

The Shrinking of Georgian Ethno-cultural Territory During the Last 200 Years: Reasons, Consequences and Possible Ways of Prevention

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Abstract: This paper covers the topic of the gradual decrease of Georgian ethno-linguistic and cultural realm that took place within the last 200 years as a result of dramatic political events in and around South Caucasus from 1801 to 2008. Those events include the incorporation of Georgian states into the Russian Empire, the two world wars, the incorporation of Georgia into the USSR after the short period of independence in 1918-1921 and the Russian-sponsored wars and ethnic cleansings of 1991-2008 following the demise of the Soviet Union. The paper has profound implications for future studies of Georgian and regional history. It covers various aspects of the process under research, names the parties that gain from it and describes its consequences that are of national and international importance. It also suggests a few possible ways to prevent further “melting” of Georgia.

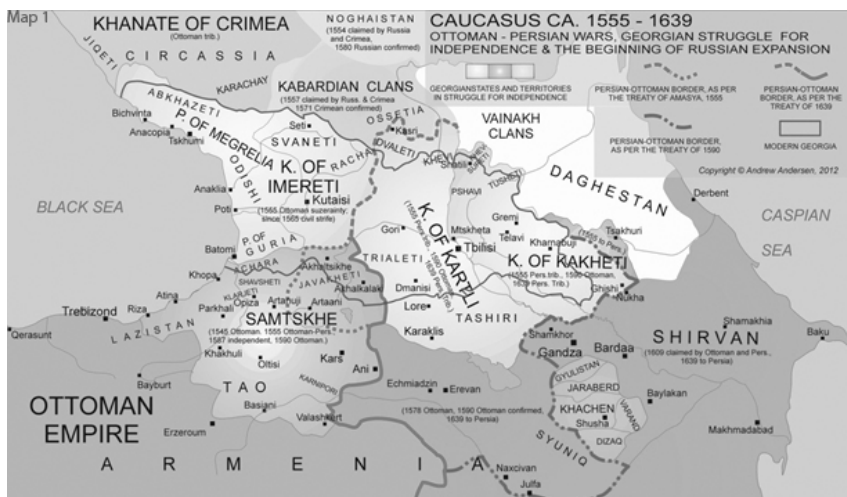
Key words: Georgia; Caucasus; Russia; Soviet; wars; conflicts; disintegration; imperialism; ethnic; territory

Résumé : Cet article traite du thème de la diminution progressive de l'espace ethnolinguistique et culturel géorgien au cours des deux derniers siècles, à la suite d'événements politiques dramatiques qui ont eu lieu dans la région du Caucase du Sud pendant la période spécifiée (1801-2008). Ces événements incluent l'incorporation des États géorgiens dans l'Empire russe, les deux guerres mondiales, l'intégration de la Géorgie en URSS après une courte période d'indépendance en 1918-1921, les guerres parrainées par la Russie et les nettoyages ethniques de 1991-2008 à la suite du démembrement de l'Union soviétique. L'article peut contribuer à de futures études de l'histoire géorgienne et régionale. Il couvre divers aspects des processus étudiés, nomme les parties qui en bénéficient et décrit ses conséquences d'importance nationale et internationale. Il suggère également quelques façons possibles de prévenir la « fusion » de la Géorgie.

Mots-clés : Géorgie; Caucase; Russie; soviétique; guerres; conflits; désintégration; impérialisme; ethnique; territoire

Introduction

The death of King Alexander I (1412-43) the last Monarch of integral Georgia marked the beginning of the crisis of Georgian statehood that was to last for 358 years. By the end of the 18th century the once strong, united and relatively big Georgian state transformed into a patchwork of small kingdoms and principalities surrounded by aggressive enemies typified by constant conflicts over territory (See Map 1).



Facing endless challenges King Erekle (Heraclius) II of the Georgian kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti signed the Treaty of Georgievsk (July 24, 1783) with Empress Catherine II of Russia putting his country under the protection of the Russian Empire.

