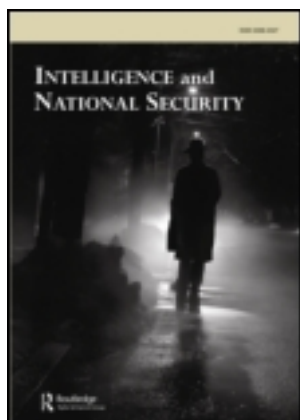


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# Unknown Agabekov

BORIS VOLODARSKY\*

**ABSTRACT** The decision to declassify selected historical documents from the archives of the Security Service in 1997 has been a boon to academic historians of intelligence. The declassified files reveal the successes and failures of the Security Service in fulfilling its statutory function of defending the realm. Yet the activity of Soviet spies continues to be one of the most challenging topics in intelligence history. The role of Soviet defectors in transforming the Security Service's understanding of the nature and extent of Soviet intelligence operations, meanwhile, remains largely understudied. In the case of Agabekov, for example, the reaction of SIS or MI5 to his 'disappearance' in the spring of 1938 has long been neglected. It is possible that there was no reaction at all, because both services had long-since written off Agabekov as a source. This helps explain why Agabekov's case has been ignored in the relevant literature in both Russia and the West.

On 2 July 1930, eight years before the first government visitors appeared at Bletchley Park, the Secret Intelligence Service intercepted a telegram sent from the Moscow OGPU (predecessor of the KGB) headquarters to their station at the Soviet Embassy in Berlin. It was marked for a 'Comrade Veresayev' (the OGPU head of station Nikolai G. Samsonov, codenamed GOLST) and informed him that agents' networks were now in danger as a result of the defection of a high-ranking OGPU official named Grigory Sergeyevich Arutyunov, a.k.a. Georges Agabekov. The telegram read: 'An especially dangerous situation has arisen [as a result of Agabekov's treason] for those comrades who were in touch with our organization in Constantinople up to the 24/6/30 [the date when Agabekov defected]'. A list of ten agents followed and it was said that they were to return to Moscow at once. Three others were ordered to 'change their places of residence forthwith and temporarily cease activity'.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the OGPU had all reasons to worry that this defection could seriously damage Soviet interests.

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon Brook-Shepherd, *The Storm Petrels: The First Soviet Defectors, 1928–1938* (London: Collins 1977) p.129.

Who was Agabekov? Why was he so dangerous to the OGPU? Grigory Sergeyevich Arutyunov, alias 'Georges Agabekov' alias 'Nerses Ovsepyan',<sup>2</sup> (as Arutyunov has become better known under his alias 'Agabekov', he shall be called Agabekov hereafter), an OGPU official in charge of its Eastern Section, was one of the first Soviet defectors and the author of two volumes of memoirs published in the West as one small book *OGPU: The Russian Secret Terror*.<sup>3</sup> In a rare act of literary and historical barbarism, the publisher and especially the translator, Henry W. Bunn, concocted their version not from the Russian text but from its French translation omitting whole chapters and totally restructuring the original work. As a result, academic historians and scholars as well as Western intelligence professionals have been deprived of much of Agabekov's excellent material for all these years.

Agabekov was the very first Soviet defector to come from the top ranks of the Soviet secret police. Those who defected before him – Boris Bazhanov, Stalin's former secretary, and Grigory Besedovsky, former Soviet chargé d'affaires in France – could reveal very little about the work of secret Soviet agents outside Russia. During his debriefing Bazhanov mentioned only one or two persons, among them the Persian Minister of Court Abdolhossein Teymourtash, who were of any interest to Western intelligence services.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup>There is a certain confusion in the Security Service files regarding Agabekov. Even his recently declassified personal file TNA: KV 2/2398, which in fact is a part of his MI5 Personal File 4096 V. 1, is entitled 'Nerses OVSEPIAN, aliases George AGABEKOV, George ARUTIUNOV', which is wrong. His real name, as stated, was Georgy Sergeyevich Arutyunov, born on 15 January 1895 in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, and he used the aliases 'Azadov' in Bokhara (Bukhara), 'Georges Agabekov' when he worked in Afghan and Persia, and 'Nerses Ovsepyan' when he operated as an illegal resident in Istanbul. One of the reports about Agabekov's career claims in one and the same document: '(8) In 1927 Agabekov was posted to the Soviet legation in Tehran, where he took over the duties of OGPU representative from one Kazas', and a little further on: '(10) In 1926 he became Resident of the OGPU in Tehran, with the official title of Attaché to the Embassy, where he remained until May 1928'. See TNA: KV 2/2398 Serial 15a (20a) Enclosure B.

<sup>3</sup>Georges Agabekov, *OGPU: The Russian Secret Terror* (New York: Brentano's 1931). There were some reprints of the first English edition, namely *OGPU: The Russian Secret Terror* (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press 1975), and after the collapse of the Soviet Union one of Agabekov's books was finally published in Russia under the title *Sekretnyi terror: zapiski razvedchika* (Moscow: Sovremennik 1996), and two years later as *Sekretnyi terror* (Moscow: Terra-knizhnyi klub 1998), which is a slightly edited version of his *GPU: zapiski chekista* (Berlin: Strela 1930) but this is practically all. Agabekov's second book, *Cheka za rabotoi* (Berlin: Strela 1931), is a rarity even in the best European libraries, though its modern reprint (Berlin: Energiadruck 1983) and an old German translation (Grigori Agabekov, *Die Tscheka bei der Arbeit* (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche-Verlagsgesellschaft 1932)) are available at least in London.

<sup>4</sup>The Reza Shah's Court Minister, Teymourtash, was thought to have been implicated in some Soviet espionage activities because Soviet intelligence, at least before 1930, had maintained several agents in Iran, some of whom had been directly recruited from Teymourtash's own relations. The reason for suspicions regarding the minister's role has become clear only five decades later. Actually what had first appeared and caused so much speculation was a series of articles published in the Paris newspaper *Le Matin* between 26 and 30 October 1930

Besedovsky could only reveal, with any certainty, selected Soviet espionage operations based on his personal experiences in Vienna, Paris and Tokyo, where he served as a diplomat. But Agabekov joined the Cheka in 1920 and by the time of his defection had grown up to head its Eastern Section. He was sent as the illegal resident<sup>5</sup> to Turkey, also responsible for operations in the Middle East, and was able to blow entire networks controlled by legal and illegal Soviet intelligence officers and agents in many parts of the world.

From the only existing account published by Gordon Brook-Shepherd more than 36 years ago and covering only a few episodes of his life, it is generally known that Agabekov had fallen in love with the youngest daughter of an Englishman 'who worked in the Constantinople offices of the Blair and Campbell Shipping Company',<sup>6</sup> named Isabel Streeter. That in January 1930 he tried in vain to defect to the British in Turkey, then arrived in Paris in June, and that in or about March 1938 he was assassinated by the NKVD (successor of the OGPU and predecessor of the KGB). Almost nothing has been known so far about his life during those seven years or about his Austrian and Belgian adventures, not to mention his mysterious death.

