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THE FACTOR OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION IN THE MANIFESTATION OF MININATIONALISM IN ABKHAZIA AND TSKHINVALI REGION/SOUTH OSSETIA

Abstract: This article examines the factor of the Russian Federation in the manifestation of mininationalism in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia

Key words: Russian Federation, Abkhazia, Tskhinvali region, South Ossetia.

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Introduction

It is widely known that the modern international system is anarchic in nature, where the main actors - states, act based on their national interests and try to protect them. Although states are equal under international law, they are still divided into large and small states, which is being determined by resources, economics, population, level of development, geopolitics, and many other factors. However, despite this division, no country in the world is safe from external threats. Especially small states that are constantly struggling for survival. History shows that there is always a temptation on the part of strong and big states to absorb a weak neighboring country.

The Russian Federation is not an exception in this regard, since it is a powerful state and one of the determinants of the world political climate, and in the Caucasus region, it acts based on its geopolitical interests. As the legal successor of the Soviet Union, Moscow still tries to maintain spheres of influence in the former Soviet republics, including Georgia.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, in some former republics, there were conflicts on ethnic grounds, which was a kind of activation of the "slow-action mine" planted by the central government at the time.

The "slow-action mine" planted by the Soviet Union in the territory of Georgia in the form of ethnic

strife started in the 80s of the twentieth century, which resulted in the formation of two separatist regimes. During this period, the Soviet Union was threatened with disintegration after the political-economic course named "Perestroika" was carried out, during which almost its entire territory was engulfed in chaos and civil strife. Similar events took place in Georgia as well.

A large number of experts believe that Abkhazian and Ossetian nationalism are Russian projects from the very beginning to the end. Because, before Moscow intervened in the internal affairs of the country, Abkhazians and Ossetians lived comfortably with Georgians.

Abkhazian mininationalism

Back in the 19th century, the Russian Empire exiled the Abkhazians to Turkey (Muhajir), for which the Abkhazians blamed the Georgian intelligentsia. In fact, part of the policy of tsarist Russia was the mass deportation of Abkhazians and the separation of the Abkhazian Church from the Georgian Orthodox Church, and its subordination to the Russian Synod, which led to a sharp reaction from the Abkhaz

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intelligentsia, who guarded to the centuries-old Georgian-Abkhazian relations.¹

Gradually, the ideologues of Veliko Russian chauvinism introduced the idea that Abkhazia was not Georgia to the Abkhaz intelligentsia. They started fabricating the Abkhazian "national history" and making the Abkhazians stupefied. In November 1917, secretly from the Georgian population of Abkhazia a "Congress" of the Abkhaz people was held, where the created Abkhaz People's Council made a declaration stating that the Abkhaz People's Council represented the national-political body of the Abkhaz people and it represented only the interests of Abkhaz people and not the entire population of Abkhazia.² At the beginning of 1921, after the Sovietization of Georgia, the Abkhazian Bolsheviks, at the instigation of Soviet Russia, took the initiative to separate Abkhazia from Georgia. They directly sent a request to Moscow to determine the issue of the future statehood of Abkhazia. Later, the People's Council of Abkhazia adopted the draft constitution of Abkhazia as an autonomous entity, according to which it remained part of the Democratic Republic of Georgia as an autonomous entity.

Part of the imperial policy towards Georgia was the partition of the country, which is manifested in the statement of the Russian military officer (P. Sitina), according to which the first measure against the local chauvinists (Georgians) should have been the placement of the Russian Red Army in the territory of Georgia, and the second measure - the secession of Abkhazia.³ In general, Russia has been pursuing the policy of partitioning Georgia since the 19th century. As the Abkhazian researcher, Abesalom Lepsaia, notes, the growth of Georgian nationalism was assessed by Tsarist Russia as a threat and bet in favor of the Abkhazians.⁴

On December 16, 1921, the "Union Treaty" was signed between the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia and the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia, according to which Abkhazia became part of the Georgian SSR with the name of the Treaty Republic. In 1931, the Abkhazian SSR was transformed into the Abkhazian Autonomous SSR - in the composition of the Georgian SSR, which caused the displeasure of the separatists.

