercession or Church of the Intercession of the Mother of God, and villages sometimes took their names after these churches. In 1928, Novaya Pokrovka in the Voronezh region was merged with the nearby village of Liski, which had a train station, and the Soviets took this occasion to renamed the location <i>Svoboda</i> . (This place was not the <i>Svobodnyy</i> ("Free") in the Soviet Far East, which despite its name was in the 1930s the site of one of the largest GULag forced-labor camps in the entire USSR. With a camp population of about 190,000 in 1935, the site was more populous than many Soviet cities.)						
Podlipko	?	SOV-COM	1928	Kalininskiy	for Mikhail Kalinin	renamed again, see 1938
Zatishe	"Calm", a holiday village	SOV-IDEO	1928	Elektrostal	"Electric-Steel", an industrial center	now Elektrostal, Russia
Dyushambe	see 1924	SOV-COM	1929	Stalinabad	for Stalin, with Tajik place name ending	now Dushanbe, Tajikistan
Rastyapino	see 1927	SOV-COM	1929	Dzerzhinsk [2A]	for Feliks Dzerzhinskiy	now Dzerzhinsk, Russia
Stalin	see 1924	OTHER	1929	Stalino [4A]	see note below	now Donetsk, Ukraine; illegally annexed by Russia
<i>Stalin</i> was changed to <i>Stalino</i> to resolve confusion between city's name, Stalin, and the name of the city's train station, Stalino. <i>Donetsk</i> derives from the city's location in the Donets Basin. It is not on the Don River but is on the Kalmius River, a tributary of the Don.						
Trotsky (the former Ivashchenko)	see 1918	PURGE, SOV-HERO	1929	Chapaevsk	for Vasiliy Chapaev, Russian civil war military commander	now Chapaevsk, Russia

Trotsky (the former Gatchina)	see 1923	PURGE, SOV-IDEO	1929	Krasnogvardeysk	“Red Guards’ Town”	renamed in 1944; see Table 3
Bogorodsk	“Mother of God Town”	REL, SOV-COM	1930	Noginsk	for Viktor Nogin	now Noginsk, Russia
Sergiev	see 1919	REL, SOV-COM	1930	Zagorsk	for Vladimir Zagorskiy	now Sergiev Posad, Russia
Voskresensk	named related to the resurrection of Christ	REL	1930	Istra	“Istra [River] Town”	now Istra, Russia
Batalpashinskaya	?	STATUS	1931	Batalpashinsk	village became town	renamed again, see 1934
Helenendorf	German for “Elena’s Village”, see note below	OTHER	1931	Elenino	Russian version of Helenendorf, see note below	renamed again, see 1938
In the 19th Century, the Russian Empire conquered what is now Azerbaijan and brought in loyal colonists from the empire and from Germany to settle parts of the region. Germans colonists established the village of Helenendorf, which was named for Elena Pavlovna, the daughter of the recently-assassinated Tsar Pavel I (“Paul I”). In the 1920s, the ethnic Germans in the area were forced into collective agriculture, with resisters losing their property and being deported. In 1931, the Soviets renamed the village Elenino, the Russian version of Helenendorf.						
Pokrovsk	named related to Christian intercession	REL, SOV-HIST	1931	Engels [8A]	for Friedrich Engels	now Engels, Russia
Tver	likely named after the Tvertsa River	SOV-COM	1931	Kalinin [2A]	for Mikhail Kalinin	now Tver, Russia
Vladikavkaz	“Lord of the Caucasus”	SOV-COM	1931	Ordzhonikidze [4A]	for Sergey Ordzhonikidze	renamed in 1943; see Table 3
Ivanovo-Voznesensk	see note below	REL	1932	Ivanovo [2A]	dropped religious term Voznesensk	now Ivanovo, Russia
Ivanovo-Voznesensk had been formed by merging Ivanovo (“Ivan’s Village”) with the nearby Voznesensk Posad, a religious center. Voznesensk is a religious term related to the Ascension of Christ.						
Kozlov	?	SOV-HERO	1932	Michurinsk	for I.V. Michurin, famed agricultural	now Michurinsk, Russia

					scientist	
Nizhniy Novgorod	"New Novgorod"	SOV-HERO	1932	Gorkiy [2A]	for socialist author Maksim Gorkiy	now Nizhniy Novgorod, Russia
Novokuznetsk	"New Kuznetsk"	SOV-COM	1932	Stalinsk	for Stalin	now Novokuznetsk, Russia
Permskoe	see note below	SOV-IDEO	1932	Komsomolsk-na-Amure	see note below	now Komsomolsk-na-Amure, Russia

Permskoe was a village in the Russian Far East along the Amur River and had been named by people settling there from the Perm region of the Urals. The Soviets decided to build a shipyard there and turn the village into a city. There was insufficient labor available in the region, so Komsomols (members of the Komsomol, the Communist Youth League) were sent there from across the USSR as workers. The city accordingly was named in their honor: Komsomolsk-na-Amure, "Komsomol Town on the Amur", with the "na-Amure" to distinguish the place from the many other Komsomolsks in the USSR. In actuality, while Komsomols provided a lot of the labor, so did GULag forced laborers.

Petropavlovka	"[St.] Petr and Pavel's [Village]", see note below	SOV-HERO	1932	Sabirabad	for Mirza Alekper Sabir, see note below	now Sabirabad, Azerbaijan
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In the 19th Century, the Russian Empire conquered what is now Azerbaijan and brought in loyal colonists from the empire and from Germany to settle parts of the region. Ukrainian colonists established the village of Petropavlovka. In 1932, the Soviets renamed the village Sabirabad, in honor of Mirza Alekper Sabir, an influential Azeri revolutionary poet.

Shcheglovsk	see 1918	OTHER	1932	Kemerovo	see note below	now Kemerovo, Russia
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Shcheglovo in 1918 had been upgraded to city status, becoming Shcheglovsk. Over 25% of its population was engaged in agriculture, which became a problem due to Soviet regulations adopted in the 1920s: A city had to have less than 25% of its population engaged in agriculture. To defend its city status, in 1925 Shcheglovsk absorbed the nearby village of Kemerovo (likely derived from "Kemer's Village") with its non-agricultural coal-mining work force and train station. The city became informally known as Kemerovo, since people arriving by the train saw "Kemerovo" on the station. The Soviets made this name official in 1932.

Ulala	named from the Ulalushka River	LOC	1932	Oirot-Tura	Altaic for "Oirot City"	now Gorno-Altaysk, Altay, Russia
Obdorsk	Russian for "Place near the Ob [River]"	LOC	1933	Salekhard [31]	Nenets for "Settlement on a Cape"	now Salekhard, Yamalo-Nenets, Russia
Zvanka	?	OTHER	1933	Volkhovstroy	"Volkhov Construction"; see note below	renamed again, see 1940

The Soviets used the suffix “-stroy” to denote a major construction project, such as Volkhovstroy for the building of the Volkhov Aluminum Plant on the Volkhov River. Project names sometimes served as place names while construction was underway, as was the case with Volkhovstroy.						
Batalpashinsk	see 1931	SOV-COM	1934	Sulimov	for D.E. Sulimov	renamed again, see 1937
Bobriki	from a “Bobrik” stream; see note below	SOV-COM	1934	Stalinogorsk [2A]	“Stalin’s Town”	now Novomoskovsk (“New Moskva Town”), Russia
<i>Bobrik</i> means “beaver”. The Eurasian beaver was once widespread in much of what is now Belarus, western Russia, and northern Ukraine, so there were numerous rivers and streams in this greater region all named “Bobrik”. Bobriki/Stalinogorsk/Novomoskovsk is also the source of the Don River, one of the major rivers of Europe. Also be aware that there’s another Novomoskovsk in the region: Novomoskovsk, Ukraine, which received its name in the 18th Century when it became part of the Russian Empire.						
Khibinogorsk	“Khibiny Town”, for the Khibiny Mountains	SOV-COM	1934	Kirovsk [6A]	for Sergey Kirov	now Kirovsk, Russia
Nadezhdinsk	for noblewoman Nadezhda Polovtsova	IMP, SOV-COM	1934	Kabakovsk	for I.D. Kabakov	renamed again, see 1937
Stupino	?	OTHER	1934	Elektrovoz	see note below	renamed again, see 1938
Stupino was selected for the site of a huge factory to make electric locomotives, with construction of the plant beginning in 1932. This was the <i>Elektrovozstroy</i> project, <i>elektrovoz</i> being the Russian word for electric locomotive (formed from <i>elektro-</i> meaning “electric-” and <i>-voz</i> , which was from <i>vozit</i> meaning “carry”). In 1934, Stupino was renamed Elektrovoz, even though the factory was not complete.						
Tskhinvali (Georgian)/Tskhinval (Ossetian)	derived from “land of hornbeam [trees]”	SOV-COM	1934	Staliniri (Georgian)/Stalinir (Ossetian)	for Stalin, with Ossetian place name ending	now Tskhinvali (Georgian)/Tskhinval (Ossetian); officially part of Georgia but in Russian puppet state of South Ossetia
Verkhneudinsk	“Upper Uda [River] Town”	LOC, SOV-IDEO	1934	Ulan-Ude	Buryat for “Red Uda”	Now Ulan-Ude, Buryatia, Russia
Vyatka	from the Vyatichi people	SOV-COM	1934	Kirov [7A]	for Sergey Kirov	now Kirov, Russia
Zinovevsk	see 1924	PURGE	1934	Kirovo	for Sergey Kirov	renamed again, see 1939
Birzula	?	SOV-COM	1935	Kotovsk	for G.I. Kotovskiy, see note for	now Podilsk, Ukraine

					Hîncești	
Boksity	“Bauxite [Village]”	STATUS	1935	Boksitogorsk	“Bauxite Town”	now Boksitogorsk, Russia
Gyandzha	see 1918	SOV-COM	1935	Kirovabad [9A]	for Sergey Kirov, with Azerbaijani place name ending	now Ganja, Azerbaijan
Keshishkend	?	SOV-COM	1935	Mikoyan	for Anastas Mikoyan, a top Communist from Armenia	now Yeghegnadzor, Armenia
Nikolsk-Ussuriyskiy	see note below	REL	1935	Voroshilov	for K.E. Voroshilov	now Ussuriysk, Russia

Nikolsk-Ussuriyskiy meant “Ussuri Nikolay” and was located in the Russian Far East. “Nikolay” was for Nikolay Chudotvorets, “Nikolay the Wonderworker”, better known in English as St. Nicholas (yes, the Christmas St. Nick). Ussuri was for the South Ussuri district of the Russian Empire, which in turn was named for the Ussuri River (deriving from Manchu for “Soot Black River”). The city itself was not on or even close to the river, which was a fair distance away.

Lugansk (Luhansk in Ukrainian)	derived from the Lugan (Luh) River	SOV-COM	1935	Voroshilovgrad [4A]	for K.E. Voroshilov	now Luhansk, Ukraine (illegally annexed by Russia)
Samara	from the Samara River	SOV-COM	1935	Kuybyshev [7A]	for Valerian Kuybyshev	now Samara, Russia
Sardarabat	derived from Sardarabad, see note below	SOV-COM	1935	Hoktemberyan	Armenian for “October [City]”	now Armavir, Armenia; see note below

The ancient city of Armavir had been the capital of Armenia in antiquity. It was conquered by the Muslims in 645 and passed among various Muslim states for centuries. The Seljuk Turks renamed it Sardarabad in 1064. It ended up in the Persian Safavid Empire, and in the 17th Century the city was abandoned when a Safavid ruler had the local Armenian population forcibly deported to Iran (Persia). The Soviets resurrected the Sardarabat name when in 1931 they founded a new city near the ruins of Armavir/Sardarabad. This Sardarabat was then renamed Hoktemberyan in 1935 in honor of the Soviet October Revolution. It became Armavir in 1995 a few years after Armenia became independent when the USSR broke up.

There is also an Armavir in southern Russia. The Russian Empire had conquered the future site of this city in the 19th Century and drove out or massacred the local Muslim population. Armenians dislocated from the Russian wars of conquest in the Caucasus settled here in 1839, forming a village. In 1848, they renamed their village Armavir, after the ancient capital of Armenia. Russians now make

up the great majority of this Armavir's population, but there still is an Armenian minority in the city to this day.						
Stavropol	see note below	REL, SOV-COM	1935	Voroshilovsk [4A]	for K.E. Voroshilov	renamed in 1943; see Table 3
Stavropol, the "City of the Cross" was founded in 1777 in the North Caucasus at a time when using Greek-inspired place names was in fashion in Russia. It came from the Greek σταυρός("cross") and πόλις ("city"), adapted to Russian Cyrillic as Ставрополь ("Stavropol"). Note that " <i>stavro</i> " does not mean "cross" in Russian; a fully-Russian version of "City of the Cross" would have been Krestgrad (Крестград). Stavropol was supposedly named for some cross-like feature at its site, but there are three different and incompatible stories about what the cross was. The name "Stavropol" was not unique, there being a Stavropol on the Volga River (informally known as Stavropol-na-Volge, "Stavropol on the Volga"; it is now named Tolyatti after Italian Communist Palmiro Togliatti). There were also several villages named with some version of Stavropol such as Stavropolskaya.						
Aulie-Ata	from Uzbek for "Saint-Father"	SOV-COM	1936	Mirzoyan	for L.I. Mirzoyan	renamed again, see 1938
Batum	derived from ancient Greek for "deep harbor"	LOC	1936	Batumi [9A]	revised spelling to better match local name	now Batumi, Adjara, Georgia
Kamenskoe	from "Stony Castle"	SOV-COM	1936	Dneprodzerzhinsk [4A]	see note below	now Kamianske, Ukraine
Dneprodzerzhinsk was coined from "Dnepro-" for the Dnepr River and "-dzerzhinsk" for Feliks Dzerzhinskiy, the head of the Soviet Secret Police forces.						
Khodzhent	Russian version of Tajik Khujand, a city with ancient origins	SOV-COM	1936	Leninabad	for Lenin, with Tajik place name ending	now Khujand, Tajikistan
Kutais	uncertain	LOC	1936?, see note below	Kutaisi [9A]	revised spelling to better match local name	now Kutaisi, Georgia
Kutaisi was "Kutais" in the Russian Empire. At some point, the Soviets changed the Russian version of the name to match the local version. I have not yet found a definitive date for this change, but I suspect it was 1936. This was the year the Transcaucasian SFSR was broken up in the Armenian, Azerbaijan, and Georgian SSRs, and many place name changes occurred that year due to localization efforts. For example, Batum (see above) became Batumi.						
Sukhum	Russian version of local name,	OTHER	1936	Sukhumi	spelling change	now Sokhumi, Abkhazia, Georgia, but Abkhazia is now a