On 21 July 1930 Oswald A. 'Jasper' Harker of MI5 sent a dispatch to Captain Hue M. Miller in Scotland House. 'In confirmation of Miss Sissmore's telephone conversation with Liddell this morning', Harker wrote, 'I entirely concur with your view that a H.O.W. [Home Office Warrant] on the Hotel d'Angleterre, Room 19, Rue de la Boetie, Paris, might be of considerable value, as also some observation on OVSEPIAN [Agabekov] in Paris if this could be arranged. I should be very grateful if you would let me see copies of any results of interest you may obtain from this check'.<sup>7</sup> 'Miss

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(quite possibly based on some of Agabekov's revelations). 'It is these accounts of Soviet subversion', as one researcher notes, 'that pointed an accusing finger at the Court Minister by implying that he had been working closely with Loganovsky, charge d'affaires at the Soviet embassy in Teheran. Not a word was said about the important discrepancies between these articles and the memoirs published later by either British officials or Iranians in responsible positions. Only Charles Hart commented in his report to the US Department of State, "I have no way of ascertaining in which papers these articles appeared, but I understand they are not included in the Agabekov book". Indeed, on close examination of the Russian version of Agabekov's memoirs – and he did originally write these in Russian – it transpires that Teymourash does not himself figure in these descriptions as an agent of the Soviet Union. In the French and English editions of Agabekov's account, there is a serious anomaly in that the name of the Court Minister sending instructions to his representative in Moscow is not even given; its omission at the time, however, appeared to be more a case of faulty translation from the original than an effort to conceal the Court Minister's identity'. See Miron Rezun, 'Reza Shah's Court Minister: Teymourash', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12/2 (1980) p.126.

<sup>5</sup>Usually an officer or civil employee operating 'in the dark', i.e. without diplomatic cover and running a group of agents. The illegal resident can operate either under his real or a bogus identity.

<sup>6</sup>Brook-Shepherd, *The Storm Petrels*, p.111.

<sup>7</sup>TNA: KV 2/2398 OVSEPIAN (Agabekov), Serial 9a.

Sissmore' was, of course, Jane Sissmore, MIS's first female officer, and 'Liddell' was their leading expert on Soviet subversive activities, Guy Liddell.

The required warrant duly followed six days later. The reason was formulated as: 'The individual named, who states himself to have been a member of the Russian OGPU, has made a rather theatrical "escape" from Constantinople [*sic*, Istanbul] to Paris. He has given a lurid account of orders from his former chiefs including the liquidation of recalcitrant Soviet employees. It is strongly suspected both by the War Office department concerned [M.I.1.c. that is, SIS] and ourselves that he may be acting as agent provocateur'.<sup>8</sup> For some reasons, Agabekov was not trusted from the very beginning, which is easy to understand. But noticeably, in spite of all his efforts, it seems both services never had any confidence in him.

While the police authorities did their job, already on 30 July both the Secret Intelligence Service (Valentin Vivian) and the Security Service (Oswald Harker) were studying Agabekov's statements made by him in the Paris Préfecture de Police and received from France in the form of a top-secret report,<sup>9</sup> at the same time continuing to test his reliability.<sup>10</sup>

Ironically, in spite of Agabekov's earlier attempts to establish contacts with the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), his eagerness to provide information and his love affair with a young English lady, he was expelled from France in August 1930 and forced to take up residence in Brussels. The French gave several explanations for such a move. Whatever their arguments were, Moscow was quite happy.

In Brussels, Agabekov and his fiancée took rooms at 87 Rue Potagères and he started to campaign for himself. Brook-Shepherd wrote:

On August 26, in an interview with the Paris edition of the *Chicago Tribune*, he revealed his identity and his plight as a 'homeless' refugee from Bolshevism – denied entry to Britain, expelled from France and accorded only a three months visa in Belgium. This 'unkind treatment', the interview continued, was only dissuading other important OGPU

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., Serial 12a.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., Serial 14a, CX/12650/2205.

<sup>10</sup>The SIS representative in Paris was sent ten photographs of suspected OGPU agents in Europe allegedly acting against the British interest for Agabekov's identification, followed on 30 July 1930 by another two. Agabekov recognized a person on photo no. 3 as an OGPU agent whom he knew and who, according to Agabekov, was of some importance, though he gave an incorrect name. According to the security service files, on the photo was 'Lev Gillairovich ELLERT', a suspected OGPU agent who operated in Europe in the 1930s (see TNA: KV 2/2398 and ELLERT's file KV 6/59). In reality, it was Lev Gilyarovich ELBERT, a prominent Chekist and a member of the GPU from December 1923. From January until May 1926 ELBERT worked in Greece under the cover of the attaché of the Soviet Embassy in Athens. In 1929 he was a member of the Soviet Embassy in Paris and, according to some sources, took part in the abduction of General Kutepov in January 1930. In November 1945 ELBERT was in Berlin, where he died the next year from a heart problem. It is on the record that when in Moscow ELBERT used different aliases – the poet Mayakovsky, with whom Elbert was friendly, also knew him as Heifetz.

men from following his example and deserting with their secrets. He claimed to know at least three such former colleagues who were itching to do so, provided they were given some indirect encouragement. Agabekov's lament was picked up the next day by British press and echoed around Whitehall. It seems to have done the trick, for only twenty-four hours later the first preparatory moves were made in London to arrange for a direct contact with the defector. On 17 September 1930 in an office of the Belgian *Sûreté Publique* in Brussels this confrontation at long last took place.<sup>11</sup>

In reality, at the end of August Captain Miller, then still an officer of Basil Thomson's Directorate of Intelligence (he would return to MI5, where he served during World War I) informed the interested parties (SIS and MI5): 'As regards developments subsequent to Agabekov's expulsion from France, our representative in Belgium reports that Agabekov was arrested in Liège on 14 August. He was shortly released but the watch has been kept on him by the Belgian authorities ... His further movements will be reported, and the question of establishing contact with him again is being considered. Our representative reports that there is at present no idea of expelling him from Belgium'.<sup>12</sup> Not yet.

Agabekov met SIS representatives on both 17 and 18 September. HM Government was particularly interested in identifying a Soviet agent known only as D/3, who was gathering intelligence from inside the Foreign Office.<sup>13</sup> As it turned out later, this agent was Francesco Constantini (codenamed DUNCAN) who was recruited in 1924 with the help of an Italian communist.

By the time of his rendezvous with SIS officers in Brussels, Agabekov had finished working on his first important book, *GPU: Memoirs of a Chekist*, extracts of which were first published by the émigré Russian newspaper

<sup>11</sup> Brook-Shepherd, *The Storm Petrels*, p.118.

<sup>12</sup> TNA: KV 2/2398 OVSEPIAN (Agabekov), CX/12650/2205, dated 20 August 1930.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Serial 20a. The Security Service was quite well informed about the activities of the Soviet agents in London and kept files and tracks on many of them. Thus, agent B-1 was known to have been William Norman Ewer (see TNA: Personal File EWER KV 2/1016-1017), foreign editor of the *Daily Herald*. Ewer (codenamed HERMAN) was receiving information that he then sent to the OGPU London station from his many sub-sources. Among those were GINHOVERN, JANE and DALE from the Special Branch of Metropolitan Police, as well as the journalists George Edward Slocombe (alias Nathan Grünberg), a British national who was the Paris correspondent of the *Daily Herald*, and Frederick Robert Kuh, a Federated Press of America (FPA) representative in Berlin. If one is to believe West and Tsarev, the OGPU had at least two important sources in the Foreign Office. It is difficult to say whether Agabekov was able to provide leads on any of them. According to *The Crown Jewels*, two highly-placed old Etonians in the Foreign Office were Ewer's contacts: Sir Arthur Willert and John D. Gregory; Nigel West and Oleg Tsarev, *The Crown Jewels* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press 1998) pp.9–12. At that time Willert was, as Head of the News Department, press officer at the FO while Gregory, a former British chargé d'affaires in Bucharest, served as Assistant Secretary. For more details, see Personal File SCOLOMBE, KV 2/485; Personal File KUH, KV 2/983-988; and Personal File FEDERATED PRESS OF AMERICA, KV 2/1099-1101.



