

The Signs and Cycles of State Dissolution in Georgia (1991-2012)

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Abstract

Georgia was periodically and repeatedly characterized by the signs and cycles of state dissolution in 1991-2012 throughout the rule of three leading authorities. State dissolution itself was reflected as a lack of central authority's jurisdiction and influence over different distinct and autonomous republics in Georgia. It is noteworthy that certain facts and circumstances are brought in order to prove the given works objectives, such as the coup d'état against the government of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia that began in late 1991, the armed ethno-political conflicts in the Tskhinvali region and Abkhazia in 1991-1993, the terrorist attacks against President Eduard Shevardnadze during the 1990s and the crises in Pankisi and Kodori gorges, as well as the situation in the Autonomous Republic of Adjara in 1991-2004, and finally, the Samtskhe-Javakheti issue until the mid-2000s and Russo-Georgian "August War" in 2008 along with the special military operation in the Lopota valley, which appears as a kind of political ambiguity. The relevance of the research topic is confirmed by the activity of researchers, which is evident in the scientific works published during the last 10-15 years – Nargiza Gamisonia and Dodo Pertaia (2009), Dazmir Jojua (2010), Revaz Gachechiladze (2013, 2017), Report of the Public Defender's Office of Georgia (2014), Shota Vadachkoria (2014), Ucha Bluashvili (2015), Irakli Peradze (2018), Lia Melikishvili (2019), Vahram Ter-matevosyan and Brent Currie (2019), Dimitri Shvelidze (2021), Zviad Dzidziguri (2024) and Meka Khangoshvili (2024). Therefore, the findings of the working paper to some extents are based on an analysis of the main issues presented in the secondary sources, more specifically, in monographs, research reports, scientific articles and autobiographical books. Accordingly, the paper represents the so-called "desk research", but the use of rich library resources emphasizes the originality of the research approach. The main findings of the given work declare that the signs of a sort of state dissolution caused by external or internal reasons, increased or decreased in Georgia with certain periodicities (also called cycles). In particular, in the 1990s and especially in 2001-2003, the Georgian state was actually on the edge of dissolution, as many illegal armed groups, separatist movements, and a number of territorial units were outside the jurisdiction and control of the central government. Between 2004 and 2012, as a result of the central government's activities, the problem of the stubborn leader of Adjara was resolved, and the situation in Samtskhe-Javakheti was improved. However, President Mikheil Saakashvili's government was unable to handle with the issues of the integration of the Russian-occupied separatist units into the Georgian statehood, despite accessibility to the so-called "Upper Abkhazia".

Keywords: Georgia, state dissolution, wars, jurisdiction.

Introduction

The manifestations consisting of thousands of people of crowds set out from the beginning of second half of November in 1988 and the leaders of national liberation movement took part in it along with a local population. Noteworthy, there was a consensus between the late 1980s' protest organizers and their informal public movements about the restoration of state independence in Georgia and an unsatisfactory attitude towards a local Soviet government surge after a tragic event on 9 April of 1989. The leaders of the abovementioned movement founded "National Forum" during 13-15 March of 1990 and they declared a distrust against elections, which was organized by a local Communist party on 25 March. Nevertheless, after a failure of elections, "National Forum" divided into two camps: Zviad Gamsakhurdia's led "Round Table" and "National Congress", which was created by Gamsakhurdia's opponents. Hence, "Round Table" won a multi-party elections with great success on 28 October of 1990 and announced a restoration of Georgian republic according to a referendum held in 9 April of 1991. In the same year, Georgia's Supreme Council elected Zviad Gamsakhurdia as a president of Georgia (Shvelidze 2021).

Therefore, some kind of periodically repeatable signs and cycles of state dissolution are represented in the given work by which Georgia was characterized in 1991-2012 years in the framework of three different ruling party and it was reflected as an absence or a lack of state jurisdiction in the various distinct and autonomous republic. Hence, peculiar facts and events are brought in the given working paper: the coup d'état against the president Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the wars in Tskhinvali Region and Abkhazia in 1991-1993, also terrorist attacks against the President Eduard Shevardnadze in 1990s, the crises in Pankisi and Codori Gorges, as well as Adjarian and Samtskhe-Javakhetian issues, and lastly, Russo-Georgian August War in 2008 and a special military operation held in Lopota Valley in 2012.