The provisions of the Treaty of Georgievsk were to respect Georgia's sovereignty, including provisions that anticipated and provided for the eventual recovery by force of arms of Georgia's ancient territories now in the hands of the Ottoman Turks,¹ and it was never the intent of that treaty with Russia to eventually surrender sovereignty but instead look to Russia for a mutually beneficial alliance that would protect the integrity and cultural identity of

¹ David Marshall Lang, *A Modern History of Georgia*, New York, 1962, p. 37; *Pod stiagom Rossii: Sbornik arkhivnykh dokumentov*, Moscow, 1992, p. 238-247.

Georgia. Russia never fulfilled her treaty obligations which had the opposite effect of uniting and protecting the Georgian territories. For instance, the abandonment of Erekle during the Persian invasion of 1795 that functionally led to the destruction of his Kingdom is but one of the many examples of Russia's policy of promising protectionism while its actions contradict its agreements and assurances. It is important to analyze and understand the ramifications and betrayals of Russia towards the Russian territory to understand the history between the two nations and the current dynamics as they continue to unfold. As a result of breaching of the Treaty of Georgievsk by Russia, the kingdom of Kartlia-Kakhetia Russia in 1801 became a province (*guberniya*) of the Empire. By the way, modern Russian propaganda claims that the annexation occurred "following the pleas" of George XII, the last King of Kartlia-Kakhetia. Historically that is not the truth but was used as a pretext and rationale for Russian expansionism. As we can clearly see from his letter to his envoys in St. Petersburg, King George requested not complete incorporation of his country into the Russian Empire but a conditional one, so that Georgia would remain an integral kingdom under Russian "umbrella" with its own King ruling the country as a vassal of the Emperor¹.

Within the next 63 years upon the annexation of Kartlia-Kakhetia and their foot in the door, the Russian rulers were using various degrees of military force to further annex the remaining relics of Georgian statehood, namely the Kingdom of Imereti and the principalities of Guria, Megrelia, Svanetia and Abkhazia (See Map 2) as well as brutally suppressing the pro-independence uprising of 1812-13 under Prince Alexander Bagrationi. After the Russo-Turkish war of 1828-29 the Treaty of Adrianople (14.09.1929) not only confirmed Russian sovereignty over Georgian states but also gave her Eastern Black Sea coast from Poti to Taman as well as northern portion of the Pashalik of Akhaltsikh that consisted of historical Georgian provinces of Meskhetia and Javakhetia. Finally, in 1878, the Treaty of Berlin gave Russia the former Turkish territory that included historical Georgian provinces of Achara, Shavsheti, Artani, Kola, Klarjeti and Tao thus uniting most of historical Georgian lands under the Russian Imperial crown (See Map 2).

¹ David Marshall Lang, *The Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy, 1658-1832*, NY, 1957, p. 232.



Fragmentation of historical Georgia (1864-1917)

Divide et impera... Vocally declared by the Romans more than 2000 years ago, that has been an important principle of dealing with the conquered peoples up until today. Basing on the millennial experience of numerous empires one would agree that if you keep a conquered or annexed country within a bigger empire without violation of its territorial integrity you may be able to run it quite successfully and keep it under control but only as long as the country is satisfied being part of the empire for a variety of reasons. If, however, the country does not want to remain dependent, then the process of secession could become quite easy and smooth. And some if not the majority of the empires, were not prepared to give up their conquests that easily. In such a situation, fragmentation and reduction of naturally, historically and culturally formed territory of an annexed country would definitely make its separation questionable although at the expense of good governance.

One of the empires that practiced the principle “*Divide et impera*” was, definitely, the Russian empire and later – the USSR and Russian Federation (both claimed the legacy and succession of the fallen empire). As a result, during the last 200 years the above principle has been applied to the Georgian people who have found themselves under scepter of Russian domination.