	meaning disputed					Russian puppet state and calls the city Sukhum
Tiflis	see note below	LOC	1936	Tbilisi	Georgian version of the city's name	now Tbilisi, Georgia
The city's name derives from Old Georgian, meaning "place of warmth" due to presence of many hot springs in the area. Persian-speaking states often controlled the location, so it became widely know by its Persian version of the name, "Tiflis", including in Russia (Тифлис in Cyrillic). The Russian Empire conquered the area in the 19th Century, and the Soviets reconquered the region in 1921 after Georgia had managed to become independent during the Russian Civil War. In 1936, the Soviets switched the Russian version of the name to match the local name, Tbilisi (Тбилиси in Cyrillic).						
Yangibazar	Uzbek for "new bazaar"	SOV-COM	1936	Ordzhonikidze-abad	for Sergey Ordzhonikidze	now Vahdat, Tajikistan
Detskoe Selo	see 1918	OTHER	1937	Pushkin	for Pushkin, see note below	now Pushkin, Russia
Aleksandr Pushkin was a 19th Century Russian playwright, novelist, and poet, often celebrated as the greatest Russian poet of all time. His stature was such that the Soviets celebrated the centenary of his death by renaming Detskoe Selo for him, even though Pushkin himself was far from the model of an ideal Soviet citizen.						
Kabakovsk	see 1934	PURGE	1937	Nadezhdinsk	resumed Nadezhdinsk on purge of Kabakov	renamed again, see 1939
Kadievka	?	SOV-COM	1937	Sergo	for Sergey "Sergo" Ordzhonikidze	renamed in 1943 (possibly 1940); see Table 3
Kukarka	?	STATUS, COM-IDEO	1937	Sovetsk	"Soviet Town", renamed when upgrade to town	now Sovetsk, Russia
Rishtan	uncertain	COM-SOV	1937	Kuybyshevo, see note below	for Valerian Kuybyshev	now Rishton, Uzbekistan
Bursa claims <i>Rishtan</i> first was renamed <i>Imeni Kuybysheva</i> ("Named for Kuybyshev") and became <i>Kuybyshevo</i> in 1940. Modern sources do not claim this.						
Rykovo	see 1928	PURGE	1937	Ordzhonikidze	for Sergey Ordzhonikidze	renamed in 1943; see Table 3
Sulimov	see 1934	PURGE, SOV-COM	1937	Ezhovo-Cherkessk	see note below	renamed again, see 1939

Ezhovo in Ezhovo-Cherkessk honored N.I. Ezhov, the head of NKVD, and the Cherkessk part was for the local Cherkessk people.						
Elektrovoz	see 1934	OTHER	1938	Stupino	see note below	now Stupino, Russia
Stupino was renamed Elektrovoz (Russian for electric locomotive) for the electric locomotive factory being built there. The factory depended upon Soviet plans to electrify rail lines in urban areas, in places where electric locomotives would significantly boost capacity, and for new rail lines being built in some developing industrial centers. These were expensive projects, and electrification of the lines proceeded much more slowly than planned. In 1935, the projects were scaled back when a new people's commissar of transportation decided to emphasize steam locomotives again. Construction of the Elektrovoz factory was canceled and the city resumed its name, former Stupino. (The factory site was later finished to make aircraft propellers and other metal products.)						
Elenino	see 1931	SOV-COM	1938	Khanlar	for Azeri revolutionary Khanlar Safaraliyev	now Göygöl, Azerbaijan
Kalininskiy	see 1928	STATUS	1938	Kaliningrad	upgraded to a city	now Korolyov, Russia; for S.P. Korolyov, scientist responsible for the Soviet space program
Mirzoyan	see 1936	PURGE	1938	Dzhambul	for Zhambul Zhabaev, Kazakh poet noted for praising Stalin	now Taraz, Kazakhstan
Orenburg	"Fortress on the Or [River]"	SOV-HERO	1938	Chkalov [30]	for test pilot Valeriy Chkalov	now Orenburg, Russia
Soroka	from Karelian for "river of islands" or possibly "magpie"	STATUS	1938	Belomorsk [6A]	"White Sea Town"; see note below	now Belomorsk, Russia
Soroka had been a village in Karelia on the shores of the White Sea at the mouth of the Vyg River, specializing in the timber industry and fishing. During World War I, Russian ports on the Baltic and Black Sea were blockaded by the Central Powers. The Russians accordingly built the port of Murmansk in the Russian far north to increase their ability to import vital war materials from their allies, and they also built the Murman Railroad through Karelia and the far north to connect to the port. Soroka benefited from being on the rail line, growing into a minor port. Soroka under the Soviets benefited again, as the 1930s White Sea-Baltic Canal ended there. In 1938, Soroka and several nearby settlements were merged to become the city of Belomorsk.						
Sudostroy	see note below	STATUS,	1938	Molotovsk	for Vyacheslav	now Severodvinsk ("Northern

		SOV-COM			Molotov	Dvinsk [River] Town”), Russia
The Soviets used the suffix “-stroy” to denote a major construction project, such as Sudostroy for the building of a shipyard on the White Sea. The project name sometimes served as the place name while construction was underway, as was the case with Sudostroy. When construction was finished, the location was renamed as Molotovsk.						
Berdiansk	derived from the Berda River	SOV-HERO	1939	Osipenko	for pilot Polina Osipenko	now Berdiansk, Ukraine
Brześć nad Bugiem, Poland	Polish for “Brest on the Bug [River]”	ANX-SPL, OTHER	1939	Brest, Belorussian SSR, USSR	simplified name; see note below	now Brest, Belarus
The origin of the name “Brest” is uncertain but likely came from an old Slavic word for elm trees. Other possibilities are a Slavic word for birch trees or bark and a Lithuanian word for ford, as the site was at a crossing of the Western Bug River. According to the 3rd Edition of the <i>Great Soviet Encyclopedia</i> (the entry for Brest available at http://bse.sci-lib.com/article001278.html), the first written mention of the place was in the 11th Century as “Brete”, referring to elms. The settlement fell under the rule of various states throughout its history. Under Lithuanian rule, it was known as Brest Litovsk (meaning “Lithuanian Brest” to distinguish it from other places also named Brest). Under the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, it was then Brześć Litewski (“Lithuanian Brest”). When the city passed to the Russian Empire, it was called Brest-Litovsk and also Brest-Litovskiy (both meaning “Lithuanian Brest”). Poland gained the city after World War I and changed its name to Brześć nad Bugiem (“Brest on the Bug [River]”). This avoided the “Lithuanian” reference, as Poland was now at odds with Lithuania. The Soviets took over the city in 1939 and simplified its name to Brest. The city is now part of Belarus.						
Chibyu	from the Chibyu River	OTHER	1939	Ukhta	from the Ukhta River, see note below	now Ukhta, Komi, Russia
The Ukhta River just west of the Urals Mountains in Russian had been known since the 16th Century for its oil seeps, which were collected and used as lubricates and medicine. In the 19th Century, a small oil industry developed in the region to extract oil and process it into kerosene, which was used throughout northwestern Russia. The region’s remote location and lack of good transportation facilities, however, prevented the Ukhta oil and gas fields from being developed into a major resource center. In Soviet times under Stalin, the region was selected for development. The village of Chibyu was founded in 1929 as an oil workers’ settlement. In 1939, it was renamed the village of Ukhta (and upgraded to city status in 1943). I have not done the research for the name change, but I suspect it was to align the settlement’s name with the much-better-known name of Ukhta. The Soviets by World War II were developing the gas fields at Ukhta. Without local industry to use the gas or a pipeline to send it to industrial centers, the Soviets simply burned the gas to make soot, an ingredient needed in the Soviet artificial rubber industry to make tires.						
Ezhovo-Cherkessk	see 1937	PURGE	1939	Cherkessk	“Ezhovo” was	now Cherkessk, Karachay-

					dropped when Ezhov was purged	Cherkessia, Russia
Fort-Uritskiy	see 1924	OTHER	1939	Fort-Shevchenko [30]	For Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko	now Fort-Shevchenko, Kazakhstan

Aleksandr Bekovich-Cherkassky explored parts of the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea for Pyotr I, leading to a bay and a fort being named after him. The original fort was abandoned as being too remote, replaced by a new one, Fort-Aleksandrovskiy. Ukrainian poet and painter Taras Shevchenko spent part of his exile here on military service in the 19th Century, having irritated the Tsarist government by associating with a society hoping to create a pan-Slavic republic. (The Tsars approved of pan-Slavism but not republicanism.)

The fort was renamed Fort-Uritskiy (for Communist M.S. Uritskiy) in 1924, although sources are somewhat in disagreement on this point. One claims 1920, and another claims it was September 1924 but reverted to Fort-Aleksandrovskiy November 1924. Most sources claim 1924 with no reversion to Fort-Aleksandrovskiy. In 1939, for the 125th anniversary of Shevchenko's birth, the site was named Fort-Shevchenko.



Karakol	see 1922	OTHER	1939	Przhevalsk	see note below	now Karakol, Kyrgyzstan
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Karakol had been a fortress of the Kokand Khanate in Central Asia. The 19th Century Russian Empire captured the site and built their own fortress there, keeping the name "Karakol". The site grew to become a city. In 1889, Tsar Aleksandr III ordered Karakol to be renamed Przhevalsk in honor of N.M. Przhevalskiy, a Russian traveler and explorer who had led expeditions to Central Asia, Mongolia, and Tibet. The Soviets returned the traditional name of Karakol in 1922, likely in part to remove a name associated with Russian imperialism in favor of a local name. In 1939 on the centenary of Przhevalskiy's birth, the Soviets changed its name back to Przhevalsk. I have not found a definitive reason for this, but by this time Stalin had ended the policy of cultural autonomy for ethnic minority regions and instead was promoting the Russians as the "elder brother". The Soviets included promoting selected aspects of the Russian imperial past, which would be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Kirovo	see 1934	OTHER	1939	Kirovograd
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Kirovo was originally in the Nikolaev Oblast (Nikolaev Region), with Nikolaev as the oblast capital. (It is now the Mykolaiv Oblast, capital Mykolaiv, in Ukraine.) In 1939 the northern part of the Nikolaev Oblast was made into its own oblast, with Kirovo as the capital. Normally, this would have resulted in the oblast being named the Kirov Oblast, but there already was an oblast with this name (in the Urals, with the city of Kirov as its capital). To avoid confusion, the Soviets decided to rename Kirovo as Kirovograd (Kirov's City) and the new oblast as the Kirovograd Oblast.



This Kirovograd was the site of a Soviet offensive in January 1944 that drove the Germans out of the city and then led in part to the creation of the Korsun Pocket later that month.

In Ukrainian, Kirovograd and Kirovograd Oblast were Kirovohrad and Kirovohrad Oblast. After Russia began occupying parts of Ukraine in 2014, the Ukrainians in 2016 de-Communized many of their remaining place names. Although the name of the oblast was not changed, the city of Kirovohrad was renamed Kropyvnytskyi, for Ukrainian writer-actor Marko Kropyvnytskyi.

Nadezhdinsk	see 1937	SOV-HERO	1939	Serov [29]	for fighter pilot Anatoliy Serov	now Serov, Russia
Cetatea Albă, Bessarabia, Romania	Romanian/Moldovan for “White Citadel”; see note below	ANX-HIST	1940	Akkerman	resumed historic Russian name; see note below	renamed in 1944; see Table 3

This site is on the estuary of the Dniester River and from antiquity was an important fortress and port for Black Sea trade. Many names of the site include the word “white”, due to the local chalky-white cliffs. In medieval and early-modern times, the port-fortress was fought over by the Moldovans and Ottoman Turks, with the Ottomans prevailing. They called it Akkerman, “White Castle” in Ottoman Turkish. The Russians took Akkerman in the 19th Century and kept the Turkish name (Аккерман in Cyrillic). Akkerman was in the province of Bessarabia, which joined Romania after World War I. At this time, the city resumed its historic Moldovan name, Cetatea Albă. The Soviets annexed Bessarabia from Romania in 1940 and restored the Russian name to the city.



Historic fortifications at Akkerman²³

Novyy Chardzhuy	see 1927	STATUS(?)	1940	Chardzhou	“Four Brooks [City]”	now Türkmenabat, Turkmenistan
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23 https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Chilia-and-Licostomo-on-the-map-of-Danube-Gates_fig5_290319965.

Hîncești, Bessarabia, Romania	from Hincu noble family	ANX-COM	1940	Kotovskoe	for G.I. Kotovskiy; see note below	now Hîncești, Moldova
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G.I. Kotovskiy, a Communist little known outside the USSR, had several places named after him. Kotovskiy was born in Bessarabia, a province of the Russian Empire, at what the Russians called Gincheshty (Hîncești in Moldovan). As a young adult, he became a petty criminal, a deserter from the Imperial Russian Army, and a bank robber. He was sentenced to hard labor in Siberia, escaped, and returned to Bessarabia to become a gangster. He was caught again, imprisoned, but conditionally freed when the Russian Provisional Government amnestied many prisoners following the abdication of Tsar Nikolay II in early 1917. Kotovskiy went to serve in the Russian Army, with the prospect of full release if he gave good service. He did, winning a medal for bravery.

In November 1917, the Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional Government and created their Soviet government. Kotovskiy joined the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, at the time allies of of Bolsheviks, and later joined the Bolsheviks themselves (by then, the Communist Party). He commanded cavalry units in the Russian Civil War, fighting in Ukraine, southern Russia, and near Petrograd in the northwest. As the civil war wound down, he fought anti-Soviet rebels in Ukraine and the Tambov region of Russia. Soviet propaganda celebrated his exploits, such as with this poem:

He's too fast
to be called lightning,
he's too hard
to be called a rock...²⁴

Kotovskiy was murdered in 1925, perhaps due to connections with his gangster past. He was interred in a mausoleum at Birzula in the Ukrainian SSR, about 125 km (77 miles) away from his Bessarabian birthplace at Gincheshty. (Bessarabia by this time was part of Romania.) The Soviet later honored Kotovskiy by naming at least three places for him. In 1935, *Birzula* was renamed *Kotovsk*. In April 1940, *Krasnyy Boevik* in the Tambov region was also renamed *Kotovsk* when the village was upgraded to a city. I wonder if the locals found this a bitter honor, since in 1921 Kotovskiy had been slaughtering rebellious peasants in the Tambov region. In the summer of 1940, the Soviets annexed Bessarabia from Romania, and renamed *Hîncești* as *Kotovskoe*. (In 1965, it became the third *Kotovsk* when its status was upgraded to a town; it resumed in *Hîncești* 1990 as the Moldavian SSR started to break away from the USSR.)