*Poslednie Novosti* ('The Latest News') in Paris in September 1930 and soon the whole book was released by the publishing house Strela ('Arrow') in Berlin.

According to the KGB Press Bureau-related sources, the decision to assassinate Agabekov was taken already in July 1930 and immediately a Special Tasks group in Paris headed by Yakov Serebryansky received an appropriate order from Moscow.<sup>14</sup> But when Agabekov settled in Belgium, he was under police protection. The OGPU defector established especially good personal relations with Baron M. Verhulst, director of the Belgian Sûreté.<sup>15</sup> In Belgium, as in several other countries of Europe, a number of different police departments were involved in political issues. Thus, the Sûreté de l'Etat had originally been responsible for the surveillance of foreigners. The Sûreté Publique was subdivided into the Police des Etrangers, the Commissariat Général aux Délégations Judiciaires and the Sûreté de l'Etat itself, and was responsible to the Minister for Justice. Officially, the Sûreté had no intelligence functions.<sup>16</sup> It may be added that the Russian diaspora in Belgium numbered between 3823 (1922) and about 8000 people (1937) and was largely concentrated in Brussels,<sup>17</sup> which by 1937 had become the capital of the Russian anti-communist activities.

On 13 October 1930, *Novoe Russkoe Slovo* ('The New Russian Word'), a Russian-language newspaper published in New York City until this day, ran a long article, 'O.G.P.U. – Reminiscences of the Chekist, G. Agabekov'. It was deemed so important that its full text in English translation was included in the *Hearings Before the US House of Representatives Investigating the Communist Activities in the United States*.<sup>18</sup>

During his collaboration with the British authorities, Agabekov provided high-grade intelligence giving the first ever top-level account of the work of the OGPU, its methods, structure and personnel. Among other things, he disclosed that from 1926 onwards the OGPU had been reading British diplomatic correspondence in Persia and other countries. In Tehran, a military tribunal accused 32 Iranians of spying for a foreign power on the evidence of the Agabekov disclosures. Twenty-seven of them were finally convicted and among those sentenced to death was a cipher expert from the Council of Ministers.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, in May 1931 the OGPU launched an

<sup>14</sup>A. Kolpakidi and D. Prokhorov, *KGB prikazano likvidirovat: spetsoperatsii sovetskikh spetssluzhbb* (Moscow: Yauza-Eksmo 2004) p.244.

<sup>15</sup>See Brook-Shepherd, *The Storm Petrels*, p.120. The author never specified which particular Sûreté he meant. As he himself admitted, Brook-Shepherd's sources were summaries based on appropriate SIS files.

<sup>16</sup>See Rudi Van Doorslaer, 'Anti-Communist Activism in Belgium 1930–1944', *The Social Register*, 1984, p.116.

<sup>17</sup>See Wim Coudenys, 'Russian Collaboration in Belgium during World War II', *Cahiers du Monde russe* 43/2–3 (2002) p.479.

<sup>18</sup>*Hearings Before a Special Committee to Investigate Communist Activities in the United States of the House of Representatives*, Seventy-First Congress, Third Session pursuant to H. Res. 220 providing for an investigation of Communist propaganda in the United States. Part I–Volume No. 5, December 1930 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1931).

<sup>19</sup>Rezun, 'Teymourash', p.127.

operation that became known as the 'Philomena Affair' in order to lure Agabekov to Bulgaria, abduct him there and bring him to the Soviet Union.<sup>20</sup> Alternatively, the aim was to kill him on the spot.

In October 1931, an SIS report from Germany informed the Broadway office that the OGPU resident Samsonov was being recalled to Moscow<sup>21</sup> because the head office thought he had been compromised. In March 1932, the SIS representative in Bucharest Major Montague 'Monty' Chidson, who a year before succeeded Harold Wilson,<sup>22</sup> reported that 'in the minds of the Romanian police there is absolutely no doubt that a very genuine attempt was planned upon the life of Agabekov. For this reason they regard it as inconceivable that he should still be in Soviet pay. Moreover, they have ample confirmation of their contention in this respect as they have recently intercepted a number of letters from Kaminsky, the OGPU Representative in Constantinople, addressed to the OGPU resident agent in Bucharest ... The letters completely confirm the Soviet intention to assassinate Agabekov'.<sup>23</sup>

In the summer of 1931 Austria and the whole of Europe were shaken by a daring assassination in Vienna of the former OGPU agent Georg Semmelmann, carried out by another OGPU agent, Andreas Piklovič. Early in the morning of 25 July 1931, Piklovič murdered Semmelmann by shooting him twice in the head and was caught red-handed. The killer, presumed to be a member of the Hamburg OGPU station (personal number INO-VIII-9), after almost a year of the pre-trial investigation and imprisonment, appeared before Vienna Criminal Court on 2 March 1932 only to be acquitted and released from custody. Despite the fact that Agabekov recognized Piklovič from a photo shown to him in Brussels, after which the defector immediately rushed to Vienna to testify, he failed to appear as a witness because the Austrian judge ruled against it.

Having correctly assumed that Agabekov's ten-day stay in Vienna was directly linked with the Piklovič/Semmelmann case (the author of the only published account of Agabekov's life called the OGPU assassin 'Pirkovich'), Brook-Shepherd speculated that Agabekov was detained by the Austrian police to be 'pumped for some information',<sup>24</sup> which cannot be confirmed by any documents while various police reports in the Austrian archives clearly reveal Agabekov's role in this case.

On 13 November 1931, Agabekov left his room in the Hotel Fürstenhof at No. 4 Neubaugürtel in the VII 'shopping' district of Vienna. Without delay he went to the Federal police headquarters to announce that he would like to speak to Andreas Piklovič, who had been detained and was locked in a cell

<sup>20</sup>The first account of the 'Philomena Affair' is in Brook-Shepherd, *The Storm Petrels*, pp. 130–46, understandably without any reference to any source or archive.

<sup>21</sup>TNA: M.I.1.c. 20.10.31, 450/Germany 30a, in KV 2/2398 OVSEPIAN (Agabekov), Serial 65a.

<sup>22</sup>Wilson was transferred to Riga, Latvia, to take over SIS anti-Soviet networks operating from this Baltic state.

<sup>23</sup>TNA: CX/12650/2205, dated 15.3.32, in KV 2/2398 OVSEPIAN (Agabekov), Serial 86a.

<sup>24</sup>Brook-Shepherd, *The Storm Petrels*, p.135.



there. When asked, Agabekov repeated his testimony previously given to the Belgian Sûreté Publique in Brussels. Agabekov insisted that as soon as he was shown a copy of the forged Swiss passport of 'Egon Spielmann', used by Piklovič for the Vienna operation, he immediately recognized his good friend and an OGPU colleague by the name of ... Schulman.

Agabekov stated that he had known Schulman for about ten years. However, his sensational revelations were not accepted by the Austrian police because 'Spielmann' had already been identified by the German, Yugoslav and Austrian security services as Piklovič who was expelled from Austria five years ago for the communist propaganda activities.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, when informed, the investigating judge at the II Vienna District Court for Criminal Cases ruled against any form of confrontation between the suspect and Agabekov because, according to the judge, it might violate the Austrian code of criminal procedures and hinder proper identification. Agabekov was duly informed about the decision of the judge. At least, his testimony was written down and filed.<sup>26</sup> He returned to Brussels and at the end of the month left for Sofia.