It is important to understand that the districts of Batum and Sukhum (Abkhazia) were several times separated from the province of Kutais for the purpose of their Russification and, eventually, returned under the jurisdiction of that province. Similarly, the district of Zakatala (formerly part of Kakheti taken over by the Lesghis of Daghestan in the early 18th century and conquered by Russia in 1830) and subsequently incorporated into the province of Tiflis to be later seceded from it. In fact, during the whole period of Russian imperial rule in the Caucasus the borders of provinces and districts were multiple times “adjusted” and “re-adjusted” causing administrative instability.

One should also mention here another issue that accompanied the incorporation of historical Georgian lands into the Russian empire which was the official imperial policy aimed at prevention of integration of the conquered territory into Georgian linguistic and cultural realm. Once incorporated measures were put in place to prevent any independence or autonomy.

A good example is that of Abkhazia, including both the abolished principality and the coastal area acquired from Turkey, as well as to Zakatala district and to the former historical provinces of Achara, Shavsheti, Artaani, Kola, Klarjeti and Tao re-organized into the districts of Batum, Ardahan and Olty (the latter two incorporated into Kars territory).

Most of the lands conquered from Ottoman Turkey faced the evacuation of considerable portions of local Moslem population. That left a certain vacuum that was to be filled. However, the land-hungry Georgian peasantry was not allowed to settle in the historical Georgian provinces. Instead, according to the official programs worked out in St. Petersburg, those lands were colonized by Christian refugees from Turkey (mostly Armenians and Greeks) by Russian sectarians and even by Germans and Estonians. Self-explanatory, the *lingua franca* in those areas was not Georgian but Russian and somewhere even Turkish (e.g. in the districts of Olty and Ardahan).

In Abkhazia the anti-Georgian policy of the imperial Russia also clearly manifested itself in the clerical sphere. Considering that in the period in question, religion played an important role in society, it seems appropriate to say a few words about that aspect as well.

The abolition of the Georgian Patriarchate by the Emperor's decree of 11 July, 1811 and the elimination of the Abkhazo-Imeretian Catholicosate in 1814 marked the beginning of the Russification of the church life of Georgia. In Abkhazia (Sukhumi district) the replacement of local priests with the Russian ones who did not know their flock and performed liturgy in Russian which the locals did not understand, led to a massive desertion from their more traditional Christianity roots and conversion to Islam.¹ To some extent that was done in protest against the policy of general Russification and the attempt of the Russian government to force Muslim Abkhazians out of the recently annexed principality.² According to the research by Gnolidze, in addition to the conversion from Orthodoxy to Islam, many indigenous residents of Abkhazia also practiced rejection of their Georgian identity, as belonging to the Georgian ethnos was, to some extent, equal to collaboration with Russian colonialism. As a result, many families and clans, including ethnically mixed ones, that were formerly considered Georgian, started calling themselves not Georgians but rather "Abkhazians". As for a considerable portion of historical Abkhazia between the rivers Bzyp and Makopse that was lost to Turkey by the end of the 15th century and conquered by Russia in 1829, it was included into the Black Sea province as the districts of Sochi and Tuapse and became the area of intense colonization. As a result, by the end of the 19th century, local Georgians became minority in the rural area of the district while still remaining majority in the town of Sochi

During the same period of time, very similar processes and for the very similar reasons were also taking place in the Zakatala district where village elders tended to forbid mothers to speak Georgian to their children. As a result, when those children were growing up they did not consider themselves Georgians (Ingilois) any longer but were becoming the Avas, Lesghians or

¹ Nikolay Durnovo, *Sudby Gruzinskoi Tserkvi: po voprosu o Gruzinskoi tserkovnoi avtokefalii*, Moscow, 1907; Manana Gnolidze-Swanson, "Activity of Russian Orthodox Church among the Muslim Natives of the Caucasus in Imperial Russia", *Caucasus and Central Asia Newsletter*, UC-Berkley, Issue 4, Summer 2003.

² That plan was only partially fulfilled due to the activity of Georgian Orthodox priests who performed mass conversion of Abkhazians thus saving them from deportation.