Jezupol, Poland	Polish for “Jesus’s City”	ANX-REL, LOC	1940	Zhovten, Ukrainian SSR, USSR	Ukrainian for “October” see note below	now Yezupil, Ukraine
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“October” is “*Zhovten*” in Ukrainian (from Ukrainian *zhovtyy*, “yellow”, for the yellowing of tree leaves in autumn). When Jezupol was

²⁴ “Kotovskiy, Grigoriy Ivanovich”; Russian Wikipedia; accessed 2923;

https://ru.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%9A%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%B2%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%B9_%D0%93%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B3%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B9_%D0%98%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%87 (in Russian).

annexed into the Ukrainian SSR, its name was changed to Zhovten, in honor of the October Revolution. The Russian name of the city was also <i>Zhovten</i> , even though “ <i>Zhovten</i> ” does not mean “October” in Russian. (“ <i>Oktyabr</i> ” is Russian for “October”, both the Russian and English words coming from the Latin name of the month, October.)						
Krasnyy Boevik	see 1919	SOV-COM	1940	Kotovsk	for G.I. Kotovskiy, see note for Hîncești	now Kotovsk, Russia
Nolinsk	“Noli [River] Town”	SOV-COM	1940	Molotovsk	for Vyacheslav Molotov	now Nolinsk, Russia
Perm	from a Finnic word or term meaning “far away land”	SOV-COM	1940	Molotov [29]	for Vyacheslav Molotov	now Perm, Russia
Tighina, Bessarabia, Romania	uncertain meaning	ANX-HIST	1940	Bendery (Ru & Ukr), Bender (Mold)	traditional Slavic-based name likely derived from Persian for harbor or port	now Bender, Moldova; but the city is in the Russian puppet state set up on Moldovan territory where it is called Bendery
Viipuri (Fin)/ Viborg (Swd), Finland	see note below	ANX-HIST	1940	Vyborg (Ru)/ Viipuri (Fin & Ka), KFSSR, USSR	see note below	now Vyborg, Russia
<p>The Russian name, Vyborg, derives from the Swedish <i>Viborg Slott</i> (Viborg Castle), a major fortified center Sweden controlled in southeastern Finland. The Finnish inhabitants of the region called the place Viipuri. It became Vyborg when the Russian Empire conquered the location. In 1918, it became Viipuri after Finland became independent (and also Viborg once Swedish joined Finnish as an official language of Finland). The location was annexed into the USSR in 1940 and re-assumed its Russian name, Vyborg. I speculate the Soviets reverted to the historical name rather than transliterating the Finnish name (perhaps as Vipuri [Випури]) because Finland had evacuated the population of the city before handing it over to the USSR. Had the local population remained in place, the Soviets might have instead transliterated the Finnish name into Russian Cyrillic. For example, when Lithuania was annexed in 1940, the Soviets transliterated the Lithuanian city names rather than reverting to their historic Russian names (see Vilnius in Table 2).</p> <p>Vyborg became part of the Karelo-Finnish Soviet Socialist Republic, which included Finnish and Karelian among its administrative languages, so Viipuri remained in use among Finnish and Karelian speakers. The location reverted to Finland as Viipuri/Viborg in 1941–1944 during World War II and then returned to the USSR in 1944 as Vyborg/Viipuri. In 1948, the Soviets made Vyborg the only official version, with Viipuri now just unofficial among Finnish and Karelian speakers.</p>						

Volkhovstroy	see 1933	STATUS	1940	Volkhov	see note below	now Volkhov, Russia
The Soviets used the suffix “-stroy” to denote a major construction project, such as Volkhovstroy for the building of the Volkhov Aluminum Plant on the Volkhov River. The project name sometimes served as the place name while construction was underway, as was the case with Volkhovstroy. When construction was finished, the location was renamed as Volkhov.						
Ridder	see 1927	SOV-COM	1941	Leninogorsk	for Lenin	now Ridder, Kazakhstan

Table 2: Selected Minor Changes, 1939–1940

This table covers minor place name changes resulting from the Soviet annexation of parts of eastern Europe and Finland in 1939–1940. Rather than changing the place’s name, the Soviets adapted the name for Belarusian, Russian, and/or Ukrainian pronunciation and spelling. For example, when the Soviets annexed Lithuania as the Lithuanian SSR in 1940, they did not change the name of the city of Vilnius back to Vilna, its historic Russian name (Вильна in Cyrillic). Instead, they used “Vilnius”, which when adapted for Russian was “Vilnyus” (Вильнюс in Cyrillic). Due to Soviet language policy, “Vilnius” in the Latin script also remained an official name of the city in the Lithuanian SSR, for Lithuanian speakers.



Left: Vilnius/Vilnyus as the Germans arrived in June 1941²⁵

Right: Vilnius/Vilnyus after the Germans were driven out in July 1944²⁶

Renaming Code

<i>Code</i>	<i>Expanded</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
ANX-SPL	ANNEXED-SPELLING	The place was annexed into the USSR from a foreign country. The spelling of its name was adapted for minor pronunciation differences in Russian, Belarusian, or Ukrainian, or for transliterating the name written from the Latin script to the Cyrillic script.

²⁵ <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1436385/a-glimmer-of-hope-or-prelude-to-holocaust-lithuania-s-june-1941-uprising-remains-controversial-eight-decades-on>.


²⁶ <https://www.lzb.lt/en/2017/01/06/what-we-lost-in-wwii/>.

Red highlighted names are shown on the [map](#) in this document. Tan highlighted names are shown on the separate larger-scale, [more-detailed map](#).

Language Abbreviations: Bel: Belarusian, Lith: Lithuanian; Ru: Russian, Ukr: Ukrainian.

Geographical Abbreviations: BeSSR: Belorussian SSR; LithSSR: Lithuanian SSR; MolSSR: Moldavian SSR; UkSSR: Ukrainian SSR.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Reason for Renaming</i>	<i>Year Renamed</i>	<i>New Name</i>	<i>Notes</i>	<i>Other Notes</i>
Baranowicze, Poland [5B]	derived from personal name or nickname "Baran"	ANX-SPL	1939	Baranovich (Ru)/ Baranavichy (Bel), BeSSR, USSR	Also retained Polish name for Polish speakers	now Baranavichy, Belarus
Białystok, Poland [5B]	from the Biała River	ANX-SPL	1939	Belostok (Ru)/ Belastok (Bel), BeSSR, USSR	Also retained Polish name for Polish speakers	now Białystok, Poland (city returned to Poland after WW2)
Grodno, Poland [5B]	uncertain origin of name	ANX-SPL	1939	Grodno (Ru)/ Hrodno (Bel), BeSSR, USSR	Also retained Polish name for Polish speakers	now Hrodno, Belarus
Although the Russian spelling of Grodno was unchanged from the Polish spelling, it was written in Cyrillic (Гродно).						
Kowel, Poland [5B]	from a Slavonic word for blacksmith	ANX-SPL	1939	Kovel (Ru & Ukr), UkrSSR, USSR	Also retained Polish name for Polish speakers	now Kovel, Ukraine
Łomża, Poland	uncertain origin of name	ANX-SPL	1939	Lomzha (Ru & Bel), Be SSR, USSR	Also retained Polish name for Polish speakers	now Łomża, Poland (returned to Poland after WW2)
Łuck, Poland	uncertain origin of name	ANX-SPL	1939	Lutsk (Ru & Ukr), UkrSSR, USSR	Also retained Polish name for Polish speakers	now Lutsk, Ukraine
Lwów, Poland [3B]	(legend) Prince Daniil of Galicia named the place	ANX-SPL	1939	Lvov (Ru)/ Lviv (Ukr), UkrSSR, USSR	Also retained Polish name for Polish speakers	now Lviv, Ukraine

	for his son, Lev					
Nowogródek, Poland	"New Town"	ANX-SPL	1939	Novogrudek (Ru)/ Navahrudak (Bel), BeSSR, USSR	Also retained Polish name for Polish speakers	now Navahrudak, Belarus
Przemyśl, Poland [5B]	see note below (legend)	ANX-SPL	1939	Peremyshl (Ru)/ Peremishl (Ukr), UkrSSR, USSR	Also retained Polish name for Polish speakers	now Przemyśl, Poland (returned to Poland after WW2)
<p>Archaeological evidence suggests the site of Przemyśl dates back to the 8th Century and was inhabited by a Slavic tribe, although which one is disputed. Its name at this time is uncertain, as the first written mention of the place come from the 10th Century.</p> <p>Some Polish works claim the city was founded by a Prince Przemysław. The prince slew a bear on the site during a hunt and then built a settlement there, putting a bear on the city's coat of arms. According to this story, the city was named after Prince Przemysław, although there are other explanations for the origins of the name. (See "Curiosities of Przemyśl"; http://visit.przemysl.pl/en/365-przemysl-curiosities-of-przemysl for Przemysław and an alternative.) Many non-Polish sources do not mention Prince Przemysław, which might be a legend invented to explain the presence of a bear on the city's flag and coat of arms.</p>						
Równe, Poland [5B]	uncertain origin of name	ANX-SPL	1939	Rovno (Ru)/ Rivne (Ukr), UkrSSR, USSR	Also retained Polish name for Polish speakers	now Rivne, Ukraine
Stanisławów, Poland [3B]	named after Stanisław Potocki (or his grandson)	ANX-SPL	1939	Stanislav (Ru & Ukr), UkrSSR, USSR	Also retained Polish name for Polish speakers	now Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine; for Ukrainian writer Ivan Franko
Tarnopol, Poland [3B]	"Tarnowski's City", founded by Jan Amor Tarnowski	ANX-SPL	1939	Ternopol (Ru)/ Ternopil (Ukr), UkrSSR, USSR	Also retained Polish name for Polish speakers	now Ternopil, Ukraine
Wilno, Poland [5B]	Polish name for Vilnius, named for the Vilnia River	ANX-SPL	1939	Vilnyus (Ru)/ Vilnius (Lith), LithSSR, USSR	See note below	now Vilnius, Lithuania
<p>The city was founded by a grand duke of Lithuania at a site along the Vilnia River, which gave the city its Lithuanian name, Vilnius. The city had many versions of its name in the various languages of its ruling countries: Vilnius (Lithuanian), Wilno (Polish), Vilna (Russian), Vilnyus (also Russian), plus more versions in the languages of other ethnic groups that lived in or near the city: Vilinia</p>						

(Belarusian), Wilna (German), Viļņa (Latvian), Vilne (Yiddish), and Vilno (Ukrainian).

In medieval times, Vilnius was the capital of the independent Grand Duchy of Lithuania. When this state united with the Kingdom of Poland to form the “Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth”, the city remained the capital of the Lithuanian portion of this country. The Commonwealth was subsequently partitioned out of existence by Austria, Prussia, and Russia, with eastern Poland and much of Lithuania going into the Russian Empire. Lithuania was broken up into several Russian provinces, and Vilna, as the Russian Empire called the city, became the capital of just one province. It was not even the capital of most of what is now modern Lithuania: “Kovno” (what the Russian Empire called Kaunas) was the capital of the province containing most of modern Lithuania.

Vilne/Wilno/Vilna/Vilnius was a quite multi-ethnic city by the early 20th Century, with Jews, Poles, and Russians being the largest groups there before World War I. Lithuanians were less than 3% of the city’s population, but they were the majority ethnic group in the rural regions near the city. As Lithuania and Poland became independent countries after World War I, they clashed over the ownership of Vilnius/Wilno. By this time, Poles were (just slightly) the majority group in the city, one of several justifications as to why Poland wanted the place. Lithuania also wanted the city, since the overall region was majority Lithuanian and Vilnius had been the historic capital of Lithuania. The Poles were stronger, and the city went into Poland as Wilno. The Lithuanians made Kaunas their capital but never gave up their claim on Vilnius. In 1939, the Soviets occupied Wilno as they took over eastern Poland and transferred the city to Lithuania, where its official name became Vilnius. This Soviet “gift” was not quite the act of generosity it might seem, as it came with an ultimatum to allow the Soviets to establish military bases in Lithuania. This was the first step of Soviet plans to take over the country, which occurred in 1940. Lithuania became the Lithuanian SSR. The Soviets stopped using the traditional Russian name of the city, Vilna, in favor of Vilnyus, their transliteration of the Lithuanian “Vilnius” into Cyrillic (Вильнюс)²⁷.

The Lithuanian SSR used Lithuanian and Russian as its administrative languages. The SSR had a sizable Polish minority, of perhaps 10–12% of the population. Normally in the Soviet system, this would have made Polish a “recognized” language of the SSR, like Polish was in the next-door Belorussian SSR. As far as I can find, Polish was not recognized in the Lithuanian SSR, likely due to the territorial dispute and tension between Poland and Lithuania in the 1920s and 1930s. This meant that the Polish “Wilno” was not an official name of the city.

Wołkowysk, Poland	likely a reference to wolves	ANX-SPL	1939	Volkovysk (Ru)/ Vawkavysk (Bel), BeSSR, USSR	Also retained Polish name for Polish speakers	now Vawkavysk, Belarus
Bălți, Bessarabia, Romania	from Moldovan word for puddle	ANX-SPL	1940	Beltsy (Ru), MolSSR, USSR	Also was Bălți for Moldovan speakers	now Bălți, Moldova
Cernăuți,	(legend) name is	ANX-SPL	1940	Chernovtsy (Ru)/	Russian and	now Chernivtsi, Ukraine

27 This very likely occurred in 1940 following the annexation, although I have not directly confirmed this. However, I do have a source that claims the Soviets in 1940 switched from Kovno (Ковно in Cyrillic) to Kaunas (Кайнас) in 1940, so it seems likely the Vilna/Vilnyus switch occurred at the same time.