For about a year, since he defected and published his first book, the Administration for Special Tasks otherwise known as the Serebryansky Service, commanded by an experienced OGPU illegal Yakov ('Yasha') Isaakovich Serebryansky, had been setting up a trap in Varna, Bulgaria, to lure Agabekov on board one of the Soviet ships. The service, also known among the OGPU leadership as Yasha's Group, was a special operations unit based in Paris operating under direct orders of the OGPU chairman. In 1931, at considerable risk to his life, Agabekov managed to publish his second book of sensational revelations, *Cheka za rabotoi*,<sup>27</sup> that remained largely unnoticed in the West but was immediately dispatched to Moscow and studied at the OGPU Lubyanka headquarters.<sup>28</sup> As a result, it was decided to speed up the operation against the whistleblower.

<sup>25</sup>It was stated that Piklovič worked in Moscow at the OGPU KRO's 4th section (counterintelligence, Eastern Europe), and that he was known under this name as a student in Vienna in 1922. Those familiar with the OGPU practices of the time will agree that there is nothing strange or unusual in a secret service operative using different names when travelling or living abroad, so Agabekov could have indeed known him in Russia as Schulman.

<sup>26</sup>ÖStA/NPA: Box 671, Case Pr. Zl IV-5338/31, Report of 24 November 1931.

<sup>27</sup>Agabekov, *Cheka za rabotoi*.

<sup>28</sup>This writer is reminded of 'how common it was for defectors to exaggerate the importance of their roles and contacts within the Soviet system and sell books to a popular market that were full of fiction'. Indeed, among Brook-Shepherd's 'storm petrels' or, in the words of Vladislav Krasnov, author of *Soviet Defectors: The KGB Wanted List* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press 1986), 'five select trailblazers of that long line of Communists who chose freedom', two – Walter Krivitsky and Alexander Orlov – published books and articles that hugely exaggerated their role and for years duped not only the 'popular market' but also respected historians and intelligence experts. The same may be said about the book by Nikolai Khokhlov, a postwar defector. This writer deals with these phenomena at great length in his works. But these are exceptions rather than the rule, and Agabekov's two books can perhaps accurately be described as a 'story of lost opportunity'. But in his case, it was a lost opportunity

Several months before Agabekov arrived in Vienna, a French engineer, Alexandre August Lecoq, 'domiciled at the Hotel de Bretagne on the Rue de Richelieu in Paris, the property of his mother-in-law', as a police protocol stated later, learned from a Russian refugee, one Nestor Filia, that Filia's wife Evdokia and daughter Anna possessed a fortune of 100 million Swiss francs deposited in a Geneva bank.<sup>29</sup> The problem was, according to Filia, that both women were in Russia and therefore, to make them and everybody around rich and happy, they were to be smuggled out of the country. Lecoq volunteered to bring Evdokia and Anna from Nikolaev, a city in southern Ukraine, to Paris for an agreed commission.

In May 1931 Lecoq asked his friend, a Soviet agent with a Greek passport in the name of Jean Panayotis, who lived in France, and his secretary Sergey Mintz (also a Soviet agent) to help him get both women to Paris.<sup>30</sup> To verify whether the bank really existed and the deposit was indeed there, Panayotis wrote to the Swiss banker Otto Jaeger in Winterthur. He received no answer but still went ahead.

On 25 July Panayotis went to Moscow where he spent considerable time, also visiting the southern towns of Nikolaev and Odessa. While he was away, Mintz informed Lecoq that Panayotis was a Soviet agent and that his trip to the Soviet Union had only one aim – to work out a plan of getting Agabekov back to Russia. Lecoq was told that it must be arranged for Agabekov to go to Varna where he would be taken on board a Soviet vessel, which should transport him to Odessa and from there to Moscow. Then the Soviet authorities, as part of an exchange scheme, would let the family Filia reunite in the West. Lecoq agreed to cooperate, and after some time Panayotis came back from Russia armed with the plan.

Whether he realized it or not, by giving his agreement Lecoq was becoming an accomplice in the OGPU assassination plot. After his return from Moscow, Panayotis visited Jaeger, the Swiss banker, who allegedly confirmed that the deposit was in place. This Jaeger would later finance the whole operation. Soon Nikolai Grigoryevich Samsonov, the OGPU head of station in Berlin, advised Panayotis to get in touch with one Stopford, an Englishman living in Paris who had wide social contacts (and with whom, according to a police report, Panayotis entered into homosexual relationship).

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for the services to learn how Soviet intelligence really worked. To a great degree, SIS and MI5 remained in the dark about Soviet operations in Britain and elsewhere until well into the 1950s, when Maclean and Burgess defected. For details, see Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London: Allen Lane 2009).

<sup>29</sup>TNA: KV 2/2398 OVSEPIAN (Agabekov), General Direction of Police, Corps of Detectives, Report dated 25 January 1932, Serial 80b. See also Brook-Shepherd, *The Storm Petrels*, p.131. The author names the bank as the Banque Fédérale in Geneva and refers to an unattributed version of the story in which the sum of 400 million Swiss francs is named.

<sup>30</sup>ÖStA/NBA: Box 671, Document *Die Affaire Arutiunov-Agabecov: Das Komplott von Constantia, 1931–1932*. Romanian police headquarters, Ministry of Interior, 1932. In the British document the name is given as PANAYOTTI, a Greek subject born in Odessa, Russia, and his supposed secretary is named SERGIUMINTZ (clearly an error, should be Sergey or Serge Mintz), both domiciled in Paris.

Although the Russian sources claim that Jaeger was also an OGPU agent,<sup>31</sup> it seems that he was simply duped. At one moment he was offered and signed a smart commission contract and was shown a letter of attorney issued by Evdokia Filia, in which she informed that she would cover the costs of any expenses in order to get out of Russia.<sup>32</sup> The letter, of course, was forged by the OGPU.

At the end of September 1931, Stopford came to Brussels and met with Agabekov in his house at 186 Rue au Bois to offer him the following. There was a rich lady with a daughter to be 'exfiltrated' from Russia. A ship would be rented in Varna through the services of a professional smuggler named Dimitrov. Agabekov with his experience in security matters would make sure that no Soviet agent was on board. Stopford promised to pay the defector 250 francs per day for the journey and £2000 in the event of the successful outcome of the operation.<sup>33</sup> Later Jaeger also visited Agabekov and confirmed their commitment. Panayotis accompanied the two on both visits but never showed himself to Agabekov. Before leaving, Agabekov received 10,000 francs from Stopford and departed for Vienna.

After he was not allowed to identify Piklovič/Schulman, Agabekov decided that in order to obtain some useful information he might try seeing his good acquaintance with whom he used to work in Tehran. Konstantin Konstantinovich Yurenev was now the Soviet Plenipotentiary to Austria and Agabekov hoped to bump into him while promenading along Reisnerstrasse in front of the Soviet embassy. Instead, he saw two other familiar faces. One was Mikhail Gorb, former head of the Central European Section of the OGPU and now the OGPU station chief (resident) in Vienna working under the cover of a press attaché. Another man Agabekov knew as Igor Lebedinsky, former personal secretary of the chief of the Foreign Section (INO). In Vienna Lebedinsky was Gorb's assistant posing as chief of the Consular section of the embassy under the alias of 'Vorobyov'.<sup>34</sup> Quite happy that his former colleagues had not noticed him but that he had noticed and

<sup>31</sup>Kolpakidi and Prokhorov, *KGB prikazano likvidirovat*, p.244.