Since the 80s, the national liberation movement has strengthened in Georgia, and Abkhazian separatists have also become active. They sent a letter

to Moscow demanding the return of Abkhazia to the status of the USSR (as it was in 1921-1931). The pro-Russian forces and the main stronghold of the separatists, "Aidgilara" created by them, were especially active, one of the main goals of which was the ideological processing of the Abkhazian people in order to create a kind of background - the separation of Abkhazia from Georgia. They sent a letter to Moscow demanding to return Abkhazia the status of the SSR (as it was in 1921-1931). The pro-Russian forces and the main separatist stronghold - "Aidgilara" created by them, were especially active, one of the main goals of which was the ideological processing of the Abkhaz people in order to create a kind of background for the separation of Abkhazia from Georgia. In the same period, the separatists created the "Society of Russian Culture in Abkhazia", the Armenian "Krunk", and the Ossetian "Alan", whose main purpose was to carry out the Russian imperial policy in Abkhazia.⁵

After the tragedy of April 9, 1989, when a peaceful rally was dispersed in Tbilisi under the command of General Rodionov, which, in turn, led to the strengthening of the Georgian national liberation movement, the Kremlin realized that it was losing control over public processes and promoted to provoke ethnic conflicts. The society of Abkhazia was divided into Georgian and Abkhaz parts. Due to the tense and difficult situation, the Georgian authorities did not have time to deal with the autonomous units, which the separatists took good advantage of. In August 1990, they adopted the declaration "On the State Sovereignty of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia"⁶, which the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Georgian SSR declared invalid. The separatists were supported by Moscow, which is why they took quite bold steps. There was a threat from the Kremlin that if the Georgian nationalists did not come to their senses and continued to demand sovereignty, they would have to say goodbye to Abkhazia. In Georgia, it was well known, that the provocations were inspired by reactionary forces. The provocative law adopted by the Supreme Council of the USSR on April 3, 1990, was a part of the imperial policy, according to which the autonomous formations in the allied republics had the right to freely choose whether they wanted to remain in the Union of the USSR or secede.

¹ Kvaratskhelia B., "The undeclared war of Russia against the state of Georgia (Abkhazia, "South Ossetia") and the international community. "Universal", Tbilisi, 2015, p. 16.

² Kvaratskhelia B., "The undeclared war of Russia against the state of Georgia (Abkhazia, "South Ossetia") and the international community. "Universal", Tbilisi, 2015, p. 17.

³ Kvaratskhelia B., "The undeclared war of Russia against the state of Georgia (Abkhazia, "South Ossetia") and the international community. "Universal", Tbilisi, 2015, p. 19.

⁴ J. Kvitsiani, "The causes of the Abkhazian conflict in post-Soviet historiography", Caucasian researches, Tbilisi University Publishing House, Tbilisi, 2012, N3, p. 185-186.

⁵ Kvaratskhelia B., "The undeclared war of Russia against the state of Georgia (Abkhazia, "South Ossetia") and the international community. "Universal", Tbilisi, 2015, p. 31-32.

⁶ Papaskiri Z., "Essays from the historical past of modern Abkhazia" vol. II 1917-1993, Ivane Javakhsishvili TSU Sokhumi branch publishing house, Tbilisi, 2007, p. 284.

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On April 9, 1991, the state independence of Georgia was restored and the corresponding act was issued. Later, according to the resolution of the Supreme Council of Georgia, the USSR troops on the territory of Georgia were given the status of "occupational troops". However, the situation in the country was getting worse (in the form of civil conflicts). On July 23, 1992, the 1978 Constitution of the Abkhazian SSR was annulled and the 1925 Constitution of the Abkhazian Soviet Socialist Republic (which was not published at the time) was restored.

After the overthrow of the government of Zviad Gamsakhurdia in 1992, the military council of Tengiz Kitovani and Jaba Ioseliani took power with the help of the Kremlin and the headquarters of Russian troops in Transcaucasia. A large part of the Georgian population of Abkhazia supported the overthrown president and protested the actions of the military council. For the Kremlin, the armed groups of Kitovani and Ioseliani were a kind of backbone for igniting ethnic conflicts in Georgia, together with the Abkhaz separatists. They received weapons from Russian military bases located on the territory of Georgia. The country turned out to be in complete chaos. During the mentioned period, robbery of trains on the railways in Abkhazia became more frequent. On the grounds of complete disobedience, with the agreement of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides, military units headed by T. Kitovani entered Abkhazia, whose actions (demonstration of military equipment) provoked the separatists, which directly poured water on the mill of Moscow. It should be noted that Russia supplied weapons to both parties involved in the conflict.

We can say that Georgia was defeated in the 1992-1993 war, and as a result, the jurisdiction of Georgia over the autonomous region of Abkhazia was terminated. As Givi Rogava points out in his work - "Abkhazs and Abkhazia", it would be wrong to claim that it was a confrontation between the Abkhaz and Georgian people, it would be more correct to say that the Abkhaz separatists, with the support of Russian politicians, were able to mount the Abkhaz people against the Georgians. Therefore, this is not a war between Georgians and Abkhaz, but a Russian-Georgian war.⁷

Today, Abkhazia is a quasi-state that is under Russian influence and grossly violates the territorial integrity of Georgia. To this day, the heads of the government become the candidates chosen by Moscow.