Bukovina, Romania [3B]	from “black walls” for the city’s dark, oak walls			Chernivtsi (Ukr), UkrSSR, USSR	Ukrainian versions of Cernăuți	
Chișinău, Bessarabia, Romania [3B]	?	ANX-SPL	1940	Kishinev (Ru), MoldSSR, USSR; see note below	Also was Chișinău for Moldovan speakers	now Chișinău, Moldova
Romanian/Moldovan Chișinău mostly these days is transliterated into Russian as Kishinyov (Кишинёв), although Kishinev (Кишинев) is also used. However, all Soviet-era maps of the war that I have so far seen show the city as Kishinev (Кишинев). While Russian sometimes uses Cyrillic “e” in place of Cyrillic “ë” in some words for a number of reasons, this does not seem to be the case here. For example, it is shown as Kishinev (Кишинев) on historical (Cyrillic) maps of the Russian Empire ²⁸ and even on Soviet-based maps that use “ë” elsewhere ²⁹ . I speculate that Kishinev (Кишинев) was the traditional Imperial Russian/Soviet spelling and Kishinyov (Кишинёв) is a modern way of transliterating Chișinău into Russian. Despite some time researching this speculation, I have so far found no sources that go into this subject.						
Ismail, Bessarabia, Romania [3B]	from Ayaşlı Ismail Pasha, a grand vizier of the Ottoman Empire	ANX-SPL	1940	Izmail (Ru & Ukr), UkrSSR, USSR	Russian/Ukrainian version of Ismail	now Izmail, Ukraine
Liepāja, Latvia [5B]	from Latvian for “sand”	ANX-SPL	1940	Liepaya (Ru), Latvian SSR, USSR	Also retained Latvian name for Latvian speakers	now Liepāja, Latvia
Jelgava, Latvia	disputed meaning	ANX-SPL	1940	Elgava (Ru), Latvian SSR, USSR	Also retained Latvian name for Latvian speakers	now Jelgava, Latvia
Pärnu, Estonia [5B]	from the Pärnu River	ANX-SPL	1940	Pyarnu (Ru), Estonian SSR, USSR	Also retained Estonian name for Estonian speakers	now Pärnu, Estonia
Šiauliai, Lithuania	uncertain, several	ANX-SPL	1940	Shyaylyay,	Also retained	now Šiauliai, Lithuania

28 For example, see <https://runivers.ru/upload/iblock/ff0/127056.png> and https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9b/%D0%9A%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%82%D0%B0_%D0%A0%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%B8_%D0%BF%D0%BE_%D0%B3%D1%83%D0%B1%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%8F%D0%BC_%D0%B8_%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%82%D1%8F%D0%BC_%281914%29.jpg.

29 For example, see <https://rosphoto.org/visit-online/virtual-exhibitions/osvobozhdennaya-evropa/>, which has Кишинев (Kishnev) and Арм. гр. „Вёлер” (Army Group “Wöhler” [the German *Armeegruppen Wöhler*]).

[5B]	possibilities			Lithuanian SSR, USSR	Lithuanian name for Lithuanian speakers	
Tallinn, Estonia [5B]	possible derived from Estonian for “Danish Castle”; see note below	ANX-SPL	1940	Tallin (Ru), Estonian SSR, USSR	Also retained Estonian name for Estonian speakers	now Tallinn, Estonia

Tallinn’s good harbor made it a prized possession on medieval Baltic Sea trading routes, with many countries vying to control the place. Denmark seized the castle there in the 13th Century, which the local Estonians came to call the “Danish castle”, “*Taani linna*”. Many believe this was the origin of the name Tallinn. (Tallinna was an alternative name in the 20th Century.) Before 1920, Tallinn was far better known by its Scandinavian name, Reval. The Danes, the Estonians, the Livonian Knights, the Teutonic Knights, the Russians, and the Swedes all fought for control of the city. Sweden prevailed in 1561 but was replaced by Russia in 1710. The Russian name was *Revel*, although Reval remained in international use. Tallinn became the official name and entered widespread use after Estonia achieved independence in the years after World War I. When the Soviets annexed Estonia in 1940, they did not revert the city’s name to its historical Russian version, Revel, but use a transliterated Russian version, Tallin (Таллин).

Table 3: Selected Name Changes, 1941–1945

This table covers place name changes from the start of the Great Patriotic War (22 June 1941) through to the end of the Soviets’ war with Japan (2 September 1945).

Sidetrip: Axis Renaming of Soviet Cities

During the war, the Axis powers renamed places in the parts of the Soviet Union they occupied, usually restoring traditional names. For example, *Stalino* in Ukraine resumed its prior name, *Yuzovka*, during the German occupation of the city in 1941–1943. However, *Ordzhonikidze* in Ukraine reverted to its previous Soviet name, *Rykovo*, rather than its original name, *Enakievo*. Since Rykovo had been named for A.I. Rykov, a Communist purged by Stalin, it is unclear why the anti-Communist Germans reverted to Rykovo. My sources do not go into this, but perhaps the Germans did not realize the connection of Rykovo to Rykov.

The Finns and Romanians took back their territory lost in 1940 (and more), restoring prior names. For example, Vyborg became Viipuri/Viborg again; Kishinev became Chişinău again.

The Soviets of course did not recognize the Axis changes, and the cities simply resumed using their Soviet names once the Red Army recaptured the places.

Renaming Code

<i>Code</i>	<i>Expanded</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
ANX-SPL	ANNEXED-SPELLING	The place was annexed into the USSR from a foreign country. The spelling of its name was adapted for minor pronunciation differences in Russian, Belarusian, or Ukrainian, or for transliterating the name written from the Latin script to the Cyrillic script.
TRANSFER	INTERNAL TRANSFER OF TERRITORY	Estonia’s and Latvia’s borders had been determined in 1920 partly by military action during the Russian Civil War and its related conflicts. Both countries ended up with small districts of what had traditionally been considered Russian territory. When the USSR annexed these two countries in 1940 as the Estonian and Latvian SSRs, the Soviets left the borders intact. The two lands were occupied by the Germans in 1941–1944 and then reconquered by the USSR in 1944. In late 1944, the Soviets transferred the traditional Russian districts from these SSRs to the

		Russian SFSR and in 1945 changed place names there to their Russian versions.
RELOC-[Group]	FORCED RELOCATION of named Group	<p>During the Great Patriotic War, the Soviets forcibly relocated various Soviet ethnic groups from the western USSR to remote areas, often to Siberia or what is now Kazakhstan. In 1941, the relocations targeted groups and individuals whom the Soviets believed were potentially traitorous, particularly ethnic German Soviet citizens in the Western USSR (the Volga Germans, the Black Sea Germans, etc.).</p> <p>From 1943, these relocations targeted ethnic groups deemed traitorous because a number of its members had collaborated with the Germans, such as the Chechens and Crimean Tatars. This was a form of collective punishment, as in no case had large majority of an ethnic group collaborated. It should be noted that most of the groups relocated from 1943 were primarily Muslim, so this can be seen as a resumption of the Russian Imperial ethnic cleansing of Muslims from the North Caucasus and Crimea.</p> <p>The ethnically-cleansed areas were resettled with other Soviet citizens, and many ethnic-based place names in these areas were renamed.</p>
RELOC-Balk	Bask: Balkars	Balkars from the Kabardino-Balkarian ASSR in the North Caucasus were forcibly relocated in 1944.
RELOC-Ch&In	Ch&In: Chechens- Ingushes	Chechens and Ingushes from the Checheno-Ingush ASSR in the North Caucasus were forcibly relocated in 1944.
RELOC-CrTatar	CrTatar: Crimean Tatars	Crimean Tatars from the Crimean ASSR were forcibly relocated in 1944.
RELOC-German	German: Germans	Ethnic Germans in the Volga German ASSR and other parts of the western USSR were forcibly relocated in 1941.
RELOC-Kalmyk	Kalmyk: Kalmyks	Kalmyks from the Kalmyk ASSR in southern Russia were forcibly relocated in 1944.
RELOC-Kara	Kara: Karachays	Karachays from the Karachay Autonomous Oblast in the North Caucasus were forcibly relocated in 1943.
WAR	WAR RELATED	The name was changed due to some reason related to World War II.

Note: In addition to the forcibly-relocated ethnic groups listed above, several minority ethnic groups in the Adjarian ASSR of the Georgian SSR were also forcibly relocated in 1944. Since the German 1942 offensive stalled before it reached Adjara, none of these groups in this area had collaborated with the Germans during the war. Instead, the Adjarian ASSR bordered on Turkey, and the Soviets considered these groups pro-Turkish or otherwise unreliable. The Meskhetian Turks comprised the bulk of the deportees, and one justification for their relocation was that some

Meskhetian Turks were engaged in smuggling goods into the USSR from Turkey. I have, however, so far found no source claiming that villages or cities in Adjara were renamed following the relocations.

Red highlighted names are shown on the [map](#) in this document. Tan highlighted names are shown on the separate larger-scale, [more-detailed map](#).

Language Abbreviations: Ger: German; Ru: Russian, Ukr: Ukrainian.

Geographical Abbreviation: UkSSR: Ukrainian SSR.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Reason for Renaming</i>	<i>Year Renamed</i>	<i>New Name</i>	<i>Notes</i>	<i>Other Notes</i>
Marksshtadt	see 1920, Table 1	RELOC-Ger	1942	Marks	Russian for “Marx”	now Marks, Russia; see note below
In 1941 during the war, the Soviets deported the ethnic German population of the city and resettled the place with other Soviet citizens. The name Marksshtadt (“Marx’s City”) was changed in 1942 (some works incorrectly claim 1941) to remove the Germanic connection, becoming Marks (Mapkc in Cyrillic, the Russian spelling “Marx”).						
Baltser (Ru)/ Balzer (Ger)	from the name of an 18th Century German colonist	RELOC-Ger	1942	Krasnoarmeysk	“Red Army Town”	now Krasnoarmeysk, Russia
Dzharkent	?	WAR	1942	Panfilov	for I.V. Panfilov, see note below	now Jarkent, Kazakhstan
Panfilov was the commander of the Red Army’s 316th Rifle Division. The division fought the German 2nd Panzer Division during the German drive on Moskva in the autumn of 1941. For its actions in this campaign, it earned the Red Banner award on 17 November and was promoted to become the 8th Guards Rifle Division on 18 November. Panfilov himself won the Order of the Red Banner on 11 November but died in action on 18 November. In 1942, he was posthumously award the Order of Lenin and made a Hero of the Soviet Union. The city of Dzharkent was renamed in his honor.						
Lyuksemburg	see 1921, Table 1	RELOC, LOC	1943	Bolnisi	see note below	now Bolnisi, Georgia
In 1941, Stalin had many of the ethnic German inhabitants of Lyuksemburg (name for German communist Rosa Luxemburg) and the surrounding area deported to remote places in the USSR. The place was renamed Bolnisi in 1943. Bolnisi refers to the Bolnisi Sioni church, which dates back to the 5th Century, and has inscriptions with some of the earliest examples of Georgian writing. The church is also ornamented with the Bolnisi cross, which inspired later designs such as the Maltese Cross and the Iron Cross, a Prussian and						

German military award of 1813–1945.



The Bolnisi inscriptions and Bolnisi cross³⁰

Mikoyan-Shakhar	"Mikoyan-City", see note below	RELOC- Kara	1943	Klukhori	named after the region the city was located in	now Karachaevsk ("Karachays' Town", Karachay-Cherkessia, Russia
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Mikoyan-Shakhar had been a new city in the Caucasus Mountains built to become the capital of the Karachay Autonomous Oblast. Construction started in 1926, and in 1927 the site was built enough to officially become a city: Mikoyan-Shakhar in Russian, "*shakhar*" being the Russian transliteration of the local term for city, "*shahar*". Mikoyan-Shakhar was named for Anastas Mikoyan, a top Communist official who had authorized the construction of the city. (Some works claim it was founded as the village of Georgievskoe in 1929 and renamed as the city of Mikoyan-Shakhar later than year, but this is not supported in more detailed sources.) During WW2, the Germans occupied the area in August 1942–January 1943 and then retreated. Some Karachays had collaborated with the Germans, so later in 1943 the Soviets forcibly relocated the entire Karachay population, mostly to Central Asia. Mikoyan-Shakhar was then renamed Klukhori in November 1943 (some works mistakenly claim 1944). In the 1950s after the death of Stalin, the Karachays were allowed to return to their homeland, and Klukhori was named Karachaevsk in 1957.

Ordzhonikidze (the former Rykovo/Enakievo)	for Sergey Ordzhonikidze	WAR	1943	Enakievo	resumed historic name	now Yenakiyev, Ukraine but illegally annexed by Russia and called Enakievo
Sergo	for Sergey "Sergo" Ordzhonikidze	WAR(?)	1943(?)	Kadievka	resumed historic name	now Kadiivka, Ukraine but see note below

Kadievka (Kadiivka in Ukrainian) was an important coal mining center in the Donbass. In 1935, miner A.G. Stankhanov exceeded his

30 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bolnisi_Sioni_-_Georgian_inscription.JPG.

work shift's coal quota by 14 times, although there are good suspicions the Soviets helped Stankhanov do this as a propaganda stunt. The Soviets then used Stankhanov's example to launch the Stankhanovite Movement, which piled pressure on Soviet workers across the economy to try to boost production. Some places were named for Stankhanov but not Kadiievka. It instead was named Sergo for Sergey "Sergo" Ordzhonikidze.

The city resumed its traditional name of Kadiievka in either 1940 or 1943. Sources are contradictory on the date, and sometimes the same source claims both dates in different portions of its text. The Germans occupied the city in 1942–1943 during the war. Since the wartime Soviets sometimes restored historic names after liberating cities, I suspect that 1943 is more likely than 1940. In support of this, two other places named for Sergey Ordzhonikidze (as covered elsewhere in this table) were also renamed during the war, while no place named for Sergey Ordzhonikidze had its former name restored before the war.

In 1978, the Soviets renamed Kadiievka as Stankhanov in an effort to revive memories of A.G. Stankhanov, as the Soviet economy had been in a prolonged period of stagnation by this time. When the USSR broke up in 1991, Stankhanov was part of Ukraine. Control of the city illegally passed to a Russian puppet state in 2014, with Russia illegally annexing the region and city in 2022. In 2016 as part of a drive to de-Communization Ukrainian place names, Ukraine officially renamed the city Kadiivka. The Russian occupiers continue to call the city Stankhanov.

Svoboda	"Freedom" or "Liberty"	WAR	1943	Liski	?, a village name in use since at least the 1600s	now Liski, Russia; see note below
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Svoboda was on the east bank of the Don River. During the German 1942 summer offensive, the city ended up on the Soviet front lines for months, with the Germans just across the river. In January 1943, the Soviets pushed the Germans back and at some point that year renamed the city Liski, the name of one of the villages that had become Svoboda. Most sources that I've seen do not say why the Soviets decided to change the name³¹. One source³² blandly states that since the railway station was named Liski it was "reasonable" to rename the city after the station. The Soviets certainly did sometimes rename cities to match the names of their train stations, but I wonder if Stalin's Soviets also had a more cynical reason for getting rid of the name Svoboda ("Freedom").

Voroshilovsk [4A]	for K.E. Voroshilov	WAR	1943	Stavropol	resumed historic name	now Stavropol, Russia
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K.E. Voroshilov had served with Stalin at the 1918 Battle of Tsaritsyn during the Russian Civil War, where they became close associates. With Stalin's favor, Voroshilov in the 1920s and 1930s rose to become People's Commissar for Defense, a member of the Polituro, and a Marshal of the Soviet Union. Many places were named after him, including the city of Stavropol becoming Voroshilovsk in 1935.