Tatars.¹ It goes without saying that no single Georgian priest was allowed to preach in the district of Zakatala during the period of Russian domination between 1830 and 1917, while old Georgian churches in the area remained abandoned and ruined.

During the Russian period (1878-1917) in the historical provinces of Shavsheti and Klarjeti (where, in fact, the Georgian statehood was born in the 10th century A.D.). Those provinces were fragmented by including them partially into the district of Batum where they formed the sectors of Shavsheto-Imerkhevi (*Shavsheto-Imerhevskiy uchastok*) and Ardanuchi (*Ardanuchskiy uchastok*) and into the district of Ardahan, forming there Poskhov and Ardahan sectors (*Poskhovskiy I Ardahanskij uchastki*). If you look at the Russian maps of the area dated by the early 20th century you will be surprised to see numerous villages with purely Georgian names. Those are Giorgoba, Satlel, Shuatskal, Georgis-Ubani, Sakire, Samkhlia, Zedatsminda, Martsvaleti, Banarkhevi, Gvinia, Satkepel, Saikhve, Jariskhevi, Nakalakevi, Akhashen, Machuet, Tskarostav, Toroskhevi, Diguri, surtskavi, Anaklia, Khertvisi, and many more. As of today, you will not find these same names in modern Turkish maps because after the territory was re-taken by the Turks in 1921, all those names were replaced with the Turkish ones but those were the names those communities were officially bearing until 1921. But as early as at the end of the 19th century, all those villages with Georgian names were inhabited by the people who clearly and unequivocally identified themselves as the Turks. One may think that the area had been cleansed of the Georgians during the Ottoman domination but that was not the case. The mountainous area in question was, in fact, never cleansed. So those people were, definitely, of Georgian descent but they were not willing to recognize that. The reason, once again, lay in the hatred of the Russian empire and also in the fact that, just like in Zakatala, no Georgian priests were allowed to preach there.²

¹ Gnolidze, *op.cit.*

² Despite the declared policy of the restoration of Christianity in the Caucasus, the Russian imperial government preferred the newly annexed areas to remain Muslim rather than to be “re-baptized” by Georgian priests.

Finally, one should address separately the southern portion of the former the kingdom of Kartlia-Kakhetia known in the early 20th century as Borchalo that was later claimed by Armenia. Historically, both Armenians and Georgians inhabited Borchalo at least since the early Middle Ages while the territory itself was from time to time part of both Georgian and Armenian states.¹ The above statement can be confirmed by an examination of the architectural and cultural heritage. In particular, the architectural heritage of historical province of Lore (the sector of Lori) demonstrates the traces of both Armenian and Georgian styles of mediaeval architecture illustrated by Armenian monasteries of Odzun, Sanain and Akhlat as well as Georgian churches in Akhtala and Aqori. At the same time, the northern parts of the former Borchalo county are clearly marked with the prevailing Georgian elements the examples of which include but are not limited to one of the oldest among existing Georgian churches – that is Bolnisi Zion erected in the 5th century and still bearing authentic scripts. Four centuries of almost permanent warfare that preceded the absorption of Georgia by Russian Empire, resulted in the drastic changes in ethnic composition of the south-western frontier of the kingdom of Kartlo-Kakheti including historical provinces of Borchalo, Shamshadin and Pambak (After incorporation into Russia, Shamshadin and Pambak were re-organized into the county of Kazakah of the province of Elisavetpol and the county of Alexandropol of the province of Erivan – see Map 3). The expansion of regional Muslim powers Ottoman Turkey and Iran, in combination with regular raids of nomads, resulted in almost total annihilation or exodus of local Christian population that had predominantly consisted of Georgian and Armenian farmers. Later, depopulated Borchalo-Pambak area was settled by Turkic-speaking nomadic tribes whose descendants still reside there nowadays. After the annexation of Kartlo-Kakhetian kingdom by Russia the imperial government launched the program of colonising still partially depopulated Borchalo-Pambak area with Christian refugees from Turkey (mostly Armenians but also Greeks). In order to consolidate

¹ Robert H. Hewsen, *Armenia: a Historical Atlas*, Chicago, 2003, p. 31, 33-35, 73, 76, 85, 88, 96-97, 100, 104, 111-115, 125, 130 and 135; Richard Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia, Vol. I*, Los Angeles, 1982, p. 72-74; Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Indianapolis, 1994, p. 202.