A relevance of the research topic is confirmed by an active scientific approach towards an abovementioned theme, which is significant by the research papers published approximately during the last 10-15 years: Nargiza Gamisonia's and Dodo Pertaia's (2009), as well as Dazmir Jojua's monographies about August War's results, Revaz Gachechiladze's (2013; 2017) monographies related to a new and latest historical episodes, the report of the Public Defender's Office of Georgia (2014), Shota Vadachkoria's (2014) monography linked with the dilemma of Codori Corge, Ucha Bluashvili's (2015) monography about a Georgian political history until the Rose Revolution, Irakli Peradze's (2018) monography on Codori Gorges' historical-ethnological picture, Lia Melikishvili's (2019) monography related to the traditional culture and society, Vahram Ter-matevosyan and Brent Currie's (2019) scientific article on Samtskhe-Javakhetian issue, Dimitri Shvelidze's (2021) monography about national movement in Georgia and an overthrown of Gamsakhurdia's government, Zviad Dzidziguri's (2024) memoirs on the newest Georgian history, as well as Meka Khangoshvili's (2024) monography related to the history of Pankisi Corge, where the crises on the edge of 1990s and 2000s are mentioned simultaneously.

Research Methodology

The findings represented in the given working paper are based on the secondary sources, which is reflected in the monographies, reports, scientific articles and memoirs as an analysis of the main topics and their causal/correlative connections, when it comes to the signs and cycles in the state dissolution sphere. The

following research paper represents so-called Desk Research (unlike Field Research), nonetheless it points out an originality towards the research topic in terms of using rich library resources. Besides, the research period is chosen from the restoration of Georgia's independence, conditionally to the end of the President Saakashvili's government rule and, on the one hand, this circumstance represents some kind of limits of the given research due to the small scope of research paper, but, on the other hand, future prospects of the research topic.

Results

A coup d'état during the Winter of 1991-1992 against the president Zviad Gamsakhurdia's government:

The coup d'état in Moscow failed on 21 August of 1991. Future President Boris Yeltsin detained rebellions. A member of Georgian National Academy of Sciences, Revaz Gachechiladze claims that "oppositional parties did not delay to blame Gamsakhurdia on the obedience to the Russian rebellions" (Gachechiladze 2013, 543). Lately, an ongoing conflict and tensions rose: the former defense minister Tengiz Kitovani and the parts of his National Guard along with the former prime-minister Tengiz Sigua and Jaba Ioseliani's informal military group called "Mkhedrioni" opened fire to the president Gamsakhurdia's supporters. Over a hundred of belligerents died during two weeks and many buildings were burnt into flames on the Rustaveli Avenue. Gachechiladze declares that this event "by law was fully illegal" (Gachechiladze 2013, 544). The professor of Tbilisi State University, historian Dimitri Shvelidze said that there was no "exact scientific evaluation" about the coup in Georgia. In "Political Confrontation and Overthrow of the National Government" Shvelidze makes a conclusion that the coup d'état in Georgia was carried out not through a "putsch", but through an armed uprising.

An armed conflict in Tskhinvali region (1991-1992) and war in Abkhazia (1992-1993): Fair to say that Abkhazian and Ossetian separatist aspirations traces to a long history, but tensions significantly rose in both of them in the second half of 1980s. It seemed that they acted the same way: Abkhazians restored the former Soviet autonomous republic, whereas at once Ossetians made a transition from an autonomous district to the republic and then declared it as an autonomous Soviet republic independently from Georgia. The hostilities in Tskhinvali region began in the early 1991 and in Abkhazia on 14 August of 1992, when a part of Georgian army crossed the administrative borderline in order to defend a railway from multiple armed robberies. Military actions in Tskhinvali region ended on 24 June of 1992 by a triple signed treaty between Georgian-Russian-Ossetian counterparts, but war in Abkhazia lasted until the fall of Sokhumi on 27 September of 1993.

The terrorist attacks against the President Eduard Shevardnadze throughout 1990s: Eduard Shevardnadze acted as a head of Georgian state during 1992-1995 years. At that same time, he served as a chairman of Georgian Parliament. According to Historian Ucha Bluashvili, the government tried to adopt a new constitution, which would abolish an office of prime-minister and declare Georgia as a presidential republic. A celebration was going to happen and Eduard Shevardnadze tried to attend that event on 29 August of 1995. Mkhedrioni grouping members staged a terrorist act against Shevardnadze's vehicle on the way to the mentioned event. Shevardnadze survived by a miracle. Later, it was announced that that terrorist act was organized by the minister of state security, Igor Giorgadze, who fled the country, but

Mkhedrioni's leader Ioseliani was taken into custody. Three years later, Georgian-Chechen informal military group opened a fire against Shevardnadze's governmental escort in Ortachala on 9 February of 1998 and Shevardnadze survived for the second time. But, multiple series of terrorist acts and coup attempts were ahead of it – on 19 February in the same year, dozens of terrorists captured UN representatives. Later, the hostages were realized and organizer Gocha Esebua was killed during the operation. Besides, Colonel Akaki Eliava with his armed supporters attempted to capture Kutaisi city, but defense minister David Tevzadze forced him to retreat to the direction of former positions. To sum up, negotiations were held with him and the situation temporarily cooled down (Bluashvili 2015).