World War II did not go as well for Voroshilov. He was blamed for Soviet setback in the Winter War with Finland in 1939–1940,

31 Even a moderately detailed one like https://lk.vrnlib.ru/?p=geographical_index&raion=28 (in Russian) does not cover the reason for the name change.

32 <https://podiemvrn.ru/den-za-dnem-za-vexoj-vexa> (in Russian).

although he blamed Stalin to his face for purging the Red Army of its best commanders. He nevertheless was sidelined and replaced as People's Commissar for Defense. When Germany invaded the USSR in 1941, he was placed in charge of halting the German drive on Leningrad but was removed after the Germans surrounded the city. Voroshilov then only served in governmental and rear area positions, although these were important posts including membership in the State Defense Committee and heading the Soviet partisan movement.

The Germans occupied Voroshilovsk in 1942. In January 1943, as it became clear that the Red Army would soon liberate the city, the Soviets changed its name. The official reason given for the change was that the city was the capital of the surrounding Ordzhonikidzeskiy Region, but the fact that the city and region had different names caused "difficulties for institutions and citizens"³³. The city resumed its traditional name of Stavropol and the region became the Stavropolskiy Region. I note that this so-called difficulty, which was not unique for Voroshilovsk, could have been solved just by renaming the region after Voroshilov. I suspect the real reason was that Stalin, who was often vindictive and cruel, found the approaching liberation of the city a convenient reason to remind Voroshilov he was still partially disgraced.

Akkerman	see 1940, Table 1	WAR	1944	Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy	"White City on the Dniester [River]"	now Bilhorod-Dnistrovskyy, Ukraine
Akkerman was conquered by the Axis in 1941 and returned to Romanian control as Cetatea Albă, its Romanian name. The Soviets of course did not recognize this change and continued to call it Akkerman. The Soviets retook the city on 2 August 1944 and on 9 August renamed it Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy (Bilhorod-Dnistrovskyy in Ukrainian). I have not found an accurate reason why the Soviets renamed the city. Several works (all seemingly derived from some unnamed source, given their almost-identical phrasing) claim it "returned to its former name". However, its former Russian and Soviet name was Akkerman. I speculate the city was informally called "White City" (Belgorod/Bilhorod) by the local Russians and Ukrainians, and the Soviets chose to make this official in 1944 to stamp it as a Slavic city. "-Dnestrovskiy" was added to distinguish it from several other Soviet places called Belgorod.						
Ak-Mechet, see note below	from Crimean Tatar for "White Mosque"	RELOC-CrTatar	1944	Chernomorskoe	"Black Sea Village"	now Chornomorske, Crimea, Ukraine but illegally annexed by Russia and called Chernomorskoe
This was the Ak-Mechet in Crimea, not the Ak-Mechet covered in Table 1 that became Kyzyl-Orda and now is Kyzylorda, Kazakhstan.						
Elista [4A]	from Kalmyk for "sandy", from the Elista River	RELOC-Kalmyk	1944	Stepnoy	"[Place on the] Steppe"	now Elista, Kalmykia, Russia
Karasubazar	from Crimean	RELOC-	1944	Belogorsk	"White Mountains"	now Bilohirsk, Crimea, Ukraine

³³ "Stavropol"; Russian Wikipedia; accessed April 2023;

<https://ru.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%A1%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%B2%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BB%D1%8C> (in Russian).

	Tatar for “bazaar on the on the Karasu [River]”	CrTatar			Town”, see note below	but illegally annexed by Russia and called Belogorsk
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Karasubazar/Belogorsk was located in the Crimean Mountains, in the southern part of the Crimean Peninsula. The mountains were a karst region with plentiful caves and white limestone cliffs, making them a much-more rugged area than their modest heights would suggest. They were informally known as the “white mountains” due to the limestone.

Kashkhatau	from a Turkic language meaning “Bald Mountain”	RELOC-Balk	1944	Sovetskoe	“Soviet Village”	now Kashkhatau, Kabardino-Balkaria, Russia
Krasnogvardeysk	“Red Guards’ Town”; see Table 1	WAR	1944	Gatchina	resumed historic name; see note below	now Gatchina, Russia

Gatchina had been the location of the Great Gatchina Palace, a favorite residence of the Tsars of Russia. After the first Russian Revolution of 1917, the resulting Russian Provisional Government turned the palace into a museum, and after Soviets came to power in the second Russian Revolution of 1917, they renamed the place Trotsk (for Lev Trotskiy). When Stalin exiled Trotskiy, the place was renamed Krasnogvardeysk (“Red Guards’ Town”, in honor of the Red Guards who fought for the Bolsheviks in 1917–1918). The Germans captured Krasnogvardeysk in 1941 and extensively looted the museum there. At first, they restored its historic name, Gatchina, but in 1942 they renamed the place Lindemannstadt in honor of German Army General Georg Lindemann. (Lindemann had commanded the German 50th Corps, which in the summer of 1941 broke through Soviet lines guarding the approaches to Leningrad, leading to the capture of Gatchina and the surrounding of Leningrad.)



Gatchina, painting by G.S. Sergeev, 1798

The Soviets did not of course recognize the German name change and continued to call the place Krasnogvardeysk. In early 1944, they drove the Germans back from the Leningrad area, recaptured Krasnogvardeysk, and renamed the city Gatchina. The nearby city of Slutsk also had its historic name, Pavlovsk restored at the same time. All my sources claim the Soviet central government renamed the cities at the “request of the Leningrad organizations”³⁴. Since the Communist Party stage-managed most things, it is possible that Stalin decided to make the changes and ordered “Leningrad organizations” to make the request, but it is possible it was a genuine request. No source I’ve found so far explains why these changes were made. Both historic names were associated with Russia’s imperial past, which the Soviets mostly avoided celebrating. However, the two restored names were associated with Pyotr I (“Peter the Great”), a modernizing Tsar the Soviets partially approved of. During the war, Stalin had in part rallied the Russian population to fight by appealing to Great Russian patriotism, so I speculate that restoring these historic names were symbolic rewards for Leningrad steadfastly resisting the Germans.

Kurman-Kemelchy (often just called Kurman)	after a Crimean Tatar overlord	RELOC-CrTatar	1944	Krasnogvardeyskoe	“Red Guards Village”	now Krasnohvardiyske, Crimea, Ukraine but illegally annexed by Russia and called Krasnogvardeyskoe
Lagan	see note below	RELOC-Kalmyk	1944	Kaspiyskiy	for the Caspian Sea	now Lagan, Kalmykia, Russia

Lagan derives from Kalmyk “la”, meaning a muddy swamp or a silty area. This described the conditions of the location, which originally was a low coastal island in the Caspian Sea. (It later silted in to become a peninsula and now is an inland location about 8–10 km from the Caspian.)

Likhvin	for a boyar’s son named Likhvin	WAR	1944	Chekalin	for A.P. Chekalin	now Chekalin, Russia; see note below
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The Germans occupied Likhvin in the autumn of 1941 during their failed drive on Moskva. German security forces caught and executed 16-year old Soviet partisan A.P. Chekalin there during the occupation. Chekalin was posthumously awarded Hero of the Soviet Union, and Likhvin was renamed Chekalin in his honor in 1944. Some sources claim the name was changed in 1945, and a few sources even claim both dates(!), but 1944 seems correct. Likhvin/Chekalin was always a small place, and in the 21st Century sometimes has been the Russian town or city (*gorod*) with the smallest population. (Many villages have more people.)

Ordzhonikidze [4A] (the former Vladikavkaz)	for Sergey Ordzhonikidze	SOV-HERO	1944	Dzardzhikau	Russian version of Ossetian name for the village below	now Vladikavkaz
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Vladikavkaz in the North Caucasus had become Ordzhonikidze as covered in [Table 1](#).

34 The decree is available at <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/901870875> (in Russian).



<p>Vladikavkaz originally had been an Imperial Russian fortress built near the Ossetian village of Zaur and had locally been known as Vladikavkaz-Dzauzhikau. In 1942, the Germans had reached the outskirts of Ordzhonikidze, where they were stopped by the Red Army with help of the city's militia troops. In 1944, the Soviets rewarded the inhabitants of the city by renaming the place Dzauzhikau. I speculate this was indirectly connected with the wartime Soviet deportation of North Caucasus ethnic groups they considered traitorous. The Chechens were collectively punished and forcibly relocated, for example, while the loyal Ossetians of Vladikavkaz/Ordzhonikidze/ Dzauzhikau were symbolically rewarded.</p> <p>In 1954, the Soviets reverted Dzauzhikau's name back to Ordzhonikidze. In 1990 as Communism was starting to crumble in the USSR, the city received a dual name: Vladikavkaz, the traditional Russian name, and Dzauzhikau, the traditional Ossetian one. Across Russia and internationally, the city is mostly known as Vladikavkaz.</p>						
Petergof, technically part of Leningrad	see note below	WAR	1944	Petrodvorets	see note below	now Petergof, Sankt-Peterburg, Russia
<p>"<i>Petergof</i>" is the Russian spelling of 18th Century Dutch "<i>Pieterhof</i>" ("Pieter's Courtyard"). The town, roughly about 30 km (20 miles) from the center of Sankt-Peterburg, grew up around the Petergof Palace complex, the summer residence of the Tsars on the southern shore of the Gulf of Finland. The Soviets turned the palace into a museum in 1918. In 1936, Petergof lost its status as a separate town and became a "municipal town" within the city of Leningrad (the former Sankt-Peterburg). During the war, the Germans occupied Petergof in 1941–1944. Upon its liberation, the Soviets renamed the site, getting rid of the Germanic <i>Petergof</i> in favor of the Russian <i>Petrodvorets</i> (Peter's Palace). In 1991, Leningrad resumed its historic name, Sankt-Peterburg, and in 1997 Petrodvorets resumed its historic name Petergof.</p>						
Shlisselburg	see note below	WAR	1944	Petrokrepost	see note below	now Shlisselburg, Russia
<p>In 1702, the Russian Army captured the Swedish fortress of Nöteborg on the southern shore of Lake Ladoga, which Pyotr I renamed his "Key Fortress", since it was key to controlling the region. Instead of using a Russian name, which would have been something like <i>Klyuchevaya-Krepost</i> ("Key Fortress"), Pyotr chose <i>Shlisselburg</i>, a transliteration of the Germanic <i>Schlüsselburg</i> ("Key Fortress"). A small city grew up around the fortress. During WW2, the Germans occupied Shlisselburg in 1941–1943. In 1944, the Soviets renamed the city, getting rid of the Germanic <i>Shlisselburg</i> in favor of the Russian <i>Petrokrepost</i> ("Peter's Fortress"). In 1994 Petrokrepost resumed its historic name Shlisselburg.</p>						
Slutsk	for Vera Slutskaya	WAR	1944	Pavlovsk	restored historic name; see note for Krasnogvardeysk above	now Pavlovsk, Russia
Mukačevo, Czechoslovakia	uncertain origin	ANX-SPL	1945	Mukachevo (Ru)/ Mukacheve (Ukr);	Russian & Ukrainian	now Mukachevo, Ukraine; see note below

				Ukr SSR, USSR	versions of Mukačevo	
<p>Mukačevo, its name in Czech and Slovakian, was in Carpathian Ruthenia, known to the Soviets as Transcarpathia (Russian, <i>Zakarpate</i>; Ukrainian, <i>Zakarpattya</i>). It was a mixed ethnic region with Ukrainians, Slovaks, Hungarians, Jews, Romanians, Poles, and several other groups. Many countries vied to control the region over time, with it becoming part of the Kingdom of Hungary within Austria-Hungary. In Hungarian, the city was known as Munkács. The region ended up in Czechoslovakia after World War I, with the city now known as Mukačevo.</p> <p>In 1938 following Germany's annexation of the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia, Hungary annexed parts of Czechoslovakia including a southern strip of territory from Carpathian Ruthenia. The rest of Carpathian Ruthenia, which included Mukačevo, remained in Czechoslovakia and then briefly became independent as Carpatho-Ukraine when the Germans dismembered Czechoslovakia in March 1939. Later that month, Hungary annexed the region, with the city once again being called Munkács. Hungary fought on the side of the Axis in World War II and was overrun by the Soviets. The Soviets wanted Carpathian Ruthenia for the Ukrainian SSR, since the region had a large Ukrainian population, but simply annexing what the Soviets officially recognized as Czechoslovakian territory was not a viable option. Instead, they officially returned the region to Czechoslovakia in 1945, and Munkács was Mukačevo again. However, they had installed Communist control over Carpathian Ruthenia, ran an agitprop campaign that made it seem like the local population wanted union with the Ukrainian SSR, and prevented the Czechoslovakian government from effectively administering the region. In June 1945, Czechoslovakia officially ceded the region to the USSR, which then became part of the Ukrainian SSR. At some point in 1945 after this transfer occurred, Mukačevo was renamed Mukachevo (Russian) and Mukacheve (Ukrainian). After the Ukrainian SSR became the independent Ukraine in 1991, the city was known by its Ukrainian name, Mukacheve. However, many locals actually called the city "Mukachevo", and in 2016 the Ukrainian government granted a request of the Mukacheve city council to change the city's official name to Mukachevo.</p>						
Petseri, formerly Estonian SSR, USSR	Estonian version of Russian Pechery, see note below	TRANSFER	1945	Pechory, Russian SFSR, USSR	see note below	now Pechory, Russia



Engraving of the Pskov-Caves Monastery³⁵

Orthodox monks in the region of what is now Belarus, western Russia, and northern Ukraine had an ancient tradition of using caves as their residences, back at least to the 11th Century Kyiv Monastery of the Caves. Caves in the Pskov region of western Russia accordingly attracted Orthodox hermits and monks, resulting in creation of the Pskov-Caves Monastery in the 15th Century. The monastery grew to be an important religious center, with many above-ground buildings and a strong wall. As was usual for the time, a settlement grew up by the monastery grew. This was called Pechery, from the old Russian word for caves, *pechery* (*peshchery* in modern Russian). Pechery was in a mixed-ethnic area with Russians, Estonians, and other groups. The settlement and its district ended up in Estonia in 1920, where it was called Petseri, an Estonian rendering of “Pechery”. (This did not mean “caves” in Estonian, as *koopad* is Estonian for “caves”.) During its time in Estonia, Petseri grew from a small village with a Russian majority and Estonian minority into a small city with an Estonian majority and Russian minority. (Other ethnic groups were also present.)