Russian dominance in this unstable area the government of Russia also encouraged resettlement of farming communities from central Russia and Germany into the county of Borchalo thus making its ethnic identity more fragmented and complex.

I would like to draw your attention to one more fact here: while the Russian government encouraged the Armenian refugees from Turkey to settle in later disputed Borchalo and Javakheti, they were not allowed to move into such historically Armenian lands and the districts of Nakhichevan and southern portions of the district of Erivan (both in the province of Erivan). That made the ethnic map of the area quite chaotic and later served as a background of a number of inter-ethnic and territorial conflicts that are still far from being resolved.

The Empire collapses (1917-1918)

The fall of the Russian Empire and “re-formatting” of the world after World War I gave a chance to the peoples of the Caucasus to restore their statehood. That chance was used by various peoples with varying degrees of success.



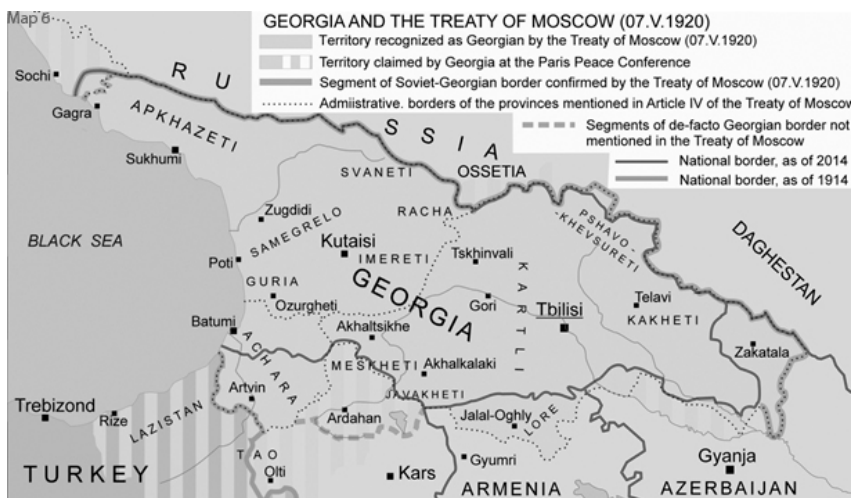
Proclaimed on May 26, 1918, the Democratic Republic of Georgia (the First Republic) was almost immediately recognized de-facto by Germany and Turkey but in terms of territorial integrity it had to face a serious challenge:

on March 3, 1918, the new Russian government (the Bolsheviks) granted a considerable portion of historical Georgia (the districts of Batum and Ardahan – see Map 4) to Ottoman Turkey. One can say “granted” here because at the moment when the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed by the Bolsheviks on March 3 and during the preceding talks Turkish troops were not in control of the above territory and, in fact, were stationed way to the west of the former Russo-Turkish border. Nevertheless, the problem was resolved when the Great War was over and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was declared void and null as a result of the Ottoman Capitulation to the Allies at Mudros on October 30, 1918.



By 1919-21 Georgia had become quite successful in terms of building independent statehood. At the beginning of 1920 it was recognized de-facto by the Entente powers and on January 27, 1921, Georgia was awarded de-jure recognition on behalf of at the Paris Peace Conference. By that time, the restored nation could boast relatively stable borders (see Maps 5 and 6) established as a result of more or less successfully resolved military and diplomatic conflicts with her neighbors. Those conflicts included the war against the Ottoman Empire (1918), the Armeno-Georgian war (1918) for Javakheti and Borchalo, a series of small-scale wars against the Soviet Russia and Russian anti-communist army of General Denikin for Abkhazia and Sochi district (1918-1920), the war against the Turkish puppet-state

known as the South-West Caucasian Republic for the county of Akhaltsikh and the district of Ardahan (1919) and the military conflict with the Soviet Azerbaijan and Soviet Russia for Zakatala and other territories (1920).