“Crisis in Pankisi Gorge” in 1999-2001 years: After an eruption of second Russo-Chechen war in the territory of Russian Federation, thousands of Chechen refugees gathered in Pankisi Gorge of Kakheti region. Simultaneously, Chechen warriors along with different nationalities from Eastern Islamic countries joined immigrated refugees. In addition, hardened situation come into reality due to the bad conditions generally in Georgia on the edge of 1990-2000s. As a result, Meka Khangoshvili (a researcher from Duisi) depicts that crisis in Pankisi (Pankisi Crisis is a false appeal) erupted, namely, kidnapping, drug dealing and other sort of serious crime increased. Local Kist people stood up against already created situation. It is worth to note the fact that Chechen-Kist-Georgian unofficial military raid was organized in Abkhazia in 2001 and it resulted up to 15 casualties (Khangoshvili 2024, 193).

Autonomous republic of Adjara in 1991-2004 years: A famous public figure, Aslan Abashidze, which was a descendent of Memed Abashidze, served as an incumbent on various positions inside Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Adjara in 1989-1991 years, but under the leadership of newly-elected president Zviad Gamsakhurdia, he was appointed as an acting chairman of Supreme Council in Autonomous Republic of Adjara. Afterwards, when Gamsakhurdia's government was overthrown, Aslan Abashidze took into advantage of support from Russian military base (near Gonio) and prohibited Georgian Guard or Mkhedrioni to enter in the controlled territory. Politician Zviad Dzidziguri claims that, in fact, Abashidze solely ruled Adjara from 1991 to 2004 years and “nearly established it as an independent state” (Dzidziguri 2024, 94): He avoid to transfer a revenue to central budget from Sarpi-Batumi ports. Also, he fully controlled the appointment process of concrete incumbents, etc. Noteworthy, Abashidze actively endorsed then-president Eduard Shevardnadze and managed to overcome a barrier on 1995 and 1999 parliamentary elections as a head of Democratic Revival Union (along with Union of Citizens of Georgia and National-Democratic Party). The situation was deteriorated after 2004 presidential elections in January, when Mikheil Saakashvili come into authority. Particularly, Abashidze acknowledged Rose Revolution as unconstitutional act and actually, expressed no confidence towards him. Some youth organizations such as “Kmara” (“Enough”) and “Our Adjara” were formed in Adjara. Abashidze exploded the Choloki Bridge and several heavy military vehicles started to patrol near it. In the end, he lose authority and fled to Russian Federation via an invitation from the government representative Igor Ivanov (Dzidziguri 2024).

Kodori Gorge in 1993-2006 years: Unlike Kodori Gorge (same as – Dali Gorge), Georgia lost its jurisdiction in Abkhazian territory after war in 1992-1993 years. Local Georgian Emzar Kvitsiani gathered 350 warriors consisting of the Svans in order to form the group called a “Hunter”. Historian Shota Vadachkoria declares

that the ‘Hunter’ managed to maintain control over Kodori and Chkhalt’a Gorges, as well as Marukh and Klukhori Passes during 1993-2006 years (Vadachkoria 2014, 309), whereas “Georgian defense ministry provided to supply it with weapons during 1999-2004 years (Vadachkoria 2024, 50). The leading political party United National Movement abolished the activities of “Hunter” in April of 2005 and conducted a small-scale military operation in the Codori Gorge on 26 July of 2006. Later, Codori Gorge was named as Upper Abkhazia. The government started to settle local infrastructure and maintain control over it until August War. Nevertheless, Georgian armed forces left the Gorge without hostilities. Ethnologist Irakli Peradze claims that “nearly 2600 ethnic Georgians left the Gorge, but nowadays up to forty Svans live there. Their main occupation is a rural life and operating a family-type hotels”. For now, “The Chuberi Pass is closed and it is necessary to pass through the Gulripshi district to reach Kodori Gorge” (Peradze 2018, 60).