Estonia was annexed into the USSR in 1940 as the Estonian SSR. Since both Estonian and Russian were administrative languages of the Estonian SSR, this meant Petseri gained an official Russian name in addition to its Estonian name. However, the Soviets did not resume the traditional Pechery name but instead transliterated Estonian Petseri into Russian (Петсери, Petseri). The German occupied Petseri in 1941–1944, and the Soviets drove the Germans out in 1944, reestablishing Estonian SSR control of the Petseri district. In late 1944, the Soviets transferred parts of the eastern Estonian SSR to the Russian SFSR, including the Petseri district. I believe this was likely a punishment for many Estonian having collaborated with the Germans³⁶. In 1945, the Soviet changed the city’s name to Pechory, a modernized version of Pechery.

35 https://www-mk--pskov-ru.translate.google/social/2021/07/09/krovavyy-put-pechorskoy-obiteli-drevnee-predanie-o-groznom-care-i-strashnoy-smerti.html?_x_tr_sl=ru&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=wapp.

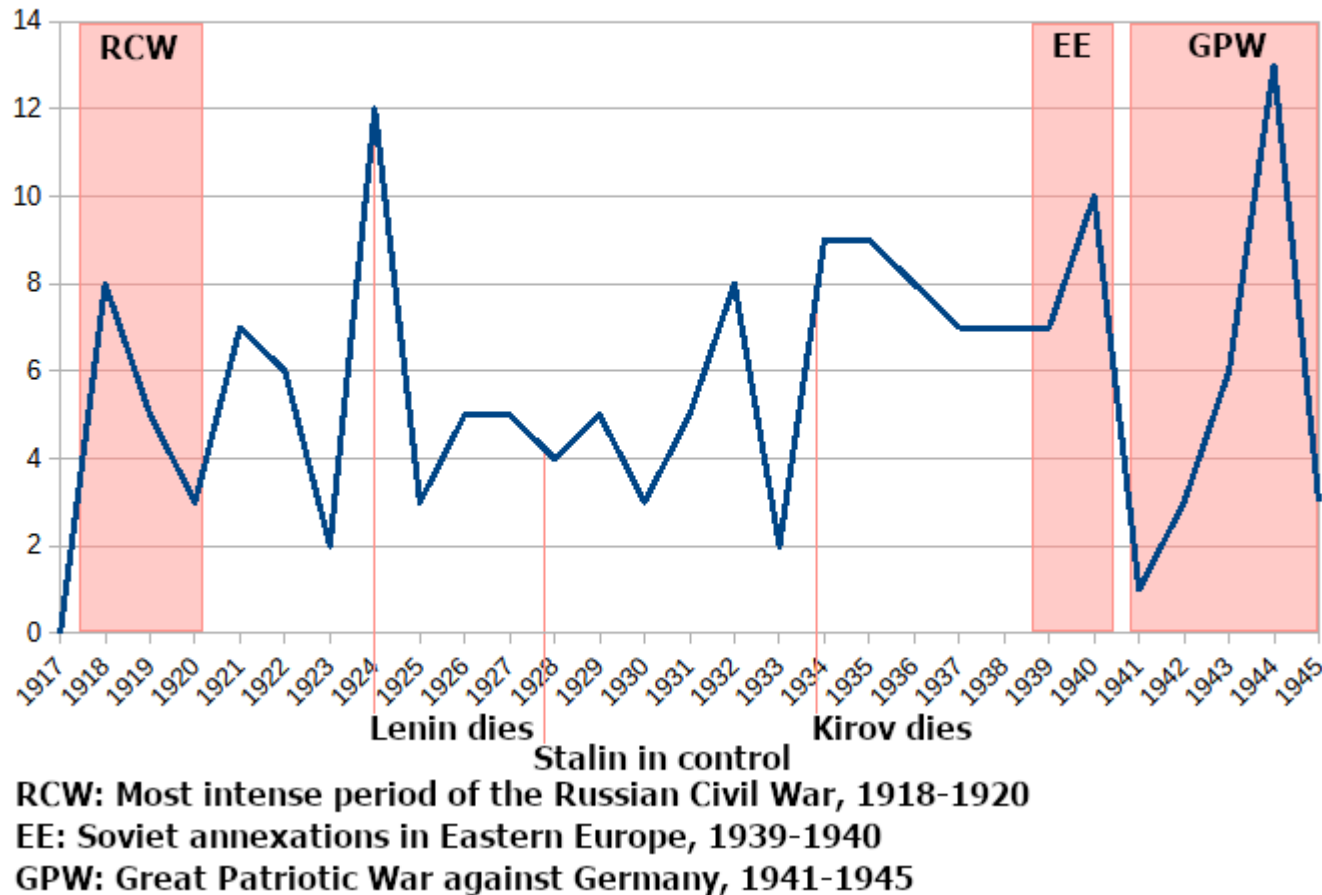
36 The Soviets claimed that the Germans had deported the entire population of Petseri, leaving the city depopulated in 1944. This may well have been correct, as the Germans did deport many people to become laborers in Germany. However, it is also likely that many Estonians voluntarily fled the city on the approach of the Red Army, not wishing to come under Soviet rule again.

Užhorod, Czechoslovakia	from Hungarian Ungvár, “Castle on the Ung [River]”	ANX-SPL	1945	Uzhgorod (Ru)/ Uzhhorod (Ukr), Ukr SSR, USSR	Russian & Ukrainian versions of Užhorod	now Uzhhorod, Ukraine; see note below
Užhorod was the Czech and Slovakian version of the Hungarian name, Ungvár. This city was in Carpathian Ruthenia and had a history very similar to Mukačevo/Mukachevo (see above), except that it was in the part of Carpathian Ruthenia that went to Hungary in 1938 rather than in 1939 like the rest of the region. In June 1945, as with Mukačevo/Mukachevo, Užhorod became part of the Ukrainian SSR of the USSR and was soon renamed Uzhgorod/Uzhhorod.						

Chart 1: Soviet Renamings by Year

The Soviet Renaming Revolution, 1917-1945

Number of cities renamed per year (not comprehensive and minor spelling changes due to annexations not included).



This chart shows the number of place name changes by year, based on the information given in Tables 1 and 3. Table 2, which lists only minor spelling changes to adapt foreign names during the annexations of 1939–1940, is ignored. This chart is not comprehensive as it excludes many status changes as well as a number of political name changes for villages, towns, and small cities. Nonetheless, it still shows some interesting patterns: a spike in 1918 soon after the Soviets came to power, a spike in 1924 following Lenin's death, an increase in 1934–1935 following the death of

Sergey Kirov, a spike in 1940 as the USSR annexed parts of eastern Europe, and a spike in 1944 as the Soviets decisively defeated the Germans in the USSR.

There is another renaming spike on the chart, which I do not correlate to an event: the spike of 1932. That year was the height of the famine caused by Stalin's ruthless policies to forcibly collectivize agriculture while also exporting grain to pay for industrialization. I believe it was only a coincidence that a renaming spike occurred that year.

1.G After September 1945



There were numerous place name changes after the period covered in this guidebook (November 1917–September 1945). These are not covered in detail here, but an overview of them is as follows:

- Names continued to be modified due to change in status. Villages were often growing into towns or cities, while sometimes a town or city declined into village status.
- Various names were changed in the immediate post-war years. The USSR gained new territory from the war, particularly from Germany and Japan. The German and Japanese place names in the annexed territories were changed to Russian place names. For example, the north half of Germany's East Prussia was annexed into the USSR, and its major city of *Königsberg* ("King's Hill") became *Kaliningrad*

(“Kalinin’s City”, for M.I. Kalinin³⁷). The Soviets also gained the southern half of Sakhalin Island from Japan, where for example the city of *Toyohara* became *Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk* (“South Sakhalin Town”)³⁸.

- Soviet victory in World War II led to the USSR dominating parts of eastern and central Europe. The USSR organized this territory into Soviet satellite states run by local Communists under the control of the Soviet Union. This expansion of Soviet control led to some places being renamed in these countries. For example, *Chemnitz* in East Germany became *Karl-Marx-Stadt* (German for “Karl-Marx-City”).



Stalinstadt, East Germany³⁹

As should come as no surprise, a number of these renamings involved Stalin. For example, *Braşov* in Romania becoming *Oraşul Stalin* (Stalin’s City), *Eisenhüttenstadt* in East Germany becoming *Stalinstadt* (Stalin’s City), *Katowice* in Poland becoming *Stalinogród* (Stalin’s City), and *Varna* in Bulgaria becoming *Stalin*. Everyone apparently had to have their own Stalin if they knew was was good for them.

- Names in the USSR continued to be changed for political reasons in the post-war period, often to commemorate Communist leaders when they died. For example,

³⁷ This was the second Kaliningrad, as there was another one next to Moskva.

³⁸ The Japanese themselves had gained southern Sakhalin from the Russian Empire in 1905, so Japanese *Toyohara* had earlier been Russian *Vladimirovka*.

³⁹ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_183-19521-0005,_Namensgebung_%22Stalinstadt%22.jpg.

Mariupol, the birth place of A.A. Zhdanov, became *Zhdanov* after his death in 1948. (It resumed its traditional name in 1989.)

- Stalin died in 1953, and by 1956 the new Soviet leadership was denouncing his excesses. In 1957, they decided no Soviet place name should commemorate a living person, which not coincidentally caused *Molotov* to revert to *Perm*. V.M. Molotov had been and remained a loyal, murderous Stalin crony, so he fell out of favor with the new Soviet leadership. This new rule also caused some other places named after still-living Communists to change their names, such as places named after Voroshilov. Voroshilov, however, had fewer enemies in the new Soviet leadership. Once the de-Stalinization drive had run its course, he was recalled from retirement and made a political figurehead. In 1970, after his death in 1969, one of “his” former cities resumed his name: Lugansk (Luhansk in Ukrainian) had become Voroshilovgrad in 1935, had resumed Lugansk/Luhansk in 1958, and now became Voroshilovgrad again in 1970. (It resumed Lugansk/Luhansk in 1990.)

The decision not to honor living persons provided the opening for some cities to get rid of unloved political names and revert to traditional names, even if the person they were named for was deceased. *Chkalov* in 1957 became *Orenburg* again, for example, even though Valeriy Chkalov had died in the 1930s.

By 1961, the Soviet leadership was ready to start erasing Stalin’s name from the map. In cases where the former names had an Imperial or capitalist connotation, they created new, blandly geographical names. *Stalingrad* became *Volgograd* (“Volga [River] City”) and *Stalino* became *Donetsk* (“Donets [Basin] Town”).

All this did not mean the Soviet leadership had grown tired of renaming places for political reasons! *Akmolinsk* in Kazakhstan became *Tselinograd* (“Virgin Lands’ City”) in 1961 during the Soviets’ campaign to turn “virgin lands” into new farmland⁴⁰. *Gzhatsk*, in the district where cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin had been born, became *Gagarin* after he died in 1968 in a jet aircraft crash. Political renamings continued up to the mid-1980s, with Rybinsk becoming Andropov in 1984, for Yu.V. Andropov, who died that year. Andropov died in office, having been both General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. Andropov had earlier been a vicious,

40 *Tselinograd* in turn in 1991 became *Akmola* (upgrading the older Akmolinsk to reflect the place’s city status) when Kazakhstan became independent. However, Kazakhstan remained a dictatorial state with many of the follies of the USSR. *Akmola* became *Astana* (“New Capital”) in 1998 after country’s the capital was moved there from Almaty in 1997. It then became *Nur-Sultan* in 2019 in honor of Kazakh dictator Nursultan Nazarbayev when he retired, then *Astana* again when the next Kazakh leader tired of having his predecessor honored.

perhaps paranoid head of the KGB. As the top leader, Andropov proved clueless in how to shake the Soviet economy out of its stagnation and indeed made things worse by increasing military spending to 70% of the total government budget. He hardly deserved a city being named after him.

- By the late 1980s, the Soviet Union was descending into political turmoil, and the inhabitants of various places became renaming their cities to get rid of their political names, often reverting to traditional names. Besides *Zhdanov* resuming *Mariupol* in 1989, *Andropov* reverted to *Rybinsk*. The most momentous renaming came in 1991 following a failed Communist coup to take over a Communist country (the USSR): the inhabitants of *Leningrad* voted to be *Sankt-Peterburg* once again. The USSR itself dissolved a few months later in 1991, and the successor states to the Soviet Union renamed very many places. Many political names were discarded. Communism was mostly but not completely discredited, especially in Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine. While many political names in these places were changed, some places retained their Communist-era names like Komsomolsk-na-Amure, Leninsk-Kuznetskiy, and Sovetsk. After Russia began occupying and illegally annexing parts of Ukraine in 2014, Ukraine in 2016 renamed many of its surviving Communist-named cities.

2 Appendices

2.A Soviet Language Policy

This guidebook uses the current (English) names of languages and dialects, such as “Belarusian” and “Moldovan”. Using the historical (English) names of languages for the period covered in this guidebook, like “Belorussian” and “Moldavian” can create the mistaken impression that Belorussian is different than Belarusian or that Moldavian is different than Moldovan. They are not.

This guidebook uses the historical (English) names for the internal divisions of the USSR, such as the “Belorussian SSR” and the “Moldavian SSR”. This keeps the history clear and consistent with other works on the period. “Belorussian SSR” for example, is from the Russian name for that union republic, *Belorusskaya SSR* (Белорусская ССР). Its Belarusian name, *Belaruskaya SSR* (Беларуская ССР⁴¹) would be Belarusian SSR, but this name was only used by Belarusian speakers, with the Russian name being used elsewhere in the USSR and internationally.

The Soviet Union had well over 100 ethnic groups with their own languages⁴². Russian was the dominant language due to the Russians being not just the largest ethnic group in the country but also the most powerful one, politically and militarily. This was a legacy of the Russian Empire. When the Soviets took over Russia, they promised to treat ethnic minorities better than the empire had, including a theoretical right to autonomy. This turned out to be much less than pledged, as in practice they had no intention of allowing substantive political freedoms or the option to secede from the USSR. Instead, the Soviets with their one-party system and sham elections put Communists in charge everywhere, including in the many so-called “autonomous” entities. The Communists obeyed what the Party and Soviet leadership decided, without regard for the wishes of the people.

While Soviet promises of better treatment for minorities were hollow, they not completely empty. In the 1920s, the Soviets allowed considerable non-political cultural

41 Беларуская ССР can also be transliterated as Bielaruskaja SSR and Belaruskaja SSR.

42 Various sources claim there were 120 or 130 different languages in the USSR, ranging from ones with just a few thousands of native speakers to a few with tens of millions. The exact number of languages is partly a matter of opinion as to whether what a group spoke was considered a language or a dialect of another language. These distinctions changed over time, complicating the issues. The Russian Empire considered Kazakh and Kyrgyz to be a single “Kirgiz-Kaysak” language. The Soviets followed this tradition at first but then decided they were different, albeit highly similar, languages.