It goes without saying that all those conflicts were once again caused by the expansionist policy of the regional powers, namely – Turkey and Russia (by Russia we mean both the Soviet and anti-Soviet governments), as well as by fragmentation of Georgian, Armenian and other lands that had been performed by Russian imperial administration. But, in any case, by the end of 1920 the democratic Georgia had relatively stable borders confirmed by several international treaties and agreements including the Soviet-Georgian Treaty of Moscow of May 7, 1920 (See Map 6).¹

Article I of the Treaty of Moscow stated the following: “*Proceeding from the right, proclaimed by the RSFSR, of all peoples to free self-determination up to and including separation from the State of which they constitute a part, Russia unreservedly recognizes the independence and sovereignty of the Georgian*

¹ *Okkupacija i faktičeskaja aneksija Gruzii. O političeskoj i pravovoj ocenke narušenija dogovora mezhdru Gruziej i Sovetskoj Rossiej ot 7 maja 1920 goda. Dokumenty i materialy*, Tbilisi, 1990, p. 82-83.

State and voluntarily renounces all the sovereign rights which had appertained to Russia with regard to the People and Territory of Georgia”..¹

Articles III and IV listed the former provinces and territories of the former Russian empire that made up Georgia and provided the detailed description of the state border between Georgia and the Soviet republics of Russia and Azerbaijan which by that time was already turned into a Sovietized puppet-state ruled from the Kremlin (See Map 6).²

Ethnic cleansing and fragmentation of Georgia under the Soviet rule (1921-1990)

The Treaty of Moscow of May 7, 1920 was not the first and or the last treaty brutally breached by the Soviet Russia. The rulers of the Kremlin followed the guidelines that had been put together by their leader Vladimir Ulyanov-Lenin. According to Lenin, the communists were not supposed to be bound by any treaty or agreement signed with non-Communists. All gains received by the provisions of such treaties were to be accepted as “the down payment of the debt”³ whereas the “whole sum of the debt” was to be received later. By the debt the leader of the Bolsheviks and the guru of modern left-wing politicians meant, of course, the domination over the whole states and consistent with Soviet thought of the day – the entire world.

Following the above principle, the Red Army invaded Georgia less than 10 months after the Soviet-Georgian Treaty was signed when it was the last non-Sovietised strip of land in the Caucasus. The Soviet – Georgian War of February-March, 1921 resulted in the fall of the First Republic and interruption of independent Georgian statehood for seventy years.⁴

¹ *Mirnyi Dogovor mezhdu Rossiyej i Gruziej*, Moscow, 1920; Arnold Beichman, *The Long Pretense: Soviet Treaty Diplomacy from Lenin to Gorbachev*, Alexandria, 1991, p. 165.

² *Op. cit.*

³ Vladimir Lenin, *Polnoye sobranie sochyneniy*, Vol. VI, Moscow, 1958, p. 319.

⁴ Andrew Andersen and George Partskhaladze, « La guerre soviéto-géorgienne de 1921 et la soviétisation de la Géorgie (février mars 1921) », *Revue historique des armées*, n° 254, 2009, p. 67-75.

The Sovietization of the Caucasus was, in fact, nothing but re-incorporation of the region into a new Russian Empire re-created under new name (the USSR) and on a new ideological basis (Communism). One of the few things that did not change was the practice *Divide et impera*.

Upon incorporation into the Soviet empire, Georgia was treated as a defeated country and was deprived of considerable chunks of territory (See Maps 7 and 8). According to the Treaty of Moscow signed on March 16, 1921 by the representatives of Soviet Russia and Kemalist Turkey the Sovietised and occupied Georgia had to cede to Turkey most of the territories taken over by the Turks during the Soviet-Georgian war of Feb.-March 1921, except the northern half of the former district of Batum (Achara).¹ Georgia lost Southern Achara and part of Meskheta with the towns of Artvin, Ardahan, Oqam, Olor, and Poskhov. Almost seven months later, on October 13, 1921, the new treaty basically confirming the provisions as the Treaty of Moscow was signed in Kars.