The Situation in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region in the 1990s-2000s: Academic Liana Melikishvili explains centuries-old co-existence of Georgian and Armenian national minorities in the Georgian territory as a historical condition. Particularly, at once, Asians invaded in Armenia and the latter was seeking to find a shelter in historical Georgia (Melikishvili 2019, 61). Melikishvili depicts that during the last decades Armenian national minorities founded several public and political organizations among which Javakhk and Parnava were the most significant ones. Officially, Javakhk was created as a charitable organization, but in the reality, demanded a special form of governance (Melikishvili 2019, 70). By 2007 Russian 147th army was deployed in Akhalkalaki, but their removal triggered a change in the situation” (Gachechiladze 2013, 684). Certain experts think that some groups of local ethnic Armenian population were pinning their hopes on assistance from the Russians. For example, the researchers Vahram Ter-Matevosyan and Brent Currie note that “vast unemployment, social vulnerabilities, high rates of corruption and organized crime. Also, Georgian nationalism triggered negative feelings in the region (Vahram Ter-Matevosyan and Brent Currie 2019, 2). Nevertheless, a long history of coexistence of Georgians and Armenians, as well as an absence of supporting separatist aspirations from Armenian statehood, along with other reasons, provided avoidance of conflict in Samtskhe-Javakheti region (Vahram Ter-Matevosyan and Brent Currie 2019).

The results and evaluation of Russo-Georgian 2008 “August War”: Historian Dazmir Jojua states that Russian Federation pursued a destructive politics in Georgia’s conflict regions in 1994-2007 years. Particularly, Kremlin’s goal was to freeze already provoked war and to cancel Georgia’s membership into Euro-Atlantic structures. Afterwards of Russian economic embargo and military-political incidents in conflict regions in 2006-2007 years, separatists rejected every single peaceful proposal made from Georgian authority from January to July of the following year, which caused hostilities between them during 8-12 August. Russians captured Zugdidi, Poti, Senaki, also Gori, Kaspi, Khashuri and other Georgian cities. The war between Russia and Georgia officially ended on 12 August of 2008 with a bilaterally signed document by the EU’s then-president Nicholas Sarkozy (Jojua 2010). It is worth to note that even at the present times, one of the agreements’ articles is unfulfilled, which earlier aimed to return Russia to its’ preliminary positions. To sum up, Russo-Georgian war resulted in the death of 412 people, 1747 were wounded, military, transportation, civil, or other types of infrastructure were damaged or destroyed. People living in the conflict zones became internally-displaced or refugees, etc. (Gamisonia and Pertaia 2009). In

conclusion, historian Dazmir Jojua evaluates 2008 August War as a Russian aggression and demands ending the conflict, protection of local populations' rights, as well as a restoration of territorial integrity (Jojua 2010, 344).

A special operation in Lopota Valley in 2012: Georgian ministry of internal affairs spread official information on 28 August of 2012 – “Near to Georgian-Russian borderline, particularly, in the Georgian territory, an armed group is discovered. Ministry of internal affairs is conducting a special operation in order to detain that grouping” (The report of the Public Defender’s Office of Georgia 2014, 6). Hence, Georgian enforcements held an operation in Kakheti region, particularly, in Lopota Valley. According to official information, it caused a death of seven rebellions and three of Georgian enforcements. Georgia’s public defender with its own initiative started to investigate this fact and published appropriate report in 2014. Particularly, they concluded that it was unclear, when and how illegal armed groupings entered in or left the country (The report of the Public Defender’s Office of Georgia 2014, 36).

Conclusion

As a result of the given research, a periodically changeable state dissolution cycles and signs were stemmed from the abovementioned internal or external (same as – endogenic or exogenic) reasons. Namely, in 1990s and specifically, in 2001-2003 years, Georgian state factually was on the edge of dissolution, because many illegal armed groups, separatist movements or territorial unities were out of control and beyond of government’s jurisdiction. From the time period from 2004 to 2012 years, United National Movement resolved the issue of Adjara’s stubborn leader, whereas the situation developed in Samtskhe-Javakheti. The president Mikheil Saakashvili was unable to handle with the issue of conflict resolution and return of separatist units, in spite of the established control over so-called “Upper Abkhazia”. Besides, as it was mentioned in the methodology, due to small scope of the work, the study of events after 2012 represents a limitation of the research and, at the same time, provides a future perspective. Lastly, a number of recommendations were signified towards an official state structure and to those interested into politics: 1) Any type of government must be changed with democratic elections; 2) A lack of territorial integrity and jurisdiction will be a serious obstacle on the road of strong state-building.

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