Ossetian mininationalism

The basis of Ossetian mininationalism was laid at the beginning of the 20th century. After the February revolution of 1917, Ossetians in Shida Kartli started fighting for national self-determination. In 1917-1918 there were uprisings, which were suppressed by the authorities of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. However, conspiracies continued to be organized against Georgia. The Public Commissar of Foreign Affairs of Russia, G. Chicherin, who supported the rebel Ossetians, sent threatening notes in the direction of the Democratic Republic of Georgia and continued to do so even after Russia recognized the independence of Georgia and recognized "South Ossetia" as a part of it by the Treaty of May 7, 1920. Therefore, his actions were nothing else than gross interference in the domestic affairs of Georgia.⁸ In May of the same year, the separatists created a kind of memorandum, where they demanded the direct entry of "South Ossetia" into the composition of Soviet Russia, expressed a claim against the Georgians, and hoped that their Russian friends would not abandon them in this "difficulty". Moscow helped the separatists both financially and morally.

In 1921, after the occupation of Georgia by Soviet Russia, the Caucasian Bureau adopted a resolution on granting "autonomous district rights to South Ossetia". Later, the "Autonomous District of South Ossetia" was created without any historical and legal basis. Autonomy was a kind of reward for the separatists, for what they did against the Democratic Republic of Georgia, and for the conquest of Georgia by the Red Army.

Georgian-Ossetian relations began to become more complicated in the 80s. Parallel to the strengthening of the national liberation movement in Georgia, Ossetian separatists became active. They sent complaints to Moscow, where they accused Georgians of harassing "Southern Ossetians". During this period, the main stronghold of Moscow and the informal union of separatists was the anti-Georgian informal union "Adamon Nikhas".

The resolution adopted on August 15, 1989, which determined the constitutional status of the Georgian language, became the reason for holding a rally in Tskhinvali by "Adamon Nikhas". Later, a completely unjustified and unconstitutional decision was made, according to which, "the Ossetian language was declared the state language in the South Ossetian Autonomous Region"⁹. Later, they wanted to raise the status of South Ossetia and wanted to transform the

⁷ Rogava G., "Abkhazia and Abkhazians" historical etudes, "Meridian", Tbilisi 2014, p. 75-76.

⁸ Kvaratskhelia B., "The undeclared war of Russia against the state of Georgia (Abkhazia, "South Ossetia") and the international community. "Universal", Tbilisi, 2015, p. 77.

⁹ Malashkhia Sh., "Anatomy of conflicts", Parliament of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2011, p. 140.

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"South Ossetian Autonomous District" into the South Ossetian Autonomous Soviet Republic, which was immediately condemned by the Georgian authorities. It can be seen that one of the main reasons for the Georgian-Ossetian conflict was the political status of the autonomous district. The separatists announced the transformation of the "South Ossetia Autonomous District" into the "South Ossetia Soviet Democratic Republic", and also demanded that the Supreme Council of the SSR Union accept the "South Ossetian Soviet Democratic Republic" as an independent entity¹⁰. In response, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia abolished the autonomous district of "South Ossetia".

On January 7, 1991, based on the decree of the President of the USSR - Mikhail Gorbachev, the decisions of both Tskhinvali and Tbilisi at that time, including the decisions on raising the status of autonomy of "South Ossetia" and the complete abolition of the district, were considered incompatible with the Soviet Constitution. Also, all military formations, except internal troops of the USSR, had to be withdrawn from "South Ossetia" within three days.¹¹

On March 17, 1991, a large part of the population of South Ossetia participated in the common union referendum organized by Moscow and voted for maintaining the Soviet Union, and boycotted the common Georgian referendum of March 31 of the same year on independence.

An important document is the resolution of April 1, 1991, of the Supreme Council of the USSR on the status of the autonomous district of "South Ossetia", where a state of emergency was introduced through the internal forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR. The mentioned step made the situation extremely tense, the separatists became bolder and attacked the Georgian villages with the support of the Russian military forces. Clashes started between Ossetian bandit formations and the Georgian army. The separatists refused to negotiate with the new government until the Georgian army left Tskhinvali. On January 19, 1992, a referendum was held - the majority of the population voted for the separation of "South Ossetia" from Georgia and joining the Russian Federation.¹² After the illegitimate referendum, the separatists adopted the Act of Independence of "South Ossetia". On June 24, Shevardnadze and Yeltsin signed the agreement "On the principles of settlement

of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict".¹³ After the war, mixed peacekeeping forces (Georgian, Russian, Ossetian) were deployed in the conflict zone.

In 1996, a memorandum was signed between Georgia, Russia, North Ossetia, "South Ossetia" and the OSCE, on measures to ensure security and strengthen relations between the parties to the conflict, however, it did not say anything about the status of "South Ossetia". In 2000, after long negotiations and polemics, the parties signed an interim document ("Biden document"). However, the parties still could not agree on the main issues, according to the separatists, "South Ossetia" should have its own constitution, court, legislative, and executive bodies, as well as have a president. It is not surprising that the Russian and Ossetian opinions in the mentioned document mostly coincide with each other. The main subject of disagreement was the balance between the self-determination of nations and territorial integrity.¹⁴

Russia appeared as a mediator, but in reality, it was a monopolist in peacemaking processes. Without its encouragement and support, the separatists would not have taken a single step, which is obvious at any stage of the development of the conflict. For Russia, the Tskhinvali region was of geostrategic importance, because from here it could control the oil pipelines leading to Europe. The fire stopped, but "the conflict froze". In the resolution adopted by the European Parliament on January 19, 2001, Russian aggression against Georgia (as annexation) was recorded for the first time, and mediating mission of Russia in the conflict zones was questioned.¹⁵

Today, the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia is under Russian influence and high officials are those chosen by Moscow. It remains a separatist formation on the territory of Georgia, which disrupts the territorial integrity of the country, represents the main strong point of the neighboring, hostile state, and reveals certain tendencies of irredentism.

Conclusion

About 30 years have passed since the ethnic conflicts in Georgia happened, and the international community only recently realized who was actually the main instigator of mininationalism in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia. They became more convinced of this in August 2008, when the

¹⁰ "On the Reasons, Dynamics, Ways and Possible Directions of a Solution to the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict", 2005, N1; p. 18.

¹¹ Malashkhia Sh., "Anatomy of conflicts", Parliament of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2011, p. 145.

¹² Kvaratskhelia B., "The undeclared war of Russia against the state of Georgia (Abkhazia, "South Ossetia") and the international community. "Universal", Tbilisi, 2015, p. 144-145.

¹³ Malashkhia Sh., "Anatomy of conflicts", Parliament of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2011, p. 149.

¹⁴ ГРУЗИЯ: КАК ИЗБЕЖАТЬ ВОЙНЫ В ЮЖНОЙ ОСЕТИИ, Доклад МГПК-Европа No 159, Тбилиси/Брюссель, 26 ноября 2004 г, стр.34. / GEORGIA: HOW TO AVOID WAR IN SOUTH OSSETIA, ICG Europe Report No 159, Tbilisi/Brussels, November 26, 2004, p.34.

¹⁵ Kvaratskhelia B., "The undeclared war of Russia against the state of Georgia (Abkhazia, "South Ossetia") and the international community. "Universal", Tbilisi, 2015, p. 156.

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Russian Federation revealed its open aggression toward Georgia.

After gaining independence, Georgia endured the worst ethnic conflicts, which internally weakened and exhausted it. Of course, the causes of the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts may be territorial status, issues related to the constitution, or self-government rights, but the fact is those ethnic elements are in excess in it, which is still being manipulated by Moscow. That is why the above-mentioned internal wars are considered ethnic conflicts.

After the above-mentioned confrontations, no serious and important steps have been taken towards the normalization of Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian relations. The separatist regimes of Abkhazia and Ossetia do not want to be under the jurisdiction of Georgia. They constantly appeal to the ethnic cleansing of Abkhazians and Ossetians by the Georgian side, which, of course, is exaggerated and does not correspond the reality. According to Chaim Kaufmann, it is difficult to say whether it is possible to completely eliminate ethnic hatred after large-scale violence has been committed. However, in the long run, separation may help reduce antagonism between ethnic groups. According to the author, it is impossible to weaken ethnic enmity without

separation. If one side at least periodically fears an attack by the other side, it is easy to recall past atrocities and rekindle old hatreds.¹⁶ Based on the current situation, it seems that there is no prospect of conflict resolution. At the same time, there is a kind of taboo in Georgia about the honest and sincere conversation about how to resolve conflicts. It is important to move forward, not to dwell on the past and endless mutual accusations.

Mininationalism (the same as separatist nationalism) is a big domestic problem of Georgia and it is the one that determines the political agenda of the country. In addition, the biggest problem remains the Russian Federation, which has its specific geopolitical interest in the Caucasus region, which increases the risk of implementing its aggression toward Georgia. And Georgia, as many experts say, should not deviate from the Western course, strengthen democratic institutions, take care to become more attractive to Abkhazia and "South Ossetia", consider the Russian factor and role in the Caucasus region, and plan both foreign and domestic policy accordingly. In order to resolve conflicts and reach a consensus, it is necessary to develop a specific plan, where the role of external forces will be minimized and the interests of the parties will be considered as much as possible.

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