On November 6, 1921, the puppet communist government of Georgia dominated by the Kremlin was forced to cede to the Soviet Armenia the sector of Lori of the county of Borchalo that had been disputed between the two nations since 1918 and finally incorporated into Georgia during the Turkish-Armenian war of 1920, together with the southern part of Borchalo sector of the county bearing the same name (see Mas 7 and 8). The above adjustment of Georgian-Armenian border was formally made in accordance with the declared “ethnic principle” keeping in mind that the above territory had mixed Armenian, Russian and Greek population with Armenian majority.

Four months later, on March 12, 1922, the long-disputed Zakatala district was transferred from Georgia to the Soviet Azerbaijan with some other smaller increments of territory. During the following years, the Georgians who still lived in that district were culturally deprived specifically of their right to have Georgian language schools and were to a greater or less degree assimilated

¹ Richard Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia, Vol. IV: Between Crescent and Sickle: Partition and Sovietization*, Berkeley, 1996, p. 391.

into the Tatar linguistic and cultural realm thus all amply proving that the so-called “principle of free self-determination of the peoples” was nothing more than a Communist propaganda cliché. This was yet another action that was tantamount to cultural genocide aimed at extinguishing any nationalism or identity separate from that mandated by Moscow.

Additionally, immediately upon the Sovietization of Georgia the central Soviet government ordered the creation of three autonomies within the remaining Georgian territory. Those were Abkhazia, Achara¹ and “South Ossetia” carved out of Gori, Dusheti and Racha counties (See Map 7). The above territorial formations served as potential pockets of instability that could counterweight possible national liberation movements in Georgia. And, as we all know, they successfully served that purpose of the Kremlin in the 1990’s and is still established practice today. During the Soviet period there were also some plans to create “autonomies” in Megrelia and some other parts of Georgia but, fortunately those plans never came true.



In order to be completely objective, one should mention that there was a very short period of time when the Soviet Georgia slightly expanded at

¹ Achara was created partially to satisfy some Turkish claims during the talks in Moscow in early 1921.

the expense of its northern neighbors. In April – March, 1944, after the deportation of four peoples of the North Caucasus (the Karachays, the Balkars, the Ingush and the Chechens) to Siberia and Central Asia as a collective punishment for alleged collaboration with the Nazi German army which had taken over north-western Caucasus in 1942, some of the territories of those peoples were incorporated into Soviet Georgia.



Those territories included the Uchkulan and, partially, Mikoyan districts of the former Karachay autonomous province re-organized into the district of Klukhori (returned to Soviet Russia in 1955), south-eastern sections of Elbrus and Nagorny districts of the Kabardian autonomous republic incorporated into Upper Svanetia and southern part of the former Chechen-Ingush autonomous republic with the district of Itum-Kale and, partially, the districts of Ghalanchizh, Ghalashki and Prigorodny (See Map 8). However, by 1957 when the deportees were allowed to return to their native lands, the pre-1944 border between Soviet Russia and Soviet Georgia was restored. But that short period was rather a “historical intermezzo” that could not and did not reverse the practice of shrinking of Georgian ethno-cultural territory that has been going on since the beginning of the 19th century. In other words, the Georgia that left the Soviet empire in 1991 could boast well smaller territory than Georgia that had been incorporated into that empire in 1921.

After the Second Collapse of the Empire (1991-2008)

The fall of the USSR and the restoration of Georgia's independence was accompanied by the three wars: the war for the former South Ossetia (1991-1992), the war for Abkhazia (1992-93) and the short but devastating Civil War (1993).