<sup>32</sup>TNA: KV 2/2398 OVSEPIAN (Agabekov), General Direction of Police, Corps of Detectives, Report dated 25 January 1932, Serial 80b. See also ÖStA/NBA: Box 671, Document *Die Affaire Arutiunov-Agabekov: Das Komplott von Constantia*.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>TNA: KV 2/2398 OVSEPIAN (Agabekov), Serial 82a. At the time, MI5 and Scotland Yard were able to only partially confirm this information. They also shared it with their Austrian colleagues. Documents found by this writer in the Austrian and Soviet archives fully corroborate Agabekov's story. In 1930 Mikhail Gorb became deputy chief under Artur Artuzov, who had succeeded Meier (Mikhail) Trilisser as chief of the Foreign Section (INO) – a post Artuzov held in 1930–35 (OGPU administrative order No. 12, dated 12 January 1930 confirming the new staff of the INO – 94 officers – and setting up eight operational sections). When Agabekov saw him in Vienna, Gorb, the OGPU resident, was posing as Press Attaché with a diplomatic passport in the name of 'Konstantin Komarovsky'. Igor Lebedinsky, alias Vorobyov, was later the OGPU legal resident in Austria who handled both Dr Arnold Deutsch and Edith Sushitzky, the future recruiters of Kim Philby in London. See also ÖStA/NPA: Box 671, Bundespolizeiamt-Inneres, Case Pr. Zl. IV-3412/4/31.

recognized them instead, Agabekov decided to flee the place while there was still time.

He failed to obtain a Bulgarian visa and left using a complex roundabout trip via Czechoslovakia and Romania.<sup>35</sup> Finally, having managed to get a short-stay permission, Agabekov visited Sofia, but, according to his own words, was advised by the police agents to leave the country immediately and returned to Brussels.

Back in Belgium, Agabekov visited the Bulgarian Embassy again and officially applied for permission to travel to Sofia, explaining that he wished to disclose to the Bulgarian authorities some Bolshevik agents who, he said, he knew were operating in the country.<sup>36</sup> At that time Bulgaria did not have diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia; however, the visa was granted. In late November 1931, Agabekov was on his way to Bulgaria via Romania, where he was placed under close surveillance. The Romanian police later claimed that during his transit through the country Agabekov had multiple contacts with Russian refugees and British Embassy officials.<sup>37</sup> Upon arriving in Sofia, he went to the bank and collected another 10,000 French francs in cash. Then he visited the General Directorate of Bucharest police and introduced himself asking for personal protection. Agabekov explained that in Brussels he was instructed to visit one M. Dimitrov, allegedly a smuggler in Varna, who resided at 20 Ulitsa Nishka and who would help him with the vessel. The police chief confirmed that Dimitrov was really a smuggler, that the authorities knew about his contacts with the OGPU, and advised Agabekov not to go to Varna under any pretext but to return to Belgium immediately.<sup>38</sup> The defector became very worried.

It took Stopford and Lecoq some time to find an argument good enough to persuade Agabekov to make another trip, this time to Constanza in Romania. They agreed to meet in Bucharest during the Christmas holidays. Agabekov instinctively trusted the Frenchman, as every Russian in exile trusts a foreigner – a trait that has long been noticed and used by the KGB as well as its predecessors and successors. On the morning of 26 December Agabekov arrived in Bucharest and checked in at the Athénée Palace (now the Hilton), while Lecoq had arrived some time before and settled at the Grand Hotel. In spite of all efforts, Lecoq was unable to obtain Bulgarian visas for both of them and after an exchange of coded telegrams with Mintz and Stopford

<sup>35</sup>Agabekov's personal account of the events; see KV 2/2398 OVSEPIAN (Agabekov), Serial 82a.

<sup>36</sup>TNA: KV 2/2398 OVSEPIAN (Agabekov), General Direction of Police, Corps of Detectives, Report dated 25 January 1932, Serial 80b.

<sup>37</sup>It is possible that in Bucharest he was meeting Major Chidson and/or his assistant, Archie Gibson, who reported to the head office that the OGPU had penetrated the Romanian and SIS anti-Soviet networks; for details, see Keith Jeffery, *MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service 1909–1949* (London: Bloomsbury 2010). Therefore, SIS might have needed Agabekov to help uncover the 'moles'.

<sup>38</sup>TNA: KV 2/2398 OVSEPIAN (Agabekov), General Direction of Police, Corps of Detectives, Report dated 25 January 1932, Serial 80b.

asked Agabekov to go to Constanza, a busy Black Sea Romanian port with regular services to the Soviet Union and Turkey, and wait there until a ship arrived from Varna.<sup>39</sup>

During his two-week stay in Constanza, Agabekov was closely watched by both the OGPU agents and by the Romanian police detectives (possibly, on the request of the British) who were also assigned to take care of his security. It was later discovered that apart from the main group of the OGPU agents there were also two Soviet illegals probably sent to observe and report and, if necessary, act as a back-up team. One of them was using an Austrian passport in the name of 'Johann Kouril'. This genuine document was acquired from the real Johann Kouril by an Austrian Communist Party activist and likewise OGPU agent named Franz Wolf.<sup>40</sup> (In the course of several arrests and searches and during a police raid on the forgery workshop on Heiligenstädterstrasse in Vienna hundreds of forged passports and other papers were confiscated, but many, including this one, had been 'distributed' before the raid.) The second member of the back-up team also used an Austrian identity.

On 7 January 1932, Lecoq introduced Agabekov to a Bulgarian who said his name was Geno Tzonchev and explained that he had just arrived from Varna where one of his friends owned a ship and would be happy to do anything for money. However, Agabekov quickly found out that in reality the Bulgarian came from Istanbul, which became the operational base for the plot.

On the next day the false 'Kouril' received a telegram from Varna: 'The state company [OGPU] wants to close the deal immediately. I return home today. Bill'.<sup>41</sup> He understood the signal at once and immediately left Constanza for Vienna. Two days later an unidentified person called his hotel asking for 'Mr. Kouril'. Satisfied, the caller hung up.<sup>42</sup>

The telegram was sent by another illegal who was using a genuine Austrian passport in the name of 'Franz Zenner' during his visits to Romania and Bulgaria, though he introduced himself in Constanza as Wilhelm (Willi or Bill) Koss. Remarkably, although it was very quickly established that his

<sup>39</sup>Agabekov's personal account of the events, see KV 2/2398 OVSEPIAN (Agabekov), Serial 82a.

<sup>40</sup>ÖStA/NPA: Box 671, Case Pr. Zl. IV-743/32, Report of the Vienna Police Directorate to the Foreign Ministry of 8 March 1932. This episode was part of the large-scale document forgery operation conducted by the OGPU in Austria and Germany in the late 1920s to early 1930s. David Dallin describes the case in his book *Soviet Espionage* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press 1955) pp.92–103. It became known as the Klose Affair.

<sup>41</sup>'Kouril' and 'Zenner', Soviet illegals based in Vienna, made up a second team in the *Philamena* operation. They both escaped to Austria and have never been identified. See ÖStA/NBA: Box 671, Case Pr. Zl. IV-742/32, Report of the Vienna Police Directorate of 19 March 1932.

<sup>42</sup>According to a police record, this telephone call to the Grand Hotel in Constanza, where 'Kouril' stayed, was made from the Post Office (Telegraphenamt) on Laurenzberg in Vienna's I district, which is still there, on 10 January at 1.30 pm. See ÖStA/NPA: Box 671, Case Pr. Zl. IV-742/32, Report of the Vienna Police Directorate to the Foreign Ministry of 8 March 1932.



passport was in fact officially issued by the Austrian Embassy in Berlin, the Austrian authorities did not move to search for a possible Soviet mole or collaborator in their embassy.