The situation with dialects was quite complex. Ukrainian alone, for example, had three groups of dialects with over a dozen individual dialects. One of these, Eastern Polesian in northeastern Ukraine, is intermediate between Ukrainian and Russian, and another, Western Polesian in northwestern Ukraine and southwestern Belarus, is intermediate between Ukrainian and Belarusian. Western Polesian is sometimes claimed to a dialect of Belarusian or its own microlanguage.

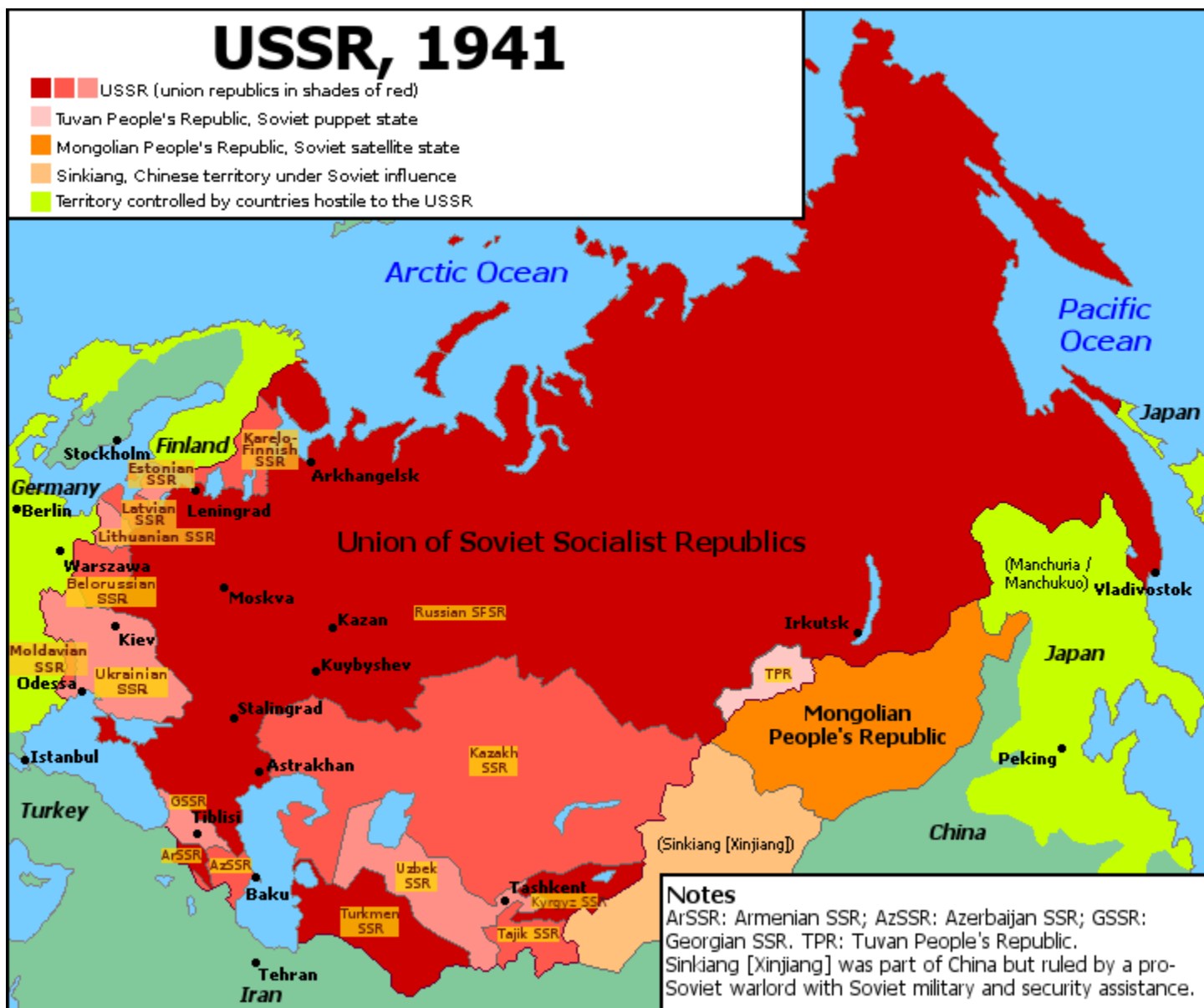
expression and extensive language rights for ethnic groups. This was not out of pure benevolence, as the Soviets hoped that cultural autonomy would cause ethnic groups to view the USSR favorably and thus lessen separatist tendencies.

Soviet language policies were quite liberal and a major contrast to those of the Russian Empire. Russian had been the official language of the empire, and from the 19th Century the Russian government attempted to russify many of its ethnic minorities, including promoting or requiring the use of Russian outside the home. For just two of many examples, in Ukraine and Russian Poland imperial laws required education, cultural events, and official business to be conducted in Russian rather than Ukrainian or Polish. The Soviets changed this, with ethnic minorities having the right to use their languages in all public affairs as well as in private. They also had the right to have at least some primary education conducted in their own languages. Larger ethnic groups had have all primary education in their own languages, even-larger ones had some or all secondary education in their own languages, and the largest groups like the Ukrainians had tertiary education in their own languages.

Hence, the first immediate task of our Party is vigorously to combat the survivals of Great-Russian chauvinism.

—I.V. Stalin, 1923⁴³

43 I.V. Stalin, "National Factors in Party and State Affairs"; 24 March 1923;
<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1923/03/24.htm>.



The Tuvan People's Republic was a Soviet puppet state. In 1944 during World War II, Stalin no longer found the pretense of Tuvan independence convenient and merged the region into the USSR as part of the Russian SFSR.

The Mongolian People's Republic was a Soviet satellite state heavily dependent on the USSR and with Soviet troops stationed in the country. It was more than a puppet state and maintained some actual independence.

Russian was not even the official language of the USSR, as Soviet laws did not enshrine Russian or any language as official. Instead, the Soviet Union had a patchwork of what are now called **administrative languages** and **recognized languages**. Each union republic had one or more administrative languages, in which governmental, legal, and other official affairs were conducted. One of the languages was always Russian; in the Russian SFSR it was the only administrative language. The other union republics were based on the territory of non-Russian ethnic groups, and the language of the republic's ethnic group was the other administrative language. For example, Russian and

Belarusian were the administrative languages in the Belorussian SSR; Russian and Ukrainian were such in the Ukrainian SSR. One union republic had three administrative languages: the Karelo-Finnish SSR with Finnish, Karelian, and Russian. (The short-lived Transcaucasian SFSR of 1922–1936 had four: Armenian, Azerbaijani, Georgian, and Russian.)

Administrative Languages of the Union Republics, circa 1941

<i>Union Republic</i>	<i>Administrative Languages</i>	<i>Union Republic</i>	<i>Administrative Languages</i>
Armenian SSR	Armenian, Russian	Latvian SSR	Latvian, Russian
Azerbaijan SSR	Azerbaijani, Russian	Lithuanian SSR	Lithuanian, Russian
Belorussian SSR	Belarusian, Russian	Moldavian SSR	Moldovan, Russian
Estonian SSR	Estonian, Russian	Russian SFSR	Russian
Georgian SSR	Georgian, Russian	Tajik SSR	Tajik, Russian
Karelo-Finnish SSR	Finnish, Karelian, Russian	Turkmen SSR	Turkmen, Russian
Kazakh SSR	Azerbaijan, Russian	Ukrainian SSR	Ukrainian, Russian
Kyrgyz SSR	Kyrgyz, Russian	Uzbek SSR	Uzbek, Russian

In addition to their administrative languages, union republics also “recognized” languages for many of the minority groups in the republic. For example, Polish, Ukrainian, and Yiddish were recognized languages in the Belorussian SSR while Belarusian, Crimean Tatar, Hungarian, Moldovan, and Polish were recognized in the Ukrainian SSR. (I have yet to find a comprehensive and accurate list of all the recognized languages of the union republics, so it is possible both these SSRs also recognized other languages.)

Various union republics had ethnic minority groups, which depending on their size, concentration, and perceived importance were organized in Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSRs) and other autonomous political entities⁴⁴. Each of these entities had its ethnic group’s language as an administrative language, in addition to

⁴⁴ In general, an ethnic group did not get an autonomous entity within a union republic if the group had its own union republic. For example, since the Russians had the Russian SFSR, ethnic Russians did not get autonomous entities within the other union republics, even when they were the majority group in an area. For example, some districts in the Ukrainian and Kazakh SSRs had Russian majorities but were not organized as autonomous entities. Similarly, Ukrainians had the Ukrainian SSR and did not get autonomous entities within the other union republics, even though there were some Ukrainian-majority districts in the Russian SFSR and Kazakh SSR. Given the size and complexity of the USSR, there were some exceptions and special cases to this convention on autonomous entities. The most unusual one was the Nakhchivan ASSR, an Azerbaijani-majority autonomous entity of the Azerbaijani SSR. The ASSR was geographically separate from the SSR itself and had been created in a complicated process resulting from ethnic tensions and violence in its region.

the administrative languages of its union republic. For example, the Ukrainian SSR had Ukrainian and Russian as its administrative languages, while its Moldavian ASSR (of 1924–1940) had Moldovan, Ukrainian, and Russian as administrative languages.

Sidetrip: Scripts in the USSR, Part 1

This is a sample sentence (Latin script, English)

Это примерная фраза (Cyrillic script, Russian)

Це зразок речення (Cyrillic script, Ukrainian)

Гэта ўзор сказа (Cyrillic script, Belarusian)

این یک جمله نمونه است (Arabic script)

זהו משפט לדוגמה (Hebrew script)

Սա օրինակելի նախադասություն է (Armenian script)

ეს არის წინადადების ნიმუში (Georgian script)

Αυτή είναι μια ενδεικτική πρόταση (Greek script)

Soviet language policy included the right of ethnic groups to use their traditional writing systems (a script⁴⁵ and the rules on how to use it). There were many scripts in use in the USSR. The most prevalent were the Cyrillic script (with differing alphabets for Belarusian, Russian, and Ukrainian), the Arabic script (used with differing alphabets by various Muslim groups in Soviet Central Asia, Russia, and Ukraine⁴⁶), the Hebrew script (used for Yiddish), and the Latin script (used in the USSR by Lithuanians, Germans, Poles, etc.). However, there were many more scripts in use: Armenian, Georgian, traditional Mongolian⁴⁷ (used by Mongols and Buryats in Siberia and Transbaykal), Greek (used by the sizable Greek minority in Ukraine and southern Russia), Hangul (used by the Soviet Korean minority), Chinese, possibly Manchu, and perhaps others.

Many small ethnic groups did not have a written form of their language when the Soviets came to power. The 1920s Soviets as part of their language policies created writing systems for a number of these languages. They did not even require the Cyrillic script to be used; the Latin script or the Arabic script could be used if judged most appropriate for cultural or historical reasons.

45 A script is a way to write words and might be expressed as alphabets, pictograms, ideograms, and so on. The Cyrillic script encompassed similar (but not identical!) alphabets for Belarusian, Bulgarian, Russian, Serbian, Ukrainian, etc. The Chinese script, in use in parts of the Soviet Far East, was based on logograms.

46 At least some of these alphabets use the “Perso-Arabic” script, a version of the Arabic script that included Persian letters in addition to Arabic letters.

47 The traditional Mongolian script is also called the classical Mongolian script and was often called “Old Mongolian” in Russia and the USSR.

The Soviets also converted some languages that used Arabic script to Latin script. This was in part to help literacy efforts. Arabic scripts in use in Central Asia at the time lacked most vowels, so a Latin script with its vowels was judged easier to learn. Why not Cyrillic, which also had a full set of vowels? In part, during the time of the Russian Empire, the efforts of Russian Orthodox missionaries to convert Muslims to Christianity had made Cyrillic very unpopular among many Muslims. Also, Turkey in the 1920s switched from its Arabic script to a Latin script, in a similar effort to boost literacy efforts. As Turkey and the USSR had good relations at this time, each country's latinization effort influenced the other country.

This latinization of the Arabic script was actually one part of a larger plan to latinize all the scripts of the Soviet Union, Cyrillic included. The early Soviets were radical revolutionaries who wanted to remake their country to socialist ideals. They believed that using the Latin script would help unite the country, would break with the Tsarist past in a way that Cyrillic could not, and would isolate Soviet Muslim citizens from traditional Islamic texts that used the Arabic script. Communist hopes for a proletarian worldwide revolution also played a role: By converting Russian writing from Cyrillic to the Latin script, the many Soviet books on Communism, the USSR, and related topics would become more accessible to the many peoples who used the Latin script⁴⁸. The goal was to create a "universal" proletarian culture, accessible to the large numbers of people who could not read Cyrillic⁴⁹. By 1929, planning began on how best to latinize Cyrillic. This was the high tide of Soviet latinization, however, and would quickly ebb under Stalin.

The Russian language might supposedly just have been "first among equals" in the USSR, but it also was the *lingua franca* of the Soviet Union, used for country-wide communications and often for communication between different ethnic groups. It was always an administrative language of each union republic. It was the language of the highest levels of the Soviet government, of the Soviet military, and of the Soviet scientific establishment. All this made Russian strongly favored. Any non-Russian Soviet citizens who wanted to advance outside their own ethnic groups needed to know Russian.

48 The books would still have been in Russian, but it is easier to learn a new language in the script you know rather than having to learn a new language and a new script together.

49 For a somewhat biased summary of this situation, see Viacheslav Charskiy; "How Stalin Saved Russia from Switching to the Latin Alphabet"; 2022; <https://www.rbth.com/education/335092-stalin-russian-language-latinization>.

By 1928–1929, Stalin had gained full control of the Communist Party, which gave him dictatorial power over the Soviet Union. Stalin had been the Soviet expert on minorities, having written *Marxism and the National Question* in 1913, a work that influenced Bolshevik/Communist thinking on Soviet minorities. Once in power, he completed the process of dividing up the Soviet Union into ethnic-based union republics and autonomous entities. Soviet propaganda celebrated him as the “father of nations” (“nations” in the Soviet system meaning ethnic groups and not independent states). However, Stalin was a russianized Georgian who actually believed ethnic Russians and the Russian language were the essential core of the USSR. Further, by the time he achieved power, it had been clear that giving ethnic groups cultural autonomy had not lessened their separatist tendencies and had possibly increased them. Stalin incrementally changed Soviet policy away from cultural autonomy and towards russification. Since this was Stalin’s USSR, the shift away from cultural autonomy was repressive and murderous at times. For example, various leaders of autonomous entities were purged for “national deviation” (such as favoring their ethnic group) and some were executed⁵⁰.