It is common knowledge – at least in Georgia – that the wars for South Ossetia (Samachablo) and for Abkhazia were, in fact, the first undeclared Russo-Georgian wars following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Ossetian and Apsua-Abkhazian separatists who were literally not the separatists but instead pro-Russian loyalists that were unable to fight against Georgia with relative success had they not enjoyed full-scale military support from the regular Russian armed forces and numerous mercenaries hired and trained in Russian Federation. As a result of those two wars, the Georgian government lost official control over parts of the former South Ossetian autonomous province (at that time only the districts of Java, and Znauri as well as parts of the districts of Tskhinvali and Akhagori) and over most of Abkhazia, except the Kodori Gorge (See Map 9).

The war in Abkhazia resulted in unprecedented ethnic cleansing and mass murder of local Georgians who had been the most numerous ethnic group there before the war (according to the census of 1992, the Georgians formed about 46% of the total population of Abkhazia). That Kremlin-backed policy, no doubt, was aimed at the total de-Georgianization of strategically important Abkhazia.

The two wars that followed: the very short and practically unknown in the world Six-Day War in the district of Gali (1998) and the Russo-Georgian war of 2008 resulted in the loss of Georgian control over the rest of the former South Ossetia and over the Kodori Gorge (the only part of Abkhazia that was still in Georgian hands until 2008 (See Map 9). According to Medvedev-Sarkozi Agreement of August 12, 2008, the new conquests of Russia clearly seen on Map 9 were supposed to come back under Georgian control. Nevertheless, they still remain occupied by the Russian troops and illegal armed formations subordinate to Abkhazian and Tskhinvali puppet regimes in breach of the above agreement that was signed by the Russian president as well as by the heads of the pseudo-separatist administrations.



Thus the process of the shrinking of Georgia continued. Of course, we know that the new realia in Abkhazia and the former South Ossetia are not recognized by the world, except Russia, a couple of Pacific island-states (Nauru, Vanuatu and for a short period of time - Tuvalu), Nicaragua and Venezuela but de-facto those two provinces have been separated from the rest of Georgia, and de-facto Georgia today is smaller than it was in 1990, although officially her national borders did not change since the disintegration of the USSR.

Conclusions

As of today, the situation in the Caucasus, in general, is very complicated if not to say explosive. Unresolved conflicts around Abkhazia, the so-called “South Ossetia” as well as around Chechenia and Karabakh, are still in

deadlock. And new conflicts may still arise (hopefully, they will not, of course) and there can be little doubt that further incursions into Georgian territory are planned by in the Kremlin as well as in the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russian Federation and in the headquarters of FSB and GRU.

And now a question arises, — what can be done to stop the shrinking of Georgia until it is too late and to restore the nation's territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders?

I would take the liberty to offer a few recommendations:

- While it is impossible to change the past it is still important to analyse the mistakes and failures of the past that led to territorial losses.
- In order to withstand the outside pressure the nation must be strong both economically and militarily so that the hostile powers would be aware of heavy casualties in case of further incursions into Georgian territory.
- Like any small nation, Georgia needs to develop effective diplomacy and work hard to acquire reliable allies who could support her in case of the next Russian aggression.
- In any event, Russia with its current government and, maybe, with any other government at power cannot be Georgia's ally in the near future. The last 200 years clearly demonstrated that from the point of view of Russian leadership - whether the Czarist, or Bolshevik, or pseudo-democratic one – Georgia should not exist as a united sovereign nation.
- Georgia should be attractive to the breakaway territories economically, culturally and politically. The combination of economic prosperity and freedom is a very effective means of integration of partially lost lands and people.
- Finally, one should also not forget about the demography: it is extremely hard to prevent territorial losses without the population growth.

All the above, of course, will not help Georgia to re-integrate her occupied territories as long as the new “Eurasian empire” that has being created by Vladimir Putin is strong and stable. But it looks like the second incarnation of once fallen colossus on clay legs is not going to be long in absence of economic, human or moral resources sufficient to achieve those ambitious goals of the Kremlin, and a new window of opportunity will soon open for Georgia. But Georgia herself should be well prepared when that happens so that the chance will not be lost.

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