In the meantime, the traffic of messages between the OGPU residencies in Berlin, Paris and Istanbul, and the Lubyanka headquarters in Moscow increased considerably.<sup>43</sup> In charge of the operation were Ivan Nikolaievich Kaminsky, codenamed MOND (whom Agabekov either by mistake or because he only knew his alias remembered as 'Nikolai Ivanovich Kremlevsky', the OGPU head of station in Istanbul), and one Nikolai Ivanovich Dneprov, officially one of the inspectors of the Soviet Trade Delegation in Ankara.

Grigory ('Grisha') Alekseyev, a deserter from the Tsarist army now employed by the Sovtorgflot (Soviet Merchant Marine) office in Istanbul, one of Kaminsky's agents, received instructions to go to Constanza on board the *SS Elena Philomena* and organize Agabekov's abduction and transportation to Odessa. Should there be a problem, Alekseyev was instructed to use chloroform. In the last resort, he was ordered to shoot the defector after receiving a signal from another accomplice, the Bulgarian agent Tzonchev, after which he was to hide at the ship.<sup>44</sup>

After Lecoq introduced Tzonchev to Agabekov, the trio started spending a lot of time together. Upon the arrival of the steamer, the Bulgarian was to supervise the abduction operation entrusted to Alekseyev. According to the plan another accomplice, Sava Nicolas Samuridis, a Greek businessman, was to act as interpreter between the captain of the *Philomena* and Grisha.

Spiru Katapodis, the captain of the *SS Philomena* sailing under the Greek flag, was awarded a contract by Sovtorgflot to perform freight services for a period of six months. Katapodis agreed because he hoped the contract would help him to get out of his financial problems. The deal was arranged by one Caligas, a co-owner of the forwarding company Galanis & Caligas in Istanbul. All participants were paid considerable amounts of cash and instructed by Kaminsky and Dneprov about what exactly each of them had to do.<sup>45</sup> Even then such operations were meticulously planned.

Six months after the assassination of Georg Semmelmann and less than three months before the trial of Piklovič in Vienna, the *Philomena* anchored in Constanza. Alekseyev stayed in his cabin on board while Samuridis and Katapodis checked in at the nearby Hotel Cherica. Samuridis informed Tzonchev that he had told Agabekov about the arrival of the ship and that Agabekov and Lecoq should get ready for a journey to Bulgaria. However, Agabekov refused to step on board and proposed that the ship should go directly to Odessa, to secure Mme Filia's escape to freedom and prosperity.

<sup>43</sup>ÖStA/NBA: Box 671, Document *Die Affaire Arutiunov-Agabecov: Das Komplott von Constantia*.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>ÖStA/NBA: Box 671, Case Pr. Zl. IV-742/6/32, Report of the Vienna Police Directorate dated 19 March 1932.



It was a totally unexpected move. Samuridis, Tzonchev and Katapodis tried to explain that they could not go to Odessa without first collecting cargo in Varna, after which Agabekov and Lecoq announced that they would leave Constanza at once. Lecoq, in the meantime, managed to telephone Mintz in Paris and as a result a telegram signed by Stopford was soon handed to Agabekov asking him to stay for another couple of days. He apparently agreed but Lecoq took the train and departed for Paris. As it was clear that Agabekov had no intention of getting on board, Alekseyev left the ship and started looking for him. Tzonchev and Samuridis joined in. They found Agabekov in a restaurant enjoying his dinner. All this frantic activity took place in Constanza in the evening of Monday 11 January, under the watchful eye of the Romanian police. Tzonchev then tried to board a steamer to Istanbul but was detained by police agents. Early next morning found Alekseyev, armed with a revolver, in the lobby of the hotel where Agabekov was staying. He was politely advised by the receptionist that the guest had left for Bucharest (this was part of a security arrangement). Somewhat disoriented, Alekseyev went looking for Samuridis to inform him that Agabekov had disappeared, only to find out that both Greeks were also absent. At that moment police decided it was time to act.<sup>46</sup> All the plotters were detained: Alexeyev in Constanza, Spiru Katapodis and Sava Samuridis in Bucharest, Lecoq on a train at a border crossing.<sup>47</sup> The operation was rolled up, many agents were compromised, and until the next opportunity Agabekov was left alone.

He safely returned to Belgium where another problem awaited him. The authorities told him that his activities during the 'Philomena Affair' were a violation of the conditions on which he had been granted temporary asylum. And although Baron Verhulst, chief of the Sûreté Publique in Brussels, was doing his best to prevent the temporary expulsion order, he was overridden by higher authority. Agabekov was therefore required to leave Belgium, though the ban was not permanent and his British wife, whom he married shortly before Christmas 1930, was permitted to stay. On the eve of Agabekov's departure a working agreement was improvised which turned him, in effect, into an *ad hoc* agent on the British payroll,<sup>48</sup> which may lead to a conclusion that he was forced to leave Belgium because SIS needed him in Germany. His new field of operation was Berlin, full of Soviet agents.

<sup>46</sup>Agabekov's own version differs in some details. According to him, Alekseyev tried to kill him on Monday 11 January, shortly after Tzonchev left him in a restaurant and while he was still finishing his dinner. Alekseyev was allegedly arrested by the Romanian police near the restaurant's window with a Mauser pistol in his hand. See TNA: KV 2/2398 OVSEPIAN (Agabekov), Serial 82a.

<sup>47</sup>ÖStA/NBA: Box 671, Case Pr. Zl. IV-742/6/32, Report of the Vienna Police Directorate dated 19 March 1932. Shortly after the operation collapsed, Jean Panayotis went to Vienna, where he stayed from 21 February to 2 March 1932 at the hotel Stadt Triest, and then left for Paris. See ÖStA/NPA: Box 671, Case Pr. Zl. IV-742/32, Report of 8 March 1932. Nothing more was heard of him.

<sup>48</sup>See Brook-Shepherd, *The Storm Petrels*, p.146.

It is unclear what exactly Agabekov did there, as only one small part of his MI5 personal file No. 4096 was released in 2006 and nothing at all from his SIS files. At the time, the British Passport Control Officer in Berlin (that is, the SIS man) was the experienced Captain Frank Foley, who by the time he returned to London when the war broke out had operated in the German capital for over ten years.<sup>49</sup> In what capacity Agabekov worked for him is not known, but there is little doubt that he was used as a penetration agent helping to uncover communist conspiracy for which Berlin was a centre and where the West European Bureau (WEB) of the Comintern was located. Berlin was also a first stopover for many Soviet agents on the way from Moscow to London and Agabekov could have been very useful in spotting them. That he was actively in touch may be confirmed by the fact that three years after his arrival in Berlin the Service continued to look for proof of his reliability. In spring 1933 a SIS source was asked to give his opinion about Agabekov's writings. In May this source reported that he had read one of Agabekov's books, and though not familiar with the territories described there thought that a lot of it was fiction. He added that he frequently heard from his OGPU friends that the book contained many inaccuracies.<sup>50</sup> In reality, the informant was, wittingly or unwittingly, disseminating the OGPU disinformation – it can now be confirmed without doubt that both Agabekov's books were a mother lode of important information in spite of a few minor errors. According to one of the reports from his declassified MI5 file,<sup>51</sup> in 1933 SIS stopped all contact with Agabekov. The reason was almost certainly the Nazi rise to power in Germany. By the summer of 1933 Adolf Hitler had effectively become the Führer of the Germans, and the interests of Admiral Hugh 'Quex' Sinclair, a long-time 'C' of the Secret Intelligence Service, turned from Stalin's agents to Hitler's brownshirts. By the time SIS broke off contact with Agabekov, Colonel Claude Dansey (later a DCSS) had already been setting up the undercover Z Organization (formally established in 1937) to carry out operations in Europe. In those days Russia was certainly not a priority for C's small staff at 54 Broadway, off Victoria Street.