Under Stalin, propaganda held that the Russians were the “elder brothers” of the various Soviet peoples, to be admired and copied. Aspects of Russia’s history and culture that supported Stalin’s centralizing goals were praised. The Soviets came up with a rationalization to justify the shift away from cultural autonomy: “bourgeois nationalism” was now a greater threat than Great Russian chauvinism, which the Soviets claimed to have tamed. Bourgeois nationalism meant support for true autonomy or independence among supposedly bourgeois elements of an ethnic group. This made it illegitimate, in the Soviets’ Marxist-Leninist system bourgeois elements only worked for the their own self-benefit and not for the good of the people in the ethnic group. (In theory, proletarian nationalism would have been more acceptable, since the proletariat, including both workers and farmers, were the vast majority of the people in the ethnic group. However, the Soviet system also maintained that a properly-guided proletariat would realize their best welfare was to be part of a Soviet socialist state of all peoples. The Communist Party, of course, provided the guidance.)

The Russian language was promoted under Stalin. In 1938, Russian became a mandatory subject in the education systems across all the union republics.

50 Once the USSR embarked on a de-Stalinization drive after Stalin’s death, a number of these executed people had their reputations rehabilitated due to lack of evidence that they actually committed any crime.

Sidetrip: Scripts in the USSR, Part 2

Stalin's pro-Russian policies ended the latinization drive and even reversed it. Efforts to latinize scripts like Cyrillic and Chinese ceased. Cyrillic was now favored, and any language that had received a Latin script since the Soviets came to power now had to convert to Cyrillic. This included those languages that had received their first writing systems under the Soviets. It also included the languages of Muslim groups that had converted from from their traditional Arabic script to the Latin script in the 1920s. They now had to convert again, this time to Cyrillic script⁵¹.

This is a sample sentence (Latin script, English)

Бұл үлгі сөйлем (Cyrillic script, Kazakh)

Бул үлгү сүйлөм (Cyrillic script, Kyrgyz)

Ин як ҷумлаи намунавӣ аст (Cyrillic script, Tajik)

Бу үрнәк жөмлә (Cyrillic script, Tatar)

Non-Cyrillic scripts were only allowed for languages that had traditionally used those scripts before the Soviets took power. For example, the Volga Germans continued to use the Latin script, the Armenians the Armenian script, and the Georgians the Georgian script.

In 1939–1940, the Soviet annexed Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, eastern Poland, parts of Finland, and parts of Romania. Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Finnish and Moldovan (Romanian) all used the Latin script and continued to do so inside the USSR with one exception: Moldovan. In the 1920s, the Soviets had required Soviet Moldovan speakers to use the Cyrillic script, in hopes of breaking their connection with Latin-script Romania.

This is a sample sentence (Latin script, English)

See on näidislause (Latin script, Estonian)

Šis ir teikuma paraugs (Latin script, Latvian)

Tai yra sakinio pavyzdys (Latin script, Lithuanian)

51 After the breakup of the USSR in 1991, the new countries of Central Asia adopted varying policies on which script to use, with debates about their merit still occurring in some lands. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan kept using Cyrillic. Uzbekistan adopted the Latin script alongside the Cyrillic script, although in practice most people there use Cyrillic. Turkmenistan switched from Cyrillic to the Latin script, and Kazakhstan currently is in the process of switching from Cyrillic to the Latin script. None of these countries switched back to the Arabic script, although some in Tajikistan call for this, while others there support the Latin script, and others still want to remain using Cyrillic.

Stalin's pro-Russian policies continued during the war with German in 1941–1945, which the Soviets cast as the “Great Patriotic War”, a reminder of Russia's triumph over Napoleon in the “Patriotic War of 1812”.

COMRADES! Permit me to propose one more, last toast.

I should like to propose a toast to the health of our Soviet people, and in the first place, the Russian people.

I drink in the first place to the health of the Russian people because it is the most outstanding nation of all the nations forming the Soviet Union.

I propose a toast to the health of the Russian people because it has won in this war universal recognition as the leading force of the Soviet Union among all the peoples of our country.

I propose a toast to the health of the Russian people not only because it is the leading people, but also because it possesses a clear mind, a staunch character, and patience.

...

To the health of the Russian people!

—I.V. Stalin, 1945⁵²

52 I.V. Stalin, toast at a reception honoring Red Army commanders, 24 May 1945.

2.B Russian Cyrillic Transliteration

Where practical I translate Russian words rather than transliterate them. For example, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was *Союз Советских Социалистических Республик* in Cyrillic. This transliterates to *Soyuz Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik*, but this far less useful for English speakers than its translation: *Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*. Some terms, however, cannot be easily translated and are transliterated instead. Further, Russian place names are always transliterated for what I hope are obvious reasons: *Нижний Новгород* is *Nizhniy Novgorod*, not “New Novgorod”; *Сталинград* is Stalingrad, not “Stalincity” or “Stalin City”.

Here is the *Classic Europa* scheme for transliterating Russian Cyrillic:

Russian Cyrillic		English		Russian Cyrillic		English	
Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower
А	а	A	a	П	п	P	p
Б	б	B	b	Р	р	R	r
В	в	V	v	С	с	S	s
Г	г	G	g	Т	т	T	t
Д	д	D	d	У	у	U	u
Е	е	E	e	Ф	ф	F	f
Ё	ё	Yo	yo	Х	х	Kh	kh
Ж	ж	Zh	zh	Ц	ц	Ts	ts
З	з	Z	z	Ч	ч	Ch	ch
И	и	I	i	Ш	ш	Sh	sh
Й	й	Y	y	Щ	щ	Shch	shch
К	к	K	k	Ъ	ъ		
Л	л	L	l	Ы	ы	Y	y
М	м	M	m	Ь	ь		
Н	н	N	n	Э	э	E	e
О	о	O	o	Ю	ю	Yu	yu
				Я	я	Ya	ya

Ъ (the hard sign) and Ь (the soft sign) are not transliterated in *Classic Europa*. Some translation schemes do transliterate Ъ as “ and Ь as ’, but others do not. These signs are not letters but instead are symbols indicating how adjacent letters are pronounced. “Nationality” is *национальность* in Russian, which transliterates as *natsionalnost* without the soft signs and as *natsional’nost’* (note the two apostrophes) with the soft signs transliterated. I feel that, unless you speak Russian, including the transliterated signs hinders rather than helps understanding, so *национальность* becomes *natsionalnost* in *Classic Europa*.

Four letters were dropped from the alphabet in a 1918 reform. These letters show up in place names in documents dating before the reform (especially I, i), so they are listed in the following table.

<i>Russian Cyrillic</i>		<i>English</i>	
<i>Upper</i>	<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>	<i>Lower</i>
И	и	I	i
Ѣ	ѣ	E or Ě	e or ě
Ѧ	ѧ	F	f
Ѫ	ѫ	I or Í	I or í

Other letters were dropped from the alphabet in earlier centuries. These are not listed here.

Notes

In researching matters dealing with the USSR, you often end up dealing with sources written in the Russian language. Russian uses a different alphabet in a different script than English, so one major factor is transliterating from the Russian alphabet of the Cyrillic script⁵³ to the English alphabet of the Latin script⁵⁴. There are multiple ways to transliterate Russian Cyrillic into English. You can see this, for example, in some transliterated word endings. For example, *-нныу*, *-нныи*, and *-нны* all are different ways to transliterate the Russian word ending *-нныи* (the last letter becomes “y”, “i”, or is just dropped because of the preceding “y”, based on the transliteration system).

Classic Europa attempts to transliterate Cyrillic in a WW2-era style of transliteration, for historical flavor. I researched transliteration in the 1980s during design work for *Fire in the East* and *Scorched Earth*, looking at then-current systems and WW2-era examples. As I recall, one major influence was how the National Geographic Society transliterated the names of Soviet geographical features (cities, rivers, and so on) on the maps they published during the war. I have used this system with one modification (covered below) ever since. Some modern transliteration systems yield different results. For example, *Classic Europa* transliterates *Артем* as “Artyom” while some modern systems would give “Artem”.

53 The Cyrillic script is used for a number of languages, most of which have their own slightly-differing alphabets, such as Belarusian, Bulgarian, Kyrgyz, Russian, Serbian, Tajik, Ukrainian, and so on. For example, the Russian and Ukrainian alphabets mostly use the same letters, although each has four letters the other doesn't.

54 The Latin script is often also called the Roman script. Like with the Cyrillic script, languages using the Latin script have slightly differing letters. For example, the English alphabet has 26 letters and normally does not use diacritical marks except sometimes in loan words and other special cases, while the Polish alphabet had 32 letters and also uses several diacritical marks like ś, ź, ę, and ł.

up in English in mathematical and scientific works. Once I learned the Russian alphabet well enough, I came to appreciate some features of it: “ч” for “ch” and “ш” for “sh” are single letters what are single sounds. The English alphabet could something like use this (although the Cyrillic letters themselves are too similar the English letters “y” and “w” to be used).

One Final Note: Converting Russian to English involved more than translation and transliteration! One things that crops up frequently is how to handle capitalization. Russian capitalizes words much less than does American or British English: the first letter of each word in a proper name, and the first letter of the first word in a sentence or in the title of a work. For titles of works, I convert this Russian scheme to American English capitalization, in which all significant words are capitalized. For example, N.E. Kakurin’s work on the Russian Civil War is *Стратегический очерк гражданской войны*. Translated, it is *Strategic Outline of the Civil War* (not *Strategic outline of the civil war*); transliterated it is *Strategicheskiy Ocherk Grazhdanskoy Voyny* (not *Strategicheskiy ocherk grazhdanskoy voyny*). Many scholarly works follow Russian capitalization rules when transliterating, but I find this to be more confusing than useful in general works like these guidebooks. I follow the Russian capitalization only when using the actual Cyrillic.

2.C A Note on Sources

I've been making lists of Soviet place names related to World War II since the 1970s, and some of this information originally came from encyclopedias available at Illinois State University at that time, including as I recall *Encyclopedia America* and *Collier's Encyclopedia*. (As I recall, I avoided the *Encyclopædia Britannica* due to its use of British spelling⁵⁶. If you think this shouldn't matter, note for example British English often used to use "Sebastopol" for "Sevastopol".) Other information from that time came from sources I no longer specifically remember, including maps in Russian-language books on the war in the libraries of Illinois State University and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. In all cases, I have rechecked recent sources to ensure dates and other details are correct.

The versions of Wikipedia in various languages had been used as references, cross-checked when details seem mistaken or uncertain, using the pages' sources and related Internet searches. I've extensively used Russian Wikipedia, for what I hope are obvious reasons, as well as the Wikipedias in some of the other Soviet languages (Belarusian, Estonian, Finnish, Georgian, German, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian, Tajik, Ukrainian). I've also used English Wikipedia as a starting point, as it often provides a good summary, although it usually (not always!) is not as detailed as the Wikipedia in the language of the place being researched.

Overall, Russian Wikipedia is usually the most detailed on a Soviet-era place name. Sometimes, when an entry for a place is insufficient, looking up the history (in Russian) of a significant factory or religious institution that was located at the place provides additional details.

German Wikipedia has some information about place names in ethnic German regions of the USSR (like the Volga German area). It also has some information about place names during the German occupation of the western USSR during World War II. The Germans renamed a number of these places to get rid of Communist-related names. However, German Wikipedia is rather hit-or-miss in this area and often just uses the Soviet name rather than the German version.

All versions of Wikipedia are written for modern audiences and sometimes don't included all the historical name changes. Also, as always, Wikipedia sometimes states as fact details that are not established as certain and sometimes is outright incorrect.

⁵⁶ Yes, *Britannica* was bought by an American publisher in 1901, but it still mostly used British spelling thereafter.

That said, these pages are good starting points:

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_renamed_cities_in_Armenia
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cities_renamed_by_Azerbaijan
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_renamed_cities_in_Belarus
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_renamed_cities_in_Estonia
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_renamed_cities_in_Georgia
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_renamed_cities_in_Kazakhstan
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_renamed_cities_in_Kyrgyzstan
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_renamed_cities_in_Latvia
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_renamed_cities_in_Lithuania
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_renamed_populated_places_in_Moldova
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_renamed_cities_and_towns_in_Russia
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_renamed_cities_in_Tajikistan
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_renamed_cities_in_Turkmenistan
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_renamed_cities_in_Ukraine
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_renamed_cities_in_Uzbekistan

One very useful source is G. R. F. Bursa; “Political Changes of Names of Soviet Towns”; *The Slavonic and East European Review*; Vol. 63, No. 2; 1985;

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4209080>. Bursa is used extensively in this guidebook.

However, Bursa’s work is not without errors. For example, Bursa claims the town of Kozlov became Michurin, but modern sources claim it became Michurinsk. (I did check to ensure that it did not first become Michurin and later changed to Michurinsk.) On the other hand, Bursa is correct in some things that many modern sources don’t cover. For example, most of these sources claim Perovsk became Kzyl-Orda in 1925, while Bursa claims it became Ak-Mechet in 1922 and then Kzyl-Orda in 1925. I thought Bursa was in error until I found a modern Kazakh source confirming it. Overall, Bursa is quite accurate, both the main text and the final eight-page “Index of Town Names”.

If you research this topic yourself, one thing to look out for is that the USSR was a huge place with many repeated place names. There were at least four places called “Dzerzhinsk” in the 1930s. The Soviet apparently never tired of reusing the same name throughout their existence, as for example in 1955–1961 they renamed two different places “Donetsk”. They were only about 160 km (100 miles) apart. Multiple names continue to vex me at times. Recently, when reading about the German 1942 summer offensive that drove on Soviet oilfields in the North Caucasus and Transcaucasus, one account mentioned that German troops had captured Kizlyar. I thought this had to be the Kizlyar on the new-built Kizlyar-Astrakhan rail line than ran up the western coast

of the Caspian Sea, and that the “capture” must have been a brief raid, since I knew the Germans had failed to block this rail line. Instead, a correspondent pointed out that it had to be another Kizlyar, one I had not known about: the one in the Caucasus Mountains near Mozdok!



2.D Image Credits

Most pictures and photographs used in this guidebook have footnotes indicating their sources. A few lack footnotes, due to a bug I found in my word processing software late in the creation process. Their sources are:

- Table 3, 1944, Krasnogvardeysk/Gatchina entry: The image of G.S. Sergeev's 1798 *Gatchina*, painting is from https://www.rbth.com/arts/history/2016/07/23/gatchina-palace-catherine-the-greats-lover-her-son-and-other-stories_614273
- Table 3, 1944, Ordzhonikidze/Vladikavkaz entry: The map is adapted from a map at http://armchairgeneral.com/rkkaww2/maps/1942S/Caucasus/Gizel_42.JPG
- Table 1, 1939, Kirovo/Kirovograd entry: The map is adapted from a map at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Liberation_of_Ukraine.jpg

All maps without source attributions are my own work.