By April 1936, Isobel Edith Streater, now Mme Arutyunova, separated from her husband without a formal divorce and returned to England where she enrolled on a secretarial course. She later worked as shorthand typist in the offices of A. Burner & Co. in London while her sister was employed by the Foreign Office. In August Monty Chidson left Bucharest and settled in The Hague using the Passport Control Office (PCO) as his cover. Like Henry Landau before him, Chidson thought his work there was quite boring. He did not know it, of course, but in the interwar period The Hague was the second

<sup>49</sup>For details about Foley's activities in Berlin, see Michael Smith, *Foley: The Spy who Saved 10,000 Jews* (London: Hodder 1999). See also Henry Landau, *All's Fair: The Story of British Secret Service Behind German Lines* (New York: Putnam 1934) and *Spreading the Spy Net: The Story of a British Spy Director* (London: Jarrods 1938). Captain Landau was Foley's predecessor in Berlin.

<sup>50</sup>TNA: KV 2/2398 OVSEPIAN (Agabekov), Cross-Reference, dated 29 May 1933, Serial 88b.

<sup>51</sup>See below.

most important operational base of Soviet intelligence in their work against Britain. Chidson's neighbour there was a quiet Dutch architect, painter and graphic artist named Henri Christiaan Pieck, whose main occupation, at the time when the new PCO took up his Dutch post, was to cultivate friendship with the British Foreign Office cipher clerks and run Captain John H. King, an important Soviet agent. The intelligent-looking Austrian antiquarian Dr Martin Lessner, whose little shop of treasures Chidson used to visit during his work in The Hague, also had a small side-job: he was in fact a so-called 'illegal resident', the OGPU station chief operating undercover. Several Soviet agents, and among others Brian Goold-Verschoye, travelled specially from London to The Hague to meet their OGPU (and later NKVD) handlers. As it turned out, for quite a few people life in this third largest city in the Netherlands was full of adventures, but at the time SIS knew nothing about all this. During the same year Agabekov was allowed to return to Brussels. It seems that in autumn 1936 he still tried to demonstrate his usefulness and that the Service was following his activities, restraining themselves from any personal contact because they were not quite satisfied with his 'product' and were not sure what to do with him.<sup>52</sup> Besides, in the 1930s neither SIS nor MI5 had enough experience in handling Soviet defectors. In fact, before the war they only had one. Johnny De Graaf of the Comintern's secret service OMS and the Razvedupr (Soviet military intelligence) had walked into Frank Foley's Berlin office, becoming an in-house success story.<sup>53</sup> It was a closely guarded secret for seven decades.

In 1937 the NKVD set up their second trap. Forty years later, from the SIS summaries (none of the records have been opened for researchers so far) Gordon Brook-Shepherd learned the following:

<sup>52</sup>KV 2/2398 OVSEPIAN (Agabekov), Cross-Reference dated 3 December 1936, Serial 96a: 'On 30.11.36 S.I.S. forwarded under CX/12650/2205/V a translation of a letter from Georgi Agabekov with regard to the GPU [*sic*, from 1934 it was NKVD] and the general situation in the USSR. Agabekov stated that, with the knowledge of the local Sûreté, he had been in contact for about three months with the representative of the Opposition group of the Bolsheviks-Zinoviev-ists, who held a responsible diplomatic post in the Soviet Embassy in Brussels. SIS reported that they had not been in contact with AGABEKOV since 1933, and were not altogether satisfied with the accuracy of the statements made in the above-mentioned letter. Taking full account of the possibilities of provocation, SIS were not encouraging any closer association'. Original in S.F. 420/1, Vol. 5, 197a. It may be added that work with the earlier defector, Grigory Besedovsky, who defected to France, was as unsuccessful as the work with Agabekov. The situation was beginning to change in 1940 when Jane Sissmore (by then Archer), one of the leading Soviet experts of MI5, was given an opportunity to debrief Walter Krivitsky ('Dr Martin Lessner'), who defected to France and later moved to the USA.

<sup>53</sup>About Johnny, see Boris Volodarsky, *Stalin's Agent: The Life and Death of Alexander Orlov* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013). See also R.S. Rose and Gordon D. Scott, *Johnny: A Spy's Life* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press 2009). The case is also mentioned in Michael Smith, *Foley*, and Keith Jeffery, *MI6*, but many important details, like – for example – his life and work after 1945, are missing in both accounts.

The setting was the Spanish Civil War, then raging at its peak, with Stalin heavily committed in political and military support to the Republican side ... What Agabekov now found himself drawn into was the more modest [than the Spanish gold reserve transfer to Moscow] but nonetheless lucrative operation of the looting of Spanish art treasure. The Russians had helped to organize the system whereby, whenever a church, monastery or castle fell into Republican hands, it would be stripped of pictures or any other valuables likely to find eager purchasers on the international market. These were then smuggled across the border into France, and so up to dealers in Paris and other countries, including Brussels. An OGPU agent named Zelinsky was running the operation from the Belgian end and, early in 1937, it occurred either to him, or his superiors in Moscow, that profit might now be combined with long-delayed revenge.<sup>54</sup>

According to the British author, Agabekov was approached through intermediaries and offered to take part in the operation on the French side where he was to secure the dispatch of the looted goods up to Paris dealers and auction houses. 'At the beginning of July 1937', Brook-Shepherd writes, Agabekov 'was known to have passed through Paris on his way to the Pyrenees. And that Paris contact was the last living trace of the defector'.<sup>55</sup> But the famous writer was wrong, as much about the looted goods that 'the Russians had helped to organize' as about Agabekov. On 7 January 1937 he was arrested by the Belgian police 'on the charge of stealing by means of false keys, receiving [stolen securities], and passing under a false name. Locked up on this charge, Agabekov was released on 18 December 1937'.<sup>56</sup> There is no way he was in Paris in July.

Pavel Sudoplatov, who later headed the 'Special Tasks' but was not in the position to know it at the time, claims in his memoirs that:

Agabekov was killed in Paris, after being lured to a safe house where he was supposed to arrange a clandestine deal to smuggle diamonds, pearls, and precious metals belonging to a wealthy Armenian family. The Armenian, whom he met in Antwerp, was a plant who lured Agabekov to the safe house with appeals to national feelings. In the safe house a former officer of the Turkish army, our assassin, awaited him, together with a young illegal, Aleksandr Korotkov, who would later become chief of the illegal department of the First Chief Directorate [of the MGB and KGB] in the 1950s. The Turk knifed Agabekov and killed him. Agabekov's body was stuffed into a suitcase, thrown into the sea, and never found.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Brook-Shepherd, *The Storm Petrels*, pp.148–9.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.149.

<sup>56</sup> TNA: KV 2/2398 OVSEPIAN (Agabekov), Serial 96b, Extract for File P.F. 4096, V. 2, Serial 33a, dated 14.1.39.

<sup>57</sup> Pavel Sudoplatov and Anatoli Sudoplatov with Jerrold L. Schecter and Leona P. Schecter, *Special Tasks: The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness – A Soviet Spymaster* (London: Little, Brown and Company 1994) p.48.

In the English-language edition that preceded the Russian version by four years, neither 'the Turk' nor 'the plant' who allegedly lured Agabekov to the safe house are identified. Sudoplatov's 1998 book gives the Armenian's name as 'G. Takhchianov'.<sup>58</sup>

In reality, he was Panteleimon Ivanovich Takhchianov, codenamed HASAN. Born in Turkey in 1906, he joined the OGPU in 1932. A year later he was sent abroad as an illegal, and in 1936 settled in France, documented as a Turkish immigrant. In the 1940s Takhchianov was one of the leaders of the Illegals' Directorate, but after the war was transferred to the Second Chief Directorate (SCD, counterintelligence).<sup>59</sup> A document from the Russian archives confirms that in April 1949 Colonel Takhchianov acted as chief of the Department 2d of the SCD of the Soviet Ministry of State Security (MGB).

This is probably another case when memory did not serve Sudoplatov well. As the 'Turk' was obviously Takhchianov, the 'Armenian' could have been Mikhail Andreyevich Allahverdiv, codenamed ZAMAN. He is mentioned in Sudoplatov's English edition only once (erroneously, as A.M. Alakhverdov) and in connection with a different episode. Allahverdiv knew Agabekov very well, as in 1928 he succeeded him as the legal resident in Iran, where he worked under the cover of a consulate official in Kermanshah. But according to his official biography, in 1933–34 Allahverdiv operated in Austria (Vienna), Switzerland (Zürich) and France (Paris), and in 1936–38 in Turkey. There is no mention of his return to Paris in late 1937 or early 1938. Besides, there are some reasons to believe that Agabekov met his death in a totally different place.

Baron Verhulst of the Belgian security police claimed that one day Agabekov was tempted to take charge of the next consignment of looted treasures directly from the Republican territory,<sup>60</sup> which allowed Brook-Shepherd to speculate that as soon as he crossed the border he was butchered and his remains were thrown into a ravine. By the time they were found, he writes, identification was impossible. To begin with, there is no any evidence whatsoever that this defector's remnants were ever found.

There may be strong arguments that Agabekov could indeed have, on whatever pretext, been lured into the Republican territory, but he would hardly have been 'butchered' there at once. Most likely he would have been arrested and delivered to Barcelona for interrogation. His British contacts would have been of great interest to the NKVD. There was also another, very personal reason. In October 1929, in Istanbul, one of Agabekov's subordinates was Naum Isaakovich Eitingon, an attaché of the Soviet Embassy and the OGPU resident in Turkey (alias 'Leonid Aleksandrovich Naumov'). Now Eitingon, alias 'Leonid Kotov', was the NKVD substation

<sup>58</sup>Pavel Sudoplatov, *Spetsoperatsii Lubyanka i Kreml 1930–1950* (Moscow: Olma-Press 2007) pp.80–1.

<sup>59</sup>Stanislav Lekarev, 'Hasan: chelovek-kinzhal', *Argumenty Nedeli*, 25–26 October 2006.

<sup>60</sup>This is also hearsay. Baron Verhulst allegedly said it to Boris Bazhanov and the latter, four decades later, to Gordon Brook-Shepherd. See Brook-Shepherd, *The Storm Petrels*, p.149 n.1.



chief in Catalonia occupying a former mansion of the Soviet Consulate General at No. 15 Avenida del Tibidabo.<sup>61</sup> It was almost certainly here that Agabekov was forced to write (or sign) the so-called 'letter to the Soviet authorities' widely quoted by Russian historians,<sup>62</sup> which was later backdated as if written on 4 September 1936. The fact that he was arrested and kept in confinement in Spain for some time may also explain why so many of Agabekov's personal effects, including some old financial statements (without doubt from his abandoned apartment in Brussels),<sup>63</sup> later appeared in the Soviet archives.

Separated but not divorced, 'Madame Aroutunoff' (Isobel Edith Streater) became very worried when a short article from the French newspaper *Les Dernières Nouvelles* dated 16 December 1938 reached her. It was an account based on the information supplied by Vladimir Burtsev, a well-known Russian émigré who lived in Paris. Burtsev stated that he had seen Agabekov and implied that he had definite grounds to believe that Soviet agents had kidnapped and killed the defector. She therefore applied to the Passport and Permit Office for an exit permit and was duly interviewed there by the Security Service.<sup>64</sup> Enquiries, which were formally made by the French Sûreté in Paris owing to enquiries instituted by the Foreign Office through the British Embassy, had no result. Georgy Sergeyevich Arutyunov/Agabekov was last seen in March 1938.

Amazingly, Piklovič, whom Agabekov had identified as his former OGPU colleague seven years before and who was caught red-handed by the Austrian police in a house on Vienna's Hockegasse where he murdered Semmelmann (it was a professional assassination – one shot in the head followed by another one, for 'control'), walked out of a courtroom a free man. Five members of the jury found him 'not guilty',<sup>65</sup> so he was released. Without doubt he was soon back in Moscow. It seems that no one made further enquiries and therefore no one, until quite recently, learned that in the murdered man's pocket the Austrian investigators found a letter that led to Christian Broda (later the Minister of Justice in the Bruno Kreisky cabinet and a prominent socialist). But back in 1931 he, like his elder brother Engelbert ('Bertl') Broda, was a young communist activist and a member of the

<sup>61</sup>*La Vanguardia*, Edición del domingo, 8 November 1936, p.2.

<sup>62</sup>See, for example, Kolpakidi and Prokhorov, *KGB prikazano likvidirovat*, p.362; Lt. Colonel Deryabin, "Petrov", "Grisha" on zhe Agabekov', *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 23 May 1990.

<sup>63</sup>Besides the above-mentioned penitential 'Letter to the Soviet authorities', the NKVD appeared to have been in the possession of several private documents of Agabekov, including the manuscript of his memoirs (286 typed pages, 26 chapters) in the Central State Archive of the October Revolution in Moscow that the author of the article says arrived there from a Prague archive after the war. See Victor Bortnevsky, 'Oprichnina. Nevozvrashchenets Grigorii Agabekov i sekretnaya sluzhba Stalina', *Sobesednik* no. 34 (August 1989). The same document is referred to in Kolpakidi and Prokhorov, *KGB prikazano likvidirovat*, p.617 as of GARE, f. 5881, op 1, d. 701a. Also mentioned is his original receipt dated 8 May 1933 for 9000 French francs that he received in Brussels from an unnamed person or organization.

<sup>64</sup>Report of Interview, 9.5.1940 in TNA: KV 2/2398 OVSEPIAN (Agabekov), Serial 103a.

<sup>65</sup>*Neue Freie Presse*, Vienna, 5 March 1932, p.2.



underground communist cell.<sup>66</sup> Engelbert Broda arrived in London on 10 April 1938, only days after Agabekov disappeared. Though Special Branch, on information supplied by a reliable informer, was convinced that Broda was an active communist, the Security Service was less certain.<sup>67</sup> During the war Broda was cleared for the most secretive work involving the British and American atomic bomb research and development, in Britain codenamed the 'Tube Alloys' project. In December 1942, the NKVD London station reported: 'EDITH [Edith Suschitzky/Tudor-Hart] sent us a detailed report through MARY [Litzi Philby] on the result and status of work on ENORMOZ [the Tube Alloys project], both in England and in the USA. ERIC [Engelbert Broda] had given her this report on his own initiative to pass to the CPGB'.<sup>68</sup> He later became a professor and returned to Austria. Both Engelbert and Christian Broda were buried in Vienna with honours. Remarkably, neither the name of Agabekov nor that of Broda is mentioned in the authorized and official histories of MI5 and MI6.

### Notes on Contributor

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<sup>66</sup>See 'Fememord in Gersthof', *Die Presse*, 22 May 2009.

<sup>67</sup>See TNA: 'Engelbert BRODA' KV 2/2349-2354.

<sup>68</sup>John Earl Haynes, Harvey Klehr and Alexander Vassiliev, *Spies: The Rise and Fall of the KGB in America* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press 2009) pp.